

XIV*

The Sports Psychology

Congress

(*Lausanne 1913*)



At the end of the 19th century, Switzerland was not at all what one would have called a sporting country, even though certain sports were practised there. She was sporting only after the fashion of Tœpffer, which was not bad in itself but tended to be insular and not at all international. Switzerland had her gymnasts, her Alpine wrestlers and that was the whole extent of it. She had no aspirations towards external laurels and used her mountains solely for walking and not yet for winter sports. Politically she was very cantonal minded and particularly mistrustful of her federal powers. Consequently Switzerland took no interest in the revival of the Olympic Games and her indifference had not really bothered me, because I did not know the country very well as yet. The way it appeared to me from a distance was the way I felt it should remain. None of the tourists passing through had any inkling of an internal evolution; neither had I. Led by chance, in 1903, to study its institutions and brought into contact with its new military system by one of its most famous officers, Colonel de Loys, I immediately realised that here, in the centre of Europe, was a small country which had not only played an important part in the past but had a great future ahead of it and which was quietly acting as a testing ground for the civilised nations of the world. From then on, Switzerland became of infinite interest to me.

From the sporting point of view, she appeared so favoured by nature as well as atavistic and other circumstances that it was hard to understand how she could be so slow to take advantage of them. "Switzerland, queen of sports" is the title of an article published in the *Olympic Review* for November 1906 and which, in retrospect, takes on a rather prophetic tone although the prophecy has not yet been completely fulfilled.

Such a country was predestined to play a very important Olympic role, but it had to be convinced of the fact. And it is no criticism of its inhabitants to remind them that nothing is ever easily got out of them unless they are already prepared in

* See "Olympic Review" since No. 101-102.

their own minds to make the necessary concession. Our Swiss colleague Godefroy de Blonay came to realise this more and more as he slowly and painstakingly tried to form a National Olympic Committee in spite of strong cantonal opposition to this sort of undertaking.

But I am not writing an article on Switzerland here. In my "*Histoire Universelle*" I was able to express in all sincerity my great admiration for this country. Here, I only want to recall how, wishing to win Switzerland over to our cause, I had begun with Lausanne and why, in trying to woo Lausanne, I had resorted to the stratagem of a scientific congress.

Lausanne's international role, which started long ago, the day the Pope came to place the Imperial crown on the head of Rudolph of Habsburg, had been somewhat neglected at the beginning of the 20th century. People came to consult famous doctors, others took pleasure in stopping there on their way through, some even lingered happily on, but it had no clearly defined role to play. Its university, which had recently moved into grand new premises whose rather unusual architecture had at least the freshness and sparkle of youth, occupied a very honourable position in the academic world without playing any leading role. Spreading delightfully along the lake, under its crown of forests, and offering every imaginable opportunity for sport, it was (either within its walls or in the immediate neighbourhood) the ideal spot for setting up the administrative headquarters of Olympism. But for this to come about, we had first of all to be accepted.

I wanted to see medicine, which to my mind was fast becoming too predominantly physiological, take greater interest in psychology. Having had a great many doctors as friends, starting with the sportsman Fernand Lagrange, the charming author of the "*Physiologie des Exercices du Corps*", I may be allowed to speak bluntly. And not so long ago in *Praxis*, the bilingual journal of the Swiss medical profession, I explained my point of view on the "morbid case" which, instead of being considered the exception, as it should, was tending more and more to be taken for normal in a variety of fields and in particular that of sport. This is not the place to try and give even a summary of such a difficult question. But what I said on that occasion was sufficient to give birth to the Lausanne Congress. I had spoken with my colleagues about the matter as early as 1909 and, two years later at the Budapest meeting, had given them a sort of manifesto which they welcomed enthusiastically and which was shortly afterwards published in English, French, German and Italian. It is quite short; and I feel it worthwhile reproducing the text here in its entirety:

ORIGINS OF SPORTING ACTIVITY

Natural aptitudes of the individual; general aptitudes (suppleness, skill, strength, endurance); special aptitudes (innate facility for a particular form of exercise). — Role and influence of sports *atavism*; observations and conclusions to be drawn. — Are natural aptitudes enough to encourage the individual or does he also need a *sporting instinct*? Nature and action of this instinct. — Can it be produced or replaced by the spirit of *imitation* and the effect of *will*?

CONTINUITY AND METHODS

The continuity vital for the creation of a real sportsman is obtained only when the *need* is created. Is it possible for the sporting need to be created physically by the habit resulting either from muscular *automatism*, or from the *desire for fresh air* produced by intensive



Lausanne 1913 - The opening of the Olympic Congress presided by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who is in the centre of the rostrum.

exercise and also morally from *ambition*, whether this ambition is the result of the desire for applause, or aims at a nobler object, such as striving after beauty, health or power.

Psychological particularities of each category of exercise: *intellectual* and *moral* qualities developed or used by each sport. — Different conditions governing the practice of sport: *solitude* and *comradeship*; *team spirit* and *rivalry*; *initiative* and *discipline*; formation and development of a team.

RESULTS

The strictly accurate character of sports results. — Training: differences from the state of *inurement*. — Normal training can be purely physical and lead only to the building up of *resistance*, but it can also contribute to *moral progress*: by the development of the will, courage and *self-confidence* and undoubtedly also to intellectual progress by the creation of *calm* and *mental order*. Under what conditions?

Finally, does not sports activity contain the seeds of a practical *philosophy* of life?

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This programme, if I may say so, had to be defended against the medical profession and, on the other hand, put over convincingly to the philosophers and teachers to win them to our cause; and we had at the same time to start to arouse the interest of sportsmen themselves. It was—paradoxically enough—a doctor who helped me, an old friend of my parents-in-law, Dr. Morax, at that time head of the Health Service in the Canton de Vaud. His three sons made names for themselves in the arts, literature and science. At Morges, where he lived, he led a patriarchal existence, keenly interested in everything that was going on in the world. Nothing happened in Europe or farther afield that did not awaken a shrewd, thoughtful, sympathetic echo in this lively old man always surrounded by young people and ever a champion of the boldest schemes. He immediately took a very keen interest in the Congress, grasping right away my half-voiced thoughts

and the profound reasons for its Olympic, and even Swiss, opportuneness. Through him I gained the cooperation of a University professor, Mr. Millioud—whose courses had been attended by Benito Mussolini, at that time an obscure student struggling courageously against an adverse fate—, the cooperation of the Rector, Mr. de Felice, and of the head of a famous private school, Mr. Auckenthaler. This is how the first group came to be formed. I persuaded a distinguished historian and philosopher, Guglielmo Ferrero, to make the opening address, as well as Theodore Roosevelt to write a message of encouragement. After that I had few illusions as to the discussions that were about to start. The subjects indicated were too unusual, they were still too unfamiliar to most of the Congress members for the whole project not to be doomed to failure. But the programme would live on, the prestige of certain names too, and the originality of the attempt would finally capture the attention of those who mattered.

The Congress opened on the morning of Thursday, 8th May 1913. On the two previous days, the IOC Session was held in the University Senate House; three new members were admitted: the Duke of Somerset for Great Britain, Count Penha-Garcia for Portugal, and Baron de Laveye for Belgium. The opening session took place in the Auditorium. The town was bedecked with flags. A troop of small boy scouts formed a guard of honour on the steps. The fine choirs of the Choral Union and the Men's Choir of Lausanne were loudly applauded and Federal Councillor Decoppet made a speech on behalf of the Supreme Council of the Confederation. In my reply, I had the sad duty to pronounce a funeral speech in memory of Dr. Morax, who had recently died. Ferrero then made an original speech full of deep philosophical significance. After which the Congress asked me to preside over its work and chose as Vice-Presidents the representatives of the Belgian and Austrian Governments, as well as Professor Millioud and Mr. Auckenthaler. A book was subsequently published containing the various memoranda presented there; many are interesting but bear witness, as I mentioned above, to a certain difficulty in keeping strictly to the subject. Roosevelt's autobiography was a striking example for all, as was the profound study by Louis Dedet, a former athlete, at that time head of the famous Normandy College, on the subject of teams, their formation, their organic life, their dissociation, etc.

The Municipal Council of Lausanne and the Mayor, Mr. P. Maillefer, had inaugurated the series of festivities on 7th May. The next evening, the famous terrace of the "*Abbaye de l'Arc*", through whose centuries-old trees the whole panorama of the Lake of Geneva could be admired, was the scene of a party which could not have been held anywhere else in the world. On the lawns, twenty-two of the finest wrestlers cheered on by their fellow cowherds and shepherds in their picturesque costumes competed in the light of resin torches. From behind the trees and shrubs could be heard the songs of the choirs. Finally, the stirring tones of the "*Ranz des Vaches*" rang out, while the torches went out one by one and the wrestling came to an end by the light of the moon. On the third evening, an amusing revue, specially prepared for the Congress, was given in the Casino. The witty songs and dances were a great success and there were many encores. There was also a Venetian Fête at Ouchy, a ball given by Baron and Baroness Godefroy de Blonay who had already entertained members of the IOC at

Grandson Castle, and finally, to bring the Congress to a close, a luncheon given by the State Council of the Canton of Vaud in the historic halls of Chillon Castle set off with beautifully reproduced decorations and costumes.

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The IOC had no practical consequences to draw from this Congress. Its role had been limited to serving as sponsor to a new order of subjects of scientific study and it was pleased to be able to note the very satisfactory conditions in which the baptism had been celebrated. During its Session, after settling a whole pile of “current affairs”—the traditional expression used to denote those that had in fact remained in abeyance for some time—and after discussing and approving the programmes and regulations of the Paris Congress scheduled for the following year, the IOC found itself faced with the Thorpe affair.

Hardly were the Games of the 5th Olympiad over than James Thorpe, the winner of the classical pentathlon and the decathlon, was accused of disguised professionalism. The dossier had been forwarded by the Swedish Committee and the American Committee to the IOC, which was called on for the first time to decide a matter of this kind and in such a sensational case. The dossier consisted of four parts: a letter from James Thorpe to Sullivan, a letter from the head of Carlisle College in Pennsylvania also to Sullivan, a note from Sullivan to the President of the IOC, and finally a statement by the President and Secretary of the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States and of the Olympic Committee, who after a thorough examination of the case had given their opinions together with their reasons. Now twenty years later, on reading these documents again, I feel the same impression of perfect dignity and loyalty I had felt at the time; a feeling shared by all my colleagues too. Thus, at the suggestion of the British members present in 1913, the Duke of Somerset and Reverend Laffan, the IOC, once it had reached its decision, sent its congratulations to the American officials for their “outstanding sporting” attitude on this occasion. There were of course a number of people who maintained that Thorpe was an American citizen of Red Indian origin and that it was because of this that he had been so easily “sacrificed” as a scapegoat. This is not true. This so-called “sacrifice” resulted in the United States falling several places lower on the honours board for 1912, and this was quite a blow to their national pride. Concerning the facts of which Thorpe was accused I have nothing to say. At the time, in the United States, there were a great many needy students good at sport who in the summer played for professional baseball teams, often under borrowed names. In 1909 and 1910, Thorpe had done exactly the same thing under his own name, but without realising the consequences of his action. Nobody had known anything about it and on his return to Carlisle College he had continued to be considered as an amateur. On reading his very frank letter and the sincerely moving one from the head of his college, how could I not help thinking of certain tennis players who had done as much or even more without being troubled in any way?... But even so there was no cause for hesitation and Thorpe, disqualified, had to give back the prizes he had won in Stockholm.

(To be continued)