



## OLYMPIC VALUES

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An Olympic Congress provides a welcome and necessary opportunity for the Olympic Movement to reflect upon important themes affecting the Movement, its stakeholders and the public at large. The Movement must take advantage of such gatherings and be objective in the considerations comprising the themes of the Congress. Positive elements should be identified and reinforced; negative elements must be acknowledged and appropriate changes made. The Congress is not a time to ignore the need for constant assessment and realignment of conduct.

Central to the Olympic Movement and Olympism are its core values. “Values” are objectives or qualities desirable as a means or an end in themselves. Without the Olympic values, there is nothing to distinguish the Olympic Movement from professional or entertainment sports. Without the Olympic values, there is nothing to inspire the youth of the world; there is no humanity to celebrate; there is nothing to draw out the best of us. There may be physical proficiency, fleeting and fickle recognition from spectators and, perhaps, material benefits. But if these features are not based on a set of ethical values, which guide the participants and assure their basic integrity, they fall far short of providing the rich and personally rewarding experience that can be derived from sport practised within the Olympic Ideal.

What are the Olympic values?

Some are described in the Olympic Charter and have stood the test of time.

- *Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism 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.*
- *The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.*

- *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.*

Some are described in the purpose of the quadrennial celebration of the Olympic values, the Olympic Games.

- *The Olympic Movement is the concerted, organised, universal and permanent action, carried out under the supreme authority of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), of all individuals and entities who are inspired by the values of Olympism. It covers the five continents. It reaches its peak with the bringing together of the world's athletes at the great sports festival, the Olympic Games. Its symbol is five interlaced rings.*

Still others are revealed through the conduct of Olympians, who have risen to the challenge of competition, the personal struggle inherent in the Olympic motto, *Citius, Altius, Fortius*: the struggle to master one's self; to overcome doubt, to overcome fear of failure, even fear of winning; to have the confidence to do one's best; and to respect fellow competitors as well as the rules of the game. The true Olympian participates with an uncompromising commitment to fair play; it would be unthinkable to do otherwise.

It is easy to articulate a set of values. It is far more difficult to embrace those values and to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to them.

Are there danger signals which indicate that Olympic values may be under attack or eroding? We are all aware of some of these indicators, including doping, corruption, manipulation of results, violence, discrimination, and biased judging. These problems are made greater when such conduct is ignored or condoned, implicitly or explicitly, by sports officials, coaches, parents, media and the public-at-large. There are many examples of the failure of ethical values in other aspects of society, including politics, business, the professions, the media, education and organised religion. It is not surprising that such conduct has spread to sport. This is, however, not an acceptable excuse. It is a fundamental responsibility of the Olympic Movement to ensure that its own Olympic values remain central to its mission on behalf of the youth of the world.

There is a tendency for each generation to think that its problems are unique, but this is not the first time that the ethical principles underlying sport have been threatened. Corruption and manipulation date back to the ancient Olympics and were part of the reason why those Games did not survive. When the modern Games were revived, the preoccupation with “amateurism” on the part of the founders and early leaders was a direct response to the corruption of sport resulting from professionalism, gambling and match-fixing, which had become rampant in the late 19th century. It was the search for a renewed sports ethic which led to the concept of amateurism, which is sometimes unfairly branded as solely a matter of social distinction. Although amateurism certainly had elements of class, these were the practical results, rather than the cause, of the amateur philosophy.

The basic philosophy of the Olympic Movement, as reflected in its values, continues to be derived from the original amateur concepts, although eligibility rules have changed over time to enable athletes who are not personally of independent means to be able to participate. The distinction, in economic terms, between amateur and professional athlete has all but disappeared. This merger, of and by itself, and from



the perspective of values, is inherently neutral. A professional can bring the same ethical values as an amateur to sports participation.

The underlying risk of potential corruption, however, rises dramatically as the financial stakes increase, whether for the athlete, the organiser or persons in a position to gain financially from the outcome of a match or event. This is particularly true with the powerful and international reach of the internet and the ease with which money can be moved from place to place. There are too many examples of such corruption to be ignored by the Olympic Movement and its stakeholders. Even the Olympic Games are not immune from such risks.

The risks call for a rededication to the ethical platform of sport. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind of the commitment of the Olympic Movement to corruption free sport. Athletes and sports officials must embrace that commitment and must demonstrate that they are prepared to do whatever is necessary to ensure that sport is practised accordingly.

Some of the ethical problems may be beyond the ability of sport to resolve on its own. In that event, sport, in addition to doing everything possible on its own account, should enlist the assistance of public and other authorities, which can become part of the solution.

Denial of the existence of the problem is not an option. If the public loses confidence in the integrity of sport, sport will cease to hold any interest, and the youth of the modern world, as happened in the ancient world, will turn away from it and find other diversions. We can already see a declining participatory interest in organised sport among today's youth, in favour, unfortunately, of far more sedentary alternatives. Even the educational systems of many countries in the world have ceased to afford any importance, not just to organised sport, but even to physical activity. The long term impacts on the Olympic Movement and the general health of such societies will be serious and extremely difficult to reverse.

To complete the circle and to examine the possibility of a better future, we return to values. Values inspire and motivate. The Olympic values of joy in effort, peace, friendship, fair play, self-discipline, respect for opponents and the applicable rules all have significant capacity to influence behaviour and to add to the enjoyment of a healthy life. They are values which are easily transferred from the field of play to the benefit of society as a whole. While perhaps first experienced through involvement in sport, they are nevertheless universal. They should be promoted as part of each person's responsibility to society.

Conduct based on such values will, indeed, put sport at the service of humanity.

### CHALLENGES FOR THE OLYMPIC CONGRESS

1. What are today's Olympic values? Do they differ from traditional Olympic values?
2. Do "Olympic values" really exist, or have they become indistinguishable from the values reflected in current social and sports conduct?
3. Does the IOC have a role in the promotion and practice of Olympic values? If so, how can it exercise that role effectively?
4. How can Olympic values be applied in practice, as opposed to mere recitation of them?
5. What specific actions should be taken to demonstrate commitment to Olympic values?