

## Competition *versus* nature: how the sport warps human character

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**Abstracts.** *The sport is considered one of the greatest social phenomena of the century. The society is facing a phenomenon that, like all social phenomena, is historically conditioned and culturally determined. The objective of this work is to demonstrate that the modern sport, plus all the benefits already known, can also affect decisively and warp human character. We tried to make a critical analysis on the subject today, having the Olympics as the main event analyzed. After the professionalization of the sport, this came to experience a real transformation with the establishment of a causal relationship between money and sports performance. If the genesis of the modern Olympic movement participation itself was a form of victory and coronation, at the beginning of the XXI century the prevailing pursuit of victory at any cost, even using illegal and unethical means, such as the use of doping. Thus the athlete who cannot win the first place and play the desired performance, often feels defeated. The consequences of the defeat are not sufficiently studied, which contributes to an attitude of denial about this situation on the part of members of the sports universe.*

*Keywords: human character, Sport, Competition.*

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Winning is important, but lose and learn from defeat, is fundamental"*  
Werlayne Leite

According to Tavares (1999 as cited in [1]), the Olympic Games were for its re-inventor the institutionalization of a conception of physical activities that "used to transform the sport in an educational enterprise, moral and social development, designed to produce effects on level of individuals, societies and nations". According to Rubio [1], Baron de Coubertin, as an educator, thinker and historian, when engaged himself in the reorganization of the Olympic Games, sought to revalue the pedagogical aspects of Greek sport, much more than watching the conquest of brands and breaking records. His primary concern was to enhance fair competition and healthy, the cult of the body and physical activity, a reflection of his humanistic conception. Coubertin's will to revive the Ancient Games derived largely from pedagogic motives, and was based very much on a British model of character development via participation in sport.

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Coubertin clearly viewed sport as a means of developing character, rather than in the adoption of a win at all costs mentality [2].

The Olympic Charter considers Olympism with a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympics seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles [3]. Therefore, it gives the sport an educational value that can transform the course of man and society, where the Olympic sport can contribute to a more peaceful and brotherly world, able to educate the new generations in values, creating a universal and unchanging Olympic spirit [4].

In accordance with the ideals of nobleness, people should compete fairly, to be humble in victory and serene in defeat, after all, "The important thing is not to win, but to compete." The motto of Baron de Coubertin was first used in the 1908 Olympic Games in London. Since then, we see (or we should face) sport as a practice without losers: with the winners are the laurels of victory, with the losers is learning - lessons such as discipline, determination, team spirit. Hence the mission of the Olympics: a more peaceful and better through sport [5].

However, we realize now that the Baron de Coubertin's motto is more than exceeded. The motto sounds inspiring, but not for everyone. Actually, when we talk about high level competitive sport, for various reasons, currently the most important thing is winning. This logic "console" as holds off the event in question, the source of suffering, to put it in perspective with "more noble" things like "mankind", the "races intertwining, ideologies and religions," sponsored by sport.

In the transformation of the practice of amateur to professional status, were not only noble and aristocratic values that have been lost. The creation of a new Olympic order indicated that the world of the twentieth century had undergone profound changes and mostly practical and moral [6]. Still according to the author, the structure of contemporary sport is observed the repetition of the liberal model which privileges victory, although the first three winners in Olympic disputes. This often leads to the winners of the silver and bronze medal feel defeated, thus negating a feat worthy of historical record. For more than a century, the contention that sport builds character has been popular among educators. The more cautious perspective of researchers is that sport might build character, but only under the right conditions [7].

The objective of this work is to demonstrate that sport, plus all the benefits already known, can also affect decisively and warp human character. We tried to make a critical analysis about the sport today, having the Olympics as the main event analyzed. Currently, there are ethical problems in the world of sports that need to be addressed [7].

## OLYMPISM AND THE PROFESSIONALIZATION

*"The Olympic discourse and practice, which have been divine, became commercial and ideological"*

Katia Rubio

For Donnelly (as cited in [1]) the ideal of amateurism is the foundation of Olympism. It developed within a context that was highly specific to Victorian morality and came to experience a real transformation with the establishment of a causal relationship between money and sports performance. Therefore, Olympism is to this author, an endangered attitude in the Olympic world. More than solidarity and mutual respect, the main reference for the realization of high competition sport today is the ability to generate financial return for all involved directly or indirectly.

The athletes, who early in the century were necessarily amateurs, were living of the

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sport, being able to devote exclusively to practice their modalities for achieving the required levels of performance [8]. It is from this moment that the two cornerstones of modern sport, amateurism and fair play, have suffered his major setback. Considered the foundation of Olympism, these concepts were guiding the sport throughout the twentieth century, until about the 70s, when the causal relationship money and sportive performance began to compose an inseparable duo [1].

With the end of amateurism, the sport became a way of life, an occupation: individuals with levels of physical abilities outside the average star in athletic feats unusual for an audience eager to show and start receiving large sums to perform certain actions, and so, over time, the champions of the sport have been transformed into real products that are sold, traded [8]. According to the Australian Sports Drug Agency [9], with the professionalization of the sport, high prizes began to be given to the winners, resulting in a "caste" of sportsmen highly paid and prestigious. These exacerbated values led to the professionalization of the sport, resulting in its marketing, with the consequent corruption system [10].

From 1896 in Athens to London 2012, the Olympic Games have grown in number of participating athletes and countries and in importance. They have become a significant event both the sporting point of view, as economic and political. No longer they have the purism dreamed by Coubertin, who envisioned the sport as a time of celebration, almost religious, among the people. At the present time the Olympics are the main competitive sporting event, especially which relates to indices of athletic performance, number of tests, modalities of athletes and participating countries, besides being an event with strong commercial and tourist [1].

Due to the growing importance of sport in society, the role of the athlete underwent major modifications. Participation in the Olympic Games has gained new meaning and has come to represent much more than a comparison of skills or techniques, but selling ideas and/or products [8]. Many athletes are seen as heroes serving as reference and identification to society. Thus the sporting spectacle promoted by these athletes was sold as a commodity, attracting large investments and also the media attention [11]. The professionalism and marketing have taken over the sport, reliving the mass sport. It rises so that the whole pressure on athletes and its yield, which can lead to doping [10].

## **MODERN SPORT: WIN AT ANY COST**

*"Winning or losing is part of the sport, the way you win or lose  
is what makes you victorious or not"*

Caio Ribeiro

Freire [12] refers to the competition as trainer of champions, race picker, prejudiced feelings disseminator, breeding in the most abominable competition that guides the relationship between the people of our society, and which finds its expression in the most important ritual modern Olympic Games. Winning at any cost is the motto that drives competition, social relations and sports games.

In all competitive sports, participants will experience some temptation to deviate from rules to gain advantage [7]. In the world of great athletes there is no such of "sportsmanship". Currently competing truth in the continental, world and Olympic, is only for the strong, those who resist the pressure - often with the help of cheating. Focused on the podium, many cheat. And that's not so unusual. As the theory goes, the sport helps to shape the character of a person. But, as the practice says it can be to a worse character [5].



Fig. 1. Existing relationship between cheating in sport and winning medals.

Competitions can create serious damage to the character of the athlete (human being), they can decisively affect human character. For many psychologists, the distortion in the human character of the athletes has, as one of the main factors, the pressure to win. "The expectation of parents and coaches early in athletes may adversely influence the behavior of a young man," says Stephen Leff, professor of the psychology clinical at the University of Pennsylvania. This excessive pressure counteracts proven advantages of the sport, as reinforcement to the self-esteem and relationship skills [5].

According to Mandell (1986 as cited in [6]) the sport as it is known in contemporary society emerged in a historical moment marked by particular conditions and was modeled on the principles of a society governed by the liberal system. In this condition, the victory, not participation, is the supreme value of athletic competition, because it is associated with the win of social recognition, money and the desire for permanence, leading to underestimation of any other outcome.

From the point of view of the major competitions, the unfolding of this logic leads to the devaluation of silver and bronze medals, prize dedicated to second and third places, those are no longer distinctions and have become consolation prizes or shame. The other settings are not even mentioned in annals and encyclopedias, burying one of the maxims of Olympism that is the participating is important [3].

With each passing day, the sport is more dependent on the media and the money and goes on leaving aside its essential features and benefits to suit the capitalist world. He gets in front of the background that people find most important: the victory [13]. The massive spread by the media and the power of propaganda on the masses change the sport. The technological discourse turns it on a national and global issue where it does little of its rules aureus: honesty, loyalty, fair play [14]. The sport ethics has changed the ideal that "the important thing is to compete...". Became a new ideal that "as important as winning, is to be known, to be famous, appears, profit..." [15]. There is a hegemonic focus in this discourse: talking about sports is talking about victory, intense effort, records, champions, medals, money, success in life [16]. The media exalts exaggeratedly the champion and leaves aside the contestant who could not succeed. Meanwhile, forces him to seek victory at all costs (including using illegal means) to fit the current model of sport, where only the champion has value [13]. We can see that, currently, the sport does not serve to educate, teach values, etc. It is being used in many other ways which

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the fundamental paradigm is the victory. A struggle exacerbated by the victory, which is worth to use all means to win. A struggle for social status, money [17]. Thus, the Olympic sport is linked to high yield and their dangerous circumstances (commercialism, doping, violence, super training, etc.). The Olympism and the Olympic Movement have suffered many losses, as we are immersed in an exacerbated and prevailing consumer society, that imposes a set of amoral values and alters the functioning of the Olympic principles [4].

Benjamin [18] states that at the time of Homer, humanity offered itself as spectacle to the Olympian gods, now it turns itself into a spectacle for itself. Its self-alienation has reached the point that allows it to live its own destruction with an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. Opponents of sports, on the other hand, often cite an abundance of evidence and sport-related cheating, aggression, self-aggrandizement, disrespectful behavior, and corruption to suggest that sports have the opposite effect – they undermine positive character [7].

Some athletes use many types of drugs, even being aware of the harm they do, because they feel the victory as a priority. In day-to-day athletes prioritize too much the sport that they tend to just dismiss what is outside it. They end up putting aside their social life (family, friends, leisure, etc.). Sometimes they leave out the obligations school (studying, submit assignments, take tests, etc.), among other things. According to Santos [5], however well intentioned, the exception helps to form the idea that anything goes for a good result and that the sport deserves full attention. When an athlete has the determination to win at any cost and the institution and staff around him/her share that spirit, some excesses may be committed, making ethical values to be forgotten [19].

However, the character, sportsmanship and disciplines in sports cannot positively influence character development especially if ‘winning’ being emphasized (Barez, 2008 as cited in [20]). Perhaps, the ‘winning emphasize’ implants for coaches and athletes by the administrators will invite inappropriate behavior like cheating, overly aggressive or taking drugs for better performances (Doty, 2006 as cited in [20]).

Brohm (1993, 1995 as cited in [6]) assesses that this logic of extreme valuation of sports result is an ideological construct that circulates through the media impact, and that the sports institutions absorb a good portion of the murderous and suicidal tendencies of individuals of a society in protracted crisis, a crisis that is at once economic, spiritual and ideological. This suicidal violence that manifests itself in many ways comes from the same matrix axiological and praxeological: competition of all against all, the endless search for the record, the relentless pursuit of overcoming limits, the cult of excess, fetishism of Progress performances and the idolatry of success at any price.

## **DOPING *versus* HUMAN CHARACTER**

*"In an era where the exploitation of the results chokes humans, the acceptance of individual limits is the greatest overcoming proof that an individual can give to himself."*

Lucia Silva, Kátia Rubio

In historical context, from the professional sports and increased competitiveness, demanding on athletes also increased a lot, once that they have come to play an important social function: to represent his nation through good performance. Athletes under constant psychological pressure, which did not have adequate physical strength, or that even having it, felt the need of having better results, found in doping an alternative of enhancement [21]. According to Tubino [22] the increase in drug use among professional athletes is due to various

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political, economic, and social factors. Among the factors presented by the author, there is a highly at the competitive feature of performance sports. At each competition, new records are shattered and this fact makes these athletes seek increasingly to maximize physical performance.

In relation to personal reasons that lead to the use of doping by athletes, we highlight the physical and psychological. The physical reason for the use of drugs and, more recently, genetic remodeling is to improve performance, giving you a greater competitive power (Miah, 2003; Brohm et. al., 1993 as cited in [19]). The psychological reason of dope is reflected in its root a high level of demand (intrinsic and extrinsic) and responsibility. The athlete who uses pacing chooses this approach because he feels unsafe, believing not to be able to meet his expectations and many others` expectations, especially when the current society is based on measuring the performance of productive results - and in the sport that logic is immediate and obvious. Furthermore, when an athlete makes use of doping substances he seeks not only the victory and pleasure that this gives him, but the financial reward and social prestige [19, 21].

Being the sport and society in general characterized by individualism, by competitiveness, by exacerbated pursuit of victory, it has played a key role in the increasing use of doping among professional athletes. According to Tubino [22] the use of doping in sport is a serious problem that spans several ethical questions, because this act considered a moral problem, hurts the rules of conduct dictated by society. For Costa [23], the issue of doping in sport also involves serious ethical questions. Usually assumed as certain that the use of prohibited drugs is unethical, especially for the fact that no natural resources are searched to increase performance, damaging honesty for the competition, including risks to the own health.

Circumventing the law of prohibited substances and methods to beat at any price also seems unfair to characterize behavior with others, contrary to the community in which it is inserted and, therefore, ethically reprehensible [23]. For Bento (2004 as cited in [11]), the use of doping sets manipulation and alteration of nature. With the aid of chemicals, it becomes possible to achieve results unattainable by natural means. The use of doping steals the athlete's optimism, enthusiasm, and belief in chances of overcoming and improvement; destroys the meaning of work, effort, persistence, substituting these values by the sad mentality of farce.

It is expected that a competition is guided by equal opportunities based on disinterest beyond the competition itself, in which wins the best, who brings more skills and who else worked to achieve the result. Not always this expectation becomes true in sports: the use of doping substances and their refinement, which leads to the impracticability of its detection, distort the sense of equality that guides the competition. The fair-play gives way to the anything goes, which in its turn reinforces the use of any resources that enable the achievement of victory. This is the logic that has prevailed largely in the high circles of sport performance [19]. Thus, the athlete becomes an instrument of the others` desire, removing his ability to discern where are the boundaries of ethical, moral and security of his behavior [10].

The highly competitive sporting environment has created a condition of absolute and unquestionable overvaluation of victory. Faced with this issue, Calderon (as cited in [19]) states that the reason to the practice of doping to have become widespread among athletes is because in the sport spectacle there are only winners and losers, which produces a large tension. No one wants to belong to the second category, nobody wants to be a loser, because society only value winners.

According to Rubio [24] the increasing commercialization of sport has contributed to the increase of drug use from the moment that not only the sport-performance, but the athlete has become a product. According to the author, another important point is the great rewards given to professional athletes who make use of these substances in order to improve athletic performance in addition to win and to stay on top of their career. This leads athletes to pay any

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price to achieve the required performance, even if they have to resort to illegal substances, making the ethical values of sport to be despised [21].

## DEFEAT AS SYMBOL OF FAILURE

*"Knowing how to lose is a characteristic that is attributed to the 'sporty', although  
It is more a force of expression than an effective disposition "*

Katia Rubio

If competition is a condition inherent to the sport, it is need to be understood in what it is specific in that context. According to Yonnet (2004 as cited in [6]), a sports competition can be divided into two systems: competition against somebody and competition against yourself. Competing against someone is trying to be better than your opponent and take victory subjugating him to his outcome; compete against yourself is a particular competition, is trying to improve your individual result, regardless of the outcome of the opponent.

According to Rubio [6] for the practitioners of the sport of ancient Greece, overcoming times, distances, weights or points were a result of an activity that ritualized Hellenistic Greek Olympics, but whose practice was first of all to develop the physical and morals. In ancient times the athletes competed, but his quest for victory was not grounded in defeat of the opponent but to overcome his own limits, that is, achieving peak performance in the trial had a divine condition, and the affirmation of the permanence. The victory over the opponent was a result of this process. For the Hellenistic Greek society, the winners would be those who would exceed their physical limits and moral. In modern sport the best performance tends to be associated with the achievement of the first prize, or even the record, distinguishing his executor of the other participants of the competition. The search for best results is no longer overcoming the own limits to become the result of overcoming the opponent. It also works for this phenomenon, the technological development that allows, besides the development of new sports equipment, the measurement of time and space in always smaller indices, that only could be record by the most advanced instruments.

Cagigal [25] states that the Olympic Games are the synthetic vision in large and ostentatious scale sport in the world. In them blunts much of sports idols consecrated by their victories. However, the author continues his reflection with a question: And all those who participate and do not win, are indeed defeated? The answer suggests that agonistic and struggles are present in various forms of competition and victory cannot just be winning the first place.

The ideal of the society today, the winner, is remembered and valued by supplanting the other, regardless of the resources used for this purpose [1]. To the defeated remains the shame for the lost objective, confusion with the inability and lack of recognition for his efforts made. Given the result and comparing it with the desired, sense of frustration is understandable, anger or perhaps disappointment of the athlete when he fails to achieve his goal. If the competition today relates to the necessity of victory as an affirmation of superiority over the opponent, it is worth mentioning that you cannot think of competition or victory without the presence of the opponent. While the attention of athletes and coaches are focused on overcoming marks and times, what is seen is the urgent need to overcome one capable of promoting his own frustration, state like this manifested in the situation of defeat [6].

If in the genesis of the modern Olympic movement participation itself was a form of victory and coronation, at the beginning of the XXI century prevails victory at any cost, because

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only it has the power to cover up the shadow of high performance sport called defeat. In this sense, mechanisms such as doping, corruption and cheating have become so valuable, for some athletes, such as physical and psychological preparation itself, demanding more effort on the part of the professionals involved with competitive preparing [6].

The difficulty which the protagonists of the sporting world and theorists have to deal with defeat may rest in the position that the condition assumed in contemporary Western culture. Stuck in a model in which income-awards not only material gains are concerned, but also the recognition of an achievement that ensures immortality, it is possible to say that the defeat is the social shadow of contemporary sport. Thus, there has been an affirmation of the heroic imagination in contemporary sports, not by its proximity to the crossing of boundaries, but by unilateral identification with the achievements recognized and justifiable people considered superhuman [6].

The consequences of defeat are not sufficiently studied, what contributes to an attitude of denial about this situation by both athletes and professionals working in the sports universe [24].

## FINAL REFLEXIONS

*"The Greeks trained to adapt to their civilization, we train ourselves to stand ours"*  
Jean Prévost

When the modern Olympic Games were conceived by Baron de Coubertin, they were thought of as an event of integration among peoples. Just over 100 years later, with all the changes in the world during the twentieth century, the Olympics (as well as the sport in general) were completely metamorphosed and reinterpreted.

Currently the Olympics are characterized by what we call post-Olympism. The post-Olympic spirit cannot be characterized as sports practice that seeks to revive the Greek Olympic past, but reworked, presents itself as an ideal illusion where key elements of its organization and practice are neglected at the expense of economic interests and satisfaction of politicians, who are not always directly related to the phenomenon of sports (Rubio, 2002).

In high performance sport, many athletes and officials pay little attention to its most important rules: honesty, loyalty, fair play, etc. Currently, speaking about high competitive level sport means speaking in excessive pursuit for victory, doping, records, cash prizes, entertainment, fame, etc.

These characteristics of postmodern sport are justified by its close relationship with the media. This relationship makes the sport setting and the demands and needs of the media, turning it into a spectacle broadcasted to millions of viewers. The sport-spectacle, in turn, allows the professionalization and commercialization of the athlete.

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