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Review Article

OLYMPIC VALUES: THE END DOES NOT JUSTIFY THE MEANS

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ABSTRACT

Well could we shout: Gold for the victor; *Zanes* for scoundrels! Human beings are capable of the most beautiful acts, yet also the most despicable. Inevitably, this is also true in the world of sport, the history of which includes abundant examples of fair and foul play alike. The social responsibility of athletes who win the olive branch at an international Olympiad is such that those who are touched by the gods must consider every move they make in life. The repercussions on young athletes of their human and sporting actions are so great, they can change the course of people's lives. This is why society must think carefully about everything it does, from journalism, the fourth estate, to those leaders in education who desire a more dignified future, free of corruption. When the rules of play are broken, anywhere on the planet, humans take a step back in their evolution. Respect for the rules of the game in sport means respect for the rules of living together, respect for oneself and for one's neighbour. Education and sport should be synonyms, and sport and corruption incompatible. Adult athletes who have embraced doping are unlikely to change their ways, but the pedagogues and educators of today play a crucial role in transmitting the Olympic values of fair play. Investing in education is the best antidote to human corruption in all walks of life.

Key words: *Values, sport, fair play, doping, Olympic games, fraud*

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INTRODUCTION

In his work *De Arte Gymnastica* (1569), Girolamo Mercuriale provides various insights that help to illuminate the darker recesses of the soul. It is not uncommon to be confronted by facts in texts that go against an ideal or a myth. On page 17, for example, Mercuriale states that the sportsman did not always compete from a love of altruistic effort, but rather because in exchange for his labour he would receive offerings and gifts. Medals always existed, whether in the form of the olive branch, the laurel wreath or other, more appealing prizes. In reference to Homer, Mercuriale writes that *“Thus and therefore you should all know quite clearly, that in those original times the goal of such exercises was the delight and the hope of winning the prize, and then to learn agility and skill to secure victory in war and defeat one’s enemies; after those times, it began to be used to increase the worship of the gods and when sacrifices were held: in order for the men who competed to attend these festivities of the gods more promptly and with greater willing, they set up these games, judging by the most agreeable and appreciable to the gods and men to establish prizes that encouraged them to dare to do anything as Aristotle said; in these games men fought only to obtain prizes, which the Greeks called atla and which these athletes competed for, those which the Athenians called Erotiano aschetia, and Roman athletes who called the fight itself a game, as it was not only established in the festivals of the gods, in amphitheatres and before the gods, but contests were also held in private places to please the people, offering atlas or prizes just as among the Greeks...”*. This means, therefore, that *athletes* bear in their name the pursuit of victory rather than the untouchable idolatry that relates more to the gods than to the human world. Nevertheless, Baron Pierre de Coubertin himself moved to revive the Olympic Games from an idealistic perspective, doing what he thought was best for the context in which he lived. For de Coubertin, athletes should be amateurs and receive no money whatsoever for taking part in the Games. His understanding of the term amateur was closely linked to his views on physical education and pedagogy, which he felt society was in much need of (Aguilera et al., 2007).

Moving forward in time, it should be noted that the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing began with a series of anecdotes that could be considered surreal and improper of the organisers of such a majestic event as an Olympiad. On the one hand, the opening ceremony featured false, computer-generated fireworks, due to fears that real ones might fail. Neither the TV viewers who watched the broadcast live nor the thousands of spectators who witnessed the opening event inside the stadium noticed this manipulation. Another perplexing episode was the performance of a young girl who was not in fact singing, but instead miming while the real singer remained hidden behind the scenes because she was not pretty enough. Regardless of the discrimination, the lack of respect for a human being and the manipulation of the youngsters taking part, it could also be considered, from a Western point of view, as an unacceptable cultural trait. In both cases, the organisers justified their actions stating that they wanted to give the world an image of perfection. For them, the end justified the means; they did not mind falsifying reality, but unfortunately the truth came to light, just as when an athlete is “caught out” in a dope test. It could be said that in the Olympic world, all that glitters is not gold.

CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

To understand the cultural fabric of humans, we must first analyse the predominant scale of values. Each context accepts or censures certain forms of behaviour, depending on the ethics and morals agreed by society. Humanism is concerned with anything that helps human beings to advance. Moral value is that which leads humans to grow in personal dignity. Put another way, it could be said that value is that which is considered important in life, which helps people to decide what is morally right and wrong. The value that society or an individual confers on a specific event is what is known as moral conscience. It is not only a question of ascertaining whether the act in question is right or wrong, but rather we must differentiate whether the person has moral conscience or not. The responsibility falls on human beings and on their scale of values. Athletes are just as responsible for their training and their achievements as they are for their cheating and their deceit.

It is therefore important to clarify certain behaviours which humans have been guilty of for centuries, and which have occurred far too often in the world of sport.

Cheating occurs when there is falsehood and intention to deceive; the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language defines it as maliciously breaking the rules of a game or contest. Cagigal (1966) writes that cheating in sport is synonymous with selfishness, cowardice, rudeness, lying, duplicity, idiocy, presumption, envy and an inferiority complex.

Deceit means making a lie appear to be true. It is also defined as causing someone to think something is true which is not, by using either apparent or feigned words or actions. The term *doping* refers to administering drugs or stimulants, and to banned methods of artificially increasing physical performance for competitive gain. The two terms should be clarified so as not to confuse doping with bad or less than exemplary habits.

The figure of the much-admired idol is one that carries great responsibility in all walks of life, but it has particular influence on the youngest athletes. The first habit of an idol is fair play: “*A good habit, that of fairness, for the game of life...*” (Cagigal, 1966).

FRAUD AND CHEATING IN MODERN SPORT

The most notorious period of drug scandals in Olympic history was undoubtedly between Montreal 1976 and Moscow 1980. East Germany won more medals than such powerful nations as the USA and Japan, coming second at both games behind the USSR. In the 1970s, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) seemed to be crazy about sport. Nobody knew who they were, but a generation of athletes was born that won gold in every event. But there was a dark secret behind these sporting successes. The leaders of the Communist party controlled a systematic and nationwide illegal doping programme. Trainers and doctors worked in shifts of 24 hours, experimenting with male hormones and adding anabolic steroids to the diet of young female athletes. Trainers were hired with the purpose of winning medals, and what they were paid depended on the results achieved. If athletes became injured, after four years they received nothing. Research into the biochemistry of movement increased the strength of the drugs used,

leading to liver damage, altered body shape, changes to the voice and hair growth. Such irreparable damage destroyed lives and hopes forever.

Fortunately, doping is now irrelevant in terms of the number of cases, but its social repercussion remains significant. In both Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008, only around 4% of the athletes cheated and were caught ([Duránte, 1992](#)). Random testing is a good method of control, though there will always be a small number of athletes who will try to cheat the system for financial gain. In cases of doping, bribery or foul play, the sanctions applied should set an example, due to the impact on society and moral decline that these acts can cause. Similarly, scientific and technological advances can also have consequences when used for the wrong reasons. [Legido \(2006\)](#), Professor of the Physiology of Sport, Complutense University of Madrid, warned that at Beijing 2008 there would be cases of genetic doping (entering genetic information into an athlete's muscles to form specific proteins and enhance control) that would go undetected. Zero tolerance of doping and fraud in sport is still the most effective way to combat the problem.

We could ask the following question: contaminated context, or human condition? Perhaps an answer of both would explain the phenomenon of anti-values in sport.

LEGENDARY CHEATS

The legend regarding the origin of the Olympic Games (Pindaro, quoted by [Kieran and Daley, 1967](#)) has it that Zeus and Chronos, the most powerful gods, fought among the peaks of Olympus for possession of the Earth and the Universe. It was in commemoration of Zeus, as winner, that the first Olympic Games were held. This grandiose and mythological vision contrasts with other legends, such as that of Pelops. It is said that King Oenomaus took pleasure at the expense of the suitors that came from distant lands to seek the hand of his daughter, Hippodamia. He decreed that to secure his daughter, a suitor must ride with her in a chariot and be chased by her father. Should the suitor be caught by the king, as punishment he would be run through by the royal lance. Thirteen victims perished. But Pelops, the 14th hopeful to become the king's son-in-law, bribed the charioteer to sabotage the axle of the king's chariot. Just as he was catching up to the couple, one of the wheels flew off, and the king broke his neck in the accident. Triumphant from his double victory, Pelops established the first Olympic Games on the same spot.

There is no way of knowing the exact origin of the Games, which date back to around 776 BC, but it is certain that in their quest for success, humans have been capable of performing the greatest sporting achievements, but also the vilest and most despicable acts in pursuit of success.

Other testimony has it that in a final encounter between two boxers, one killed the other by deliberately cheating, after which the judges declared him to be in disgrace and the dead fighter was crowned the winner. Another famous Olympic cheat was the boxer Eupolus of Thessaly, who was convicted of bribing three opponents to let him win in the 98th Olympiad. When discovered, he was fined; the money raised from athletes who broke the Olympic code of honour was used to build a line of statues, called *Zanes*. These statues were the last thing that participants would see before entering the stadium; they were a reminder that fair play should reign throughout the competition.

In recent decades, there have been abundant detestable cases of doping and foul play: East Germany (1979-89), Ben Johnson, Seoul (1988), skiers (Grenoble, 1968 - Salt Lake City, 2002), Chinese swimmers (1990-2001), cycling (Vuelta a España 2005 - Tour de France 1996-2006), and Marion Jones and Justin Gatlin in athletics, as well as match fixing in tennis and football, among others. In soccer, the terrible example that Maradona set for children as a result of his involvement in drugs, is just as repugnant as his “hand of God” incident ([Todos los mundiales, 2009](#)). Until he eventually apologised (31/01/2008), how many players have imitated him? ([El Comercio, 2009](#), among others). And given his social status as an “elite” player, how many children have scored goals with their hand in the playground?

Another episode that causes revulsion is that of the ball boys of certain clubs, their leaders and the way games are commentated on television. Ball boys have been known to manipulate games in favour of their team (by throwing two balls onto the pitch, wasting time, by hiding or by claiming to be the victims of aggression). Match delegates have been known to give instructions to ball boys to cheat in this way. And some television channels make jokes (which are anything but funny) about the roguish cunning of the Spaniards. It is a shame that the media do not seek to educate people about how it is possible to lose with dignity. As [Cagigal](#) writes (1966), “*learning how to lose means learning acceptance. Throughout life we must swallow even stones...*”.

With good reason did Baron Pierre de Coubertin, as far back as 1930, call for the intellectualisation of the sporting press. Journalists should accept their responsibility and educate public opinion by dealing with fundamental questions of life, rather than seeking sensationalism or the sale of newspapers. In this sense, the words of [Cagigal](#) (1957) are highly pertinent: “*Journalists too have much to say in these cases. Less meanness and sensitivity in individual and faultless episodes of confusion, and more courage in cases of fraudulent co-existence. The hard responsibility of journalists is to form public opinion, to educate. And in the world of sport, to educate the public sportingly, which is of no little importance, given the high civil virtues that are at stake. ...Unmoveable indignation of proven bad faith is a decisive move and a source of strong convictions...*”.

What would happen if articles were to be published on the Olympic ideal, the organisation of physical education, and the promotion of sport as recreation? Perhaps fewer newspapers would be sold, but society would gain in values and in education. As the Romanian journalist [Banciulescu](#) (1970) wrote: “*the press should not limit itself to taking the sporting pulse of the masses, to holding up a mirror to the fact of sport; it must also fulfil its duty as an educator... By thinking in this way, each day the press will help to bring physical education and sport closer to the Olympic ideal...*”.

At the same time, the players themselves lash out, simulate injuries, are disrespectful to referees, waste time and set an undesirable example to children, turning them into automata that imitate actions unbecoming of good sportsmanship. Modern technological advances mean that images from matches can be viewed and the appropriate penalties given in situ to the “kings of the dive” and simulation, as well as examining whether or not the ball crosses the goal line. The use of Hawk-Eye technology in tennis is a good example, because it satisfies spectators as well as helping the umpire. [Cagigal](#) (1957) notes that: “*Respect for authority in play is the best guarantee of sporting happiness. For these very reasons it should be inflexible, almost insanely so, with cheats. A referee*

whose is found to have been a calculating cheat has no right to expect sporting forgiveness by society. Not because one seeks to play God, who always forgives, but to set an example. In his private life, he may deserve every reprieve; but his sporting career must come to an end. Competition committees and federations should make it so, placing the heaviest sanctions that will effectively sink the sporting career of such a confidence trickster”.

As touched on previously, it is important not to confuse doping with setting a bad example. Humans are not perfect. Most of us think that our sporting heroes are upright people with healthy habits, solid values and an exemplary code of conduct. Unfortunately this is not so, and the case of Michael Phelps (2008) is a good example of a fallen, if not self-destructed, hero. The sad image of the finest swimmer of all time smoking marijuana caused irreparable damage in society and among young sports fans.

All this causes an irremediable loss of respect (for oneself and for sport), immediate social damage and personal harm (assimilation and reinforcement of negative values, emotional trauma, etc.). It promotes the idea that “anything goes” and promotes non-cooperation.

In the ancient Olympic Games, participants had to make an oath to have undertaken a training period of 30 days, under the eyes of Olympic instructors of recognised probity. Perhaps in the present day it would be a good idea to sign a commitment of honour, without resorting to the extremes of the Chinese gymnasts, who signed a contract preventing them from becoming injured and from doping themselves, for Beijing 2008.

NEO-HUMANISM AND SPORT

Once identified and recognised, the issue ceases to be a problem and becomes a challenge to be solved. Having realised that corruption can even affect sporting occasions, society steps in to ensure it is eradicated. As Elias’ theory of sport and civilisation states, sport is a reflection of the society that we live in. The only way to halt corruption is to invest heavily in education. Governments should invest more, as Finland has done, where 6% of the GDP is spent on education. This approach is based on very simple yet solid principles: 1. An educated population will elect honest and competent leaders. 2. These leaders will choose the best advisers. 3. An educated population does not tolerate corruption. 4. An educated people respects the rules of the game.

In Finland (and unlike in Spain), the role of educator is respected and valued. Teachers transmit values to young children, the adults of the future. The values and behaviours associated with fair play are learned through teaching. The approach is based on the concept of activating the chain of benefits to society. Sanctions must be inflexible and must not tolerate those who break the rules.

Because we are adaptive beings and the product of both genetic heredity and the environment in which we live, schools are the key to educational progress. Today an education is required that responds to the needs of the moment. As Virno (1970) notes, the humanist understanding of teaching should be concerned with educating in terms of formative, human and physical integrity, and always in line with the social order of the time. Thus, the sooner society learns Olympic values, the quicker such a society will

progress. As the popular saying goes, *“a tree that grows bent can never be straightened”*.

For this reason, early training in sport is crucial, with a curriculum in physical education, and specific material on Olympic values, as well as ensuring that teachers themselves are properly trained.

As a pedagogue, Coubertin always considered sport as a way of forming and educating, and ultimately looked down on those who dealt with and spoke of sport without the respect that it deserved (Aguilera et al., 2007).

As professionals of physical education, teachers must not forget that an athlete must above all be a human being. As Dr Vincenzo Virno (1970) writes: *“It is necessary for physical education to be appreciated and its many values transmitted, insisting above all that even though PE still uses methods of traditional gymnastics, which are of undisputed importance, it should equally avail itself of other kinds of training and methodologies, because it has been enriched in both its theory and its practice with new possibilities of educational guidance. It is necessary to first accept and then inform that it is not enough in Physical Education to believe and make others believe that exercise of the muscular apparatus is the only educational instrument of the body, a kind of health panacea. With this mistaken view, physical education will continue to be discredited, and will remain on the edges of school life”*.

If governments fail to realise the importance of investing in education, it is teachers who have the responsibility to work to bring an end to corruption in sport and in schools. According to Cagigal (1966), the great Spanish humanist, the role of teachers is (having accepted the existing social and political conditioning factors) to ensure that their domain is kept free of the dangers posed by these factors. *“It is easy to protest against a social trend and then fold one’s arms and claim that nobody can do anything. The foundation and the beginning of every change is man, the individual. For new weapons, new counter-weapons. If man suffers unprecedented pressure that threatens to deform his personality, let us seek new solutions to his situation. All the great findings of history have been due to the struggle to overcome difficulties, and not to plaintive cowardice. At the root of all true human failure lies a weak teacher or a twisted thinker. Let us not demand from politicians that which they cannot give. It is not politicians but teachers and thinkers that make the world go round”*.

Sánchez de Muniain, as quoted by Cagigal (1957), maintains that sport has humanistic value with regard to the body, the soul and society as a whole. Regarding the body, because it grows stronger through exercise. Regarding the soul, because in acquiring physical skill one exercises moral virtues, and because the somatic euphoria of sport lifts and boosts one’s state of mind and mental agility. Finally, regarding society as a whole, because following the rules of the game, acting appropriately in both victory and defeat, and the discipline and humility of teamwork are an excellent schooling in political education. A good athlete is better prepared for an organic democracy than a man sitting in a café can ever be (Cagigal, 1979).

Coubertin was convinced that reviving the Olympic Games would be beneficial to young people all over the world. Olympism seeks to achieve a balance between body (the physical), willpower (the conscience of being) and mind (the psyche). The Olympic

Charter states that “*the goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised in accordance with Olympism and its values*”.

The educational values of Olympism are: 1. To try to be the best. 2. To respect the rules, one’s adversaries and oneself. 3. To enjoy the competitive spirit of the movement. 4. To enjoy the effort made (Coubertin, 1973).

To play fairly, one must use brain before brawn. There is a code of sporting ethics that remains unwritten, but which honourable human beings know and respect. Rugby is a hard but noble sport; respect for one’s rival is the norm, and the “third half” is a time of dignity and largesse. This is when the two teams and the referee come together to show mutual appreciation for a game well played. In ancient times, Greek gymnasia would play host to athletes, artists, mathematicians and philosophers (such as Plato, whose name means “broad shouldered”) (Rodríguez, 2000). Appreciation of the body (physical harmony and health) is combined with leisure of the soul (science, art, philosophy). In the 21st century, it would seem that we have forgotten the Olympic spirit, a life based on enjoying hard work, the educational value of leading by example and respect for fundamental and universal ethical principles.

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