



Can Olympism save sport from its excesses?

by Jean-François Brisson

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The choice of such a subject presupposes that we admit to the following two statements:

1. *Excesses, which are increasing in sport, are disturbing.*
2. *Olympic sport and non-Olympic sport are not completely similar.*

This difference is evident even if we agree that sporting spirit and fair-play are inseparable from *all* forms of sport, amateur or professional. This sporting spirit and fair-play are therefore insufficient to define Olympic sport; Olympic sport, in some way, requires an "addition of soul", according to Paul Valéry's famous definition.

Let's firstly examine the first question:

What are these disturbing excesses, which are increasing in sport?

Basically, they appear in three directions:

— where *money* appears and controls,

— where *commercial exploitation* of stars is organised,

— where *chauvinism* is predominant, when the public places too much importance on results of international meetings, a crowd reaction which is all too often ignorant of the meaning of sport. Unfortunately, governments often encourage this bad feeling and sports victories thus become an instrument of national or political propaganda.

These excesses, which result in physical as well as social *monstrosities*, must be feared. These monstrosities are the end products of excessive and premature specialisation but can also be found socially in training pushed to inhuman limits and also in recourse to dangerous chemical or mechanical treatments. This regime of a life devoted entirely to sport also compromises the future of champions. How can such specialisation be reconciled with studying or the normal pursuit of a profession and how can the readjustment be achieved once the competition age has passed?

There are other more long term menaces: the biological possibilities of manufacturing phenomena capable of smashing present records. This is no longer a question of science fiction!

¹ See Olympic Review nos. 17, 30 and 42.

All these statements explain the birth of an anti-sports movement, whose followers willingly use the terms *exploitation* and *alienation* to qualify the fate of sports champions, whose courage and talent are used for very debatable purposes, whether it is a question of selling a product better or praising the superiority of a political regime.

Everybody has been able to see, if only from photographs, shot-putters, weight-lifters and wrestlers of more than 150 kilos, who nearly always fall back on dangerous anabolics to gain the weight of extra muscles.

Everybody knows the overwhelming time-table of some young sportsmen. Students are coming to swim up to 20 km. a day, while in 1968 one of the most famous American swimmers before Mark Spitz, Don Schollander, hero of the Tokyo Games, let out a cry of alarm by confirming that the limit had been reached and that champions were being transformed into robots. At this time, the daily limit was 12 km., *only!*

As for cross country runners, they reach a maximum of 40 km. a day...

This is frenzied training.

Commercial domination in skiing is illustrated by the many ups and downs which, since the disqualification of Schranz, colour the exploits of the actors of what has been nicknamed the *white circus*. After the commercial tournaments for basketball players, it is now tennis players who are being organised to give a show!

Everywhere "sport business" is demanding recognition. The installations necessary for the next Olympic Games could be built with the receipts from the recent Cassius Clay-Joe Frazier bout!

Another example: the club of the Italian footballer Riva has refused one and a half million liras for selling him to another club!

The incidents at the Moscow Universiad reminded us—after certain football matches which had degenerated into bloody riots in Africa and Latin America—that excessive nationalism and partisan spirit, when shown in the stadium, can lead to the worst excesses.

Of course it is much easier to uphold the traditional theory or that of the classical tragedian Corneille, where it is better to see men and institutions as they should be and not as they are.

According to this optimistic point of view, we particularly restrain that described as the *inciting power of stars* and we rely on the enthusiasm provoked, particularly in young people, by events, victories and records. Youth needs heroes. And it is true that sportsmen are as worthy of admiration as popular singers and that they normally lead a more orderly life. As champions encourage careers and as young people want to imitate them, we conclude that champions are necessary, their glorification is useful, even if sometimes they lead an existence outside the rules of normal work, even if they do for money what they should only do for their pleasure and even if they live openly or secretly on the proceeds of sports competitions. In other words, whether billed professionals or ostensible amateurs, they only form a weak minority in comparison with the mass of players, inevitably impartial, since the latter have no commercial value and nobody dreams of buying them.

The optimists conclude that we should thus accept seeing sport obey the rules of all other human activities, where inevitably we meet the best and the worst and we should rest assured that in the case of sport, the best far outweighs the worst.

It is just this conclusion which makes honest men ask questions. Here are some of the questions asked if he is sincerely searching for the truth:

1. For a champion to be not only an idol to be admired but also a model to be imitated, should he not be admired not only as a technician and specialist *but also as a man*?
2. If courage and talent are enough to justify the great admiration which sports stars inspire, why do circus acrobats, who are also courageous and talented, not have the same notoriety?
3. Why, when sport is compared with the circus, is there a certain scorn for the latter?
4. If in sport it is basically not the beauty of motion and harmony of the bodies which attract the crowd, if it gets particularly excited in wrestling which ends with the victory of the one and the defeat of the other, is it not because the champion, like in the time of the horsemen breaking lances in tournaments, resembles a fighter more than an artist?
5. If it is more the fighter than the artist who draws the crowds, why compare the sportsman to an artist to justify the benefits which sport can bring him, when the fighter, who

fights for his pay and not to defend his country, is called a mercenary?

6. If, outside sport, an amateur is described as someone whose talent is uncertain, who is not a confirmed specialist, when the quality of professional is given to those who truly master their art and technique, why draw back from another comparison which logic cannot refute: is not the amateur simply a lover, someone who loves? Doesn't he who loves find his reward in the pleasure of loving? And a professional of love who cashes in on his physical attributes, is he not a prostitute?
7. If the champion is legitimately helped or paid by those who derive profit or glory whether they be companies looking for publicity or governments looking for prestige, what difference is there between the champions, who, with a jockey's cap, ride racing horses and the champions who, with the cap of a trade mark or country's emblem, play on other racing courses, the stadia?
8. If we agree that jockeys and acrobats only have a limited number of imitators, why do we appear to believe that a boxer or cyclist, primitive and dangerous sports, must necessarily have a large number?

I do not pretend to have indisputable answers to this series of questions. But it is important and honest to say openly that the answers are not clear and that a feeling of doubt is permitted. It is not overdoing it to assert that "the excesses, which are increasing in sport, are *disturbing*".

Let us now look at the second assumption of our demonstration:

There is, or at least there should be, a difference between Olympic sport and non-Olympic sport.

In Varna last October, at the press conference which closed the Congress, I asked Lord Killanin what was this difference. He did not give me a reply.

He did not want to or he could not reply. It is true that such a reply is not easy to improvise in a few words.

However, one of the delegates, Mr. de Coquereaumont, President of the Fédération Internationale de Canoë, had recalled, drawing inspiration from Pierre de Coubertin:

“Olympic sport is that which contributes to man’s perfection”.

Here the demarcation line is found.

Sport is a game. He who plays does not ask himself if the game he plays is bettering him or damaging him, he plays and if he is a loyal sportsman, he tries to play the part without transgressing the rule:

Pure sport does not need any other justification; it is an end and not a means. We have said that Olympic sport needs an *“addition of soul”*.

We give soul to sport by no longer thinking of sport as an end but as a *means*. A *means of perfection*. It is therefore a certain type of sport which is suitable for encouragement, and not all kinds of sport.

Leaving this assumption aside, the division becomes, if not simpler, at least clearer and more rational.

For three quarters of a century, the International Olympic Committee has based its rules on the fiction of amateurism: admitting those who, sincere or not, have taken the oath as amateurs; excluding those who have openly opted for professionalism.

Here is the road which the IOC seems disposed to borrow, not persisting in wanting to regulate narrowly that which cannot be strictly controlled and putting its basic efforts into *persuasion* to create and develop a real *“state of Olympic spirit”* in the world.

In order to be widespread, however, the definitions must be simple.

The Olympic sportsman-better to use this phrase than the harshly controversial word “amateur”—must, we believe, be guided by the following principles:

- He gives more than he receives. His best reward is the pleasure of participating. (He differs in this from a professional sportsman, whose public simply waits for him “to perform for his money”.)
- He is neither an artist nor a publicity agent to edify his country, regime, race, trade mark or holiday resort.
- He chooses top competition in the first place for pleasure and the satisfaction he gets, and for honour but not for money, nor even for fame. The key to Olympic behaviour is *disinterestedness* in the face of temptations of money or fame and passionate interest in the pleasure of the game. Here is what makes up the purity of which the Olympic flame is the symbol. It is disinterestedness which allows excesses from the most passionate wrestlers to contribute to moral perfection.

- An exemplary Olympic champion, he who should be imitated, is not one who makes sport his career. The professional is he who plays first of all for those who watch him. The Olympic sportsman, even champion, is he who plays firstly for himself and, through pleasure, to better himself.
- Between the Olympic champion who gets to the top of the ladder and the grass roots sportsman who never wins an event, there must be no difference of *concept* or of *motivation* but only of intensity and success. The gap between the masses and the elite is thus found to be bridged.

Olympism is no longer uniquely elite sport; it is especially grass roots sport, “sport for all” a widespread expression nowadays, since the greatest pleasure of participation is within the grasp of everybody.

Olympic sport, as a whole, is a new way of life.

Here we find ourselves faced with a crucial choice. For there are not only the players to consider but also the spectators, much more numerous, who weigh much more on the different aspects which can be given to sport. And these spectators are not only those filling the stadia.

For 20 years, a worldwide phenomenon has come to modify our habits and our behaviour—television, whose influence on sport is dangerous for two reasons.

First effect: *immobilisation*

Added to the other modern social phenomenon, the automobile, television has contributed to millions of individuals sitting in their armchairs.

Second effect: *amplification*

Every programme broadcast by television becomes a super-show; every television star is a super star.

As the Olympic Games are the greatest world sports competition, television has given them a planetary dimension, which a short time ago was only indirectly attained through the written press. It is also worth noting in passing that television has also given the International Olympic Committee receipts about which it dared not dream 20 years ago.

As the Olympic Games have become a world spectacle followed most passionately, both in the good and bad sense of the word, what must be done to conserve the basis of their purity and their main reason for existence? Some even ask themselves, without daring to admit it, if this purity is really necessary.

The choice is crucial since there are two possible attitudes facing the Olympic phenomenon, facing the mystery, which is posed by the magic power of the word Olympic, to which many meanings are given, which is abused but whose attractive power remains considerable.

The easiest and most tempting attitude is that which contents itself with ascertaining the success and then finding its justification.

The Games have become the greatest world meeting; the candidate cities do not lack numbers of competitors, member countries of the IOC, records, which mean performances or numbers of spectators and so on; why should it not continue on its triumphal way?

But we must not hide the fact that this course inexorably leads to concessions. Why uphold out-of-date discriminations between Olympic sportsmen and professional sportsmen, why not recognise that money and politics are everywhere, why not recognise that the word Olympic means nothing?

The other, more difficult but more deserving attitude consists of wanting to give a meaning to the word and a justification to the action it implies.

At a time when customs are developing, sport soon risks being nothing more than the modern circus, the "open air" part of *show business*, completely ruled by commerce, spectacle and propaganda.

To avoid confusion, some people have dreamed up a new word: SPOL, made up by the first two letters of the word *sport* and the first two letters of the word *Olympic*.

Thus, by acting as some sort of gang-plank between grass roots sport and elite sport, the OLYMPIC GAMES can and must help save sport from its excesses.

Olympism will see the day when parents, worried about their children's future, will not want them to have meteoric and rowdy careers, like that of a singer, but they will hope to see mount the Olympic podium young champions, for whom they foster ambitions outside the stadium, whereas they would not agree to selection at a low level keeping high competition sport for the intellectual weaklings.

Of the seven deadly sins of sport which we have already described, *profiteering*, *nationalism* and physical and social *monstrosity*, we have implicitly indicated one of which Olympic

sport is guilty: *lack of understanding*, i.e. the small amount of clarity and conviction with which Olympism is defined, whose cardinal virtue can only be *impartiality*. Success's illness, *gigantism*, must be mentioned here, and as we have seen, a dangerous illness: *red tape*, which kills enthusiasm and spontaneity in state athletes in countries bothered about national prestige, which is no more reprehensible than *company* or *university* athletes.

But the most widespread, the most denounced, the most insistent, is the *untruth*. We have already foreseen its elimination by an effort to define the Olympic spirit and to spread it, without pretending to control it strictly.

The Comité Pierre de Coubertin proposes the following wording, which would no longer be an oath required from the competitors but a declaration with which they would associate themselves:

"In the Olympic Games, we must take part as loyal and impartial competitors, inspired by the Olympic spirit. We expect no other reward from our participation than the honour of having been admitted and the pleasure of facing the best in the sport we love."

And as the Olympic idea is rich enough to be expressed through several mottos, it would be good to add two more to the famous "Citius, altius, fortius", which for many only conjures up the idea of records. These two mottos would be:

"*The main thing is to participate*", which corrects the latin motto, and a Greek legend, inspired by the classic Gnoti Seauton "*know you, yourself*" and which would recommend "*conquer you, yourself*".

As for the famous Rule 26 on eligibility—and this seems the course, which the IOC is going to take—it only anticipates the disqualification of full time sportsmen, who have no other job than training and competition.

Profiteering: How to combat this?

The threat of being excluded from the Olympic festival is an efficient means of pressure. This was found at Sapporo.

Article 5 of the Comité Pierre de Coubertin proposes:

“The Olympic Winter Games, when they are held, form a completely different cycle. If the IOC decides to organise them, they shall take place in the same year as the Olympic Games.

“Before reaching a decision on this subject, the IOC at each Olympiad contacts the representatives of the organising candidate cities, the National Olympic Committees of the particular countries and the qualified International Federations so as to examine the proposed programme and the commercial influences which risk interfering with the staging and preparation of the competitions.

“The IOC then decides if the proposed Games can keep the title of “Olympic Winter Games” or if they should adopt that of “World Winter Games”.”

To grant today’s Winter Games the title of Olympic, the IOC should, for example, demand the formation of a manufacturers’ pool, which would give all the competitors a model ski, on which there could be no publicity.

An appeal also should be launched directed at the legislators of all countries to protect better the word Olympic and the Olympic emblem which are so often abused for commercial purposes.

But the most decisive measure, conceived by Coubertin’s followers, is:

the discrimination between “pure” and “impure” being problematical, a sharper but less unjust and arbitrary division should be required between the sports closest to the Olympic norms, i.e. less submitted to commercial holds, less used to large receipts and those, farther from Olympism, which benefit from the support of manufacturers and the influx of spectators.

And so that it cannot be said that exceptional sportsmen, who are impartial, can be summarily dismissed from the Olympic festival, group sports, boxing, cycling, etc. should be allowed to take part in “Olympic tournaments”, held the week before the opening of the Games in different towns, if possible close to the organising city. The cups would be presented to the winners of these tournaments during the Opening Ceremony of the Games, in future reduced with regard to programme but conforming more to their humanistic vocation.

Nationalist propaganda:

How can this be eliminated when, in most cases, preparation and Olympic participation receive government aid, in return for which the public authorities of the participating countries, like public opinion, wait for medals?

But the guardians of the Olympic charter retort: the Games are a competition among individuals, no inter-nation medal table exists.

Unfortunately the journalists take care of this—I humbly beat my chest—but, if they do, it is because the public expects this table. To ignore this disgusting habit is to encourage it. There is only one remedy:

- to create the “official international aggregate table”, including *other* things than just the total of medals. These new factors should discourage red tape as well as profiteering.

Here is *Article 44 bis*, which the Comité Pierre de Coubertin proposes adding to the Olympic charter:

“The “international aggregate table” will be established according to the following principles: in the calculation of points able to be given to each country represented, half will be given for the level of sport in that country, based on the percentage of active sportsmen in relation to total population, the other half will be given for all those selected from a country during the staging of the Games in the whole of the Olympic Programme. In the table resulting from Olympic events, two other points for study will be included in the form of extra points, on the one hand to the advantage of all-round sportsmen and on the other in favour of those who have best conformed to the Olympic spirit during their preparation.

“The best ten competitors (selected from the whole programme) of each country appearing in the international aggregate table will take part in a triathlon (running, swimming, weightlifting or climbing¹) and they will make public how much they have sacrificed to sport during the 12 months preceding the Games.”

The census of active sportsmen in each country would be encouraged by the setting up of an “Olympic Week” or “Day”, allowing isolated cases, who do not play in a club, to have their sports level assessed.

¹ Weights for men, rope climbing for women.

Countries whose population of active sportsmen in comparison to the total population exceeds a certain percentage would be allowed to send a larger number of competitors to each event of the Games.

Other things easy to apply, if not to put into practice:

- suppression of team tables for gymnastics, fencing and horse riding,
- and the possibility of forming multinational teams in athletics and swimming relays and in rowing.

As for *gigantism*, we have already indicated the remedy; splitting up—pre-Olympic tournaments, each organised in a different town.

For the *monstrosity*, or if one prefers: for the search for phenomena, this is difficult to halt. Apart from size and weight limits, which always seem a bad joke, the only solution is that set down in Article 44bis, which I have already quoted. It uses an efficient weapon: that of ridicule. A puny cross country runner who cannot lift 60 kilos, a hypertrophied weightlifter who runs 100 m in 20 seconds would be laughed at even if they were great champions in their sport.

Lastly with regard to the International Federations, so that Olympism sets the tone instead of following the tide, the IOC must obtain a certain freedom from the former to modify federal rules each time they face specialisation towards phenomena and monsters, each time the rules allow a reduction of competitors and each time the choice of equipment or horses risks warping the only hierarchy which interests Olympism, that of human valour.

Examples? Here are some:

- Placing the baskets between 4 and 5 metres high by pulling lots for the exact height at each match.
- For shot putting, not to throw a special weight but a weight chosen from a series scaled in kilograms, so as to weigh 1/15th of the competitor's body weight.
- For weightlifting, to establish a winner's table not by weight lifted but by the number of kilos lifted over the competitor's body weight.
- To eliminate the equipment problem, we have spoken of a manufacturers' pool producing an identical model of ski.
- Thus for sailing, only to accept models which, like the Finn, can be provided by the organising country.
- Lastly for horses in the final jumping competitions to provide that the first three ride three rounds using the other competitors' horses in turn.

The atmosphere would be different if the Games became a world sporting festival, not just as a spectacle but as a general inspiration and sporting stimulant. If the flame burnt permanently in Olympia, the symbolic torch could be carried in relay back as well as to the Games. The flame would be extinguished in Olympia, when the torch carries it to the stadium where the Games commence and this same torch would relight it after the closure of the Games. In the country of the organising

city, as well as in all the countries crossed, tens of millions of young people would thus benefit from a direct participation in the Olympic celebration.

And in the stadium itself, which from now on only unites a small proportion of the interested spectators because of the power and amplification of television, why do youth organisations not buy half the tickets in advance. They could then give them to those most qualified in a series of group events in the locomotion sports: walking, running, cycling, and even, if conditions include a nearby river, in water sports: canoe, kayak, rowing, these events bringing millions of young sportsmen to the Olympic stadium each day.

I hope that I have persuaded you that the Olympic Games could become the festival of universal youth, the great international and truly brotherly meeting as well as a pedagogic manifestation as Coubertin wished, and persuaded you that the Olympic idea should aim at man's perfection by appealing to his nobility, his moral purity and his impartiality.

Olympism would therefore contribute to the advent of a new way of life. So let's save Olympism so that Olympism can save sport.

J.F.B.

