

Think about it! (18)

Sport isn't what it used to be. Without wanting to drift into some kind of 'selective nostalgia', idealistic and far from reality, sport today, whether it's the king of them all: football, or whether it's the 'a-b-c' of athletics (whose Olympic version is currently paying us its four-yearly visit), basketball and cycling, there is the same three-fold problem: money, drugs and politics.

Who can deny the fact that over the last half-century or so, money has been spoiling most front-page sport? A handful of incredibly wealthy football clubs buy most of the world's best players, use them to build their international teams (which, by the way, could probably give a hammering, without too much effort, to almost any 'mere' national team) and increasingly dominate the best leagues in Europe and in other parts of the world. That's just one example among many. The bigger the role that money has, the less sporting sport becomes.

The money-problem gives rise to the drugs-problem. True, the latter doesn't necessarily have to come from the former – it could be for 'purely' personal reasons: wanting to be 'the number one', whatever the cost, etc. – but take money out of the equation and you'll see how quickly the doping-register drops. One wonders whether we will live to contemplate, not too far into the future, the sad spectacle of two (or more!) rival lists of 'winners' of the Tour de France (similar to what happened in boxing)!

And then politics. If politics in and of itself makes one sick, politics in sport makes one even more sick! It seems that every sport (and every club!) has its own particular 'parties', groups of fellow-conspirators, counting votes, always ready to make good use of both bribery and blackmail, pressurising and sweating it out in their not very sporting efforts to get their hands on the power, the biggest slice of the cake and a guaranteed personal and family future. Let them at least give up the hypocritical speeches about 'acting out of the best interests of the club or of sport in general'!

They say that, deep down, people are very good. Thanks to God (and never a truer word!) people are a lot less bad than they could be! But put on the table in front of them a blank cheque, or some 'infallible' trick to cheat and win, or some shortcut to power, and you'll soon see how good they are! 'Everybody has their price,' they say – okay, maybe not quite everyone, but when it comes to the crunch, how many of us would be capable, simply for the sake of integrity, of turning down an 'irresistible' offer? All you have to do is look the other way, and they reward you by sorting out the rest of your life.

If we really want a healthier sports scene and a better world, the only remedy that works is a radical change inside people. So where's that change going to come from? Plastic surgeons can improve our physical facade, and open-heart surgeons can do the near-miracle of changing one heart for a better one, but only in the physical realm, not in the spiritual one, which is what we really need. Only God, the Lord, specialises in giving new (moral and spiritual) hearts, and that is the only hope for sport, for the world and for you and me.

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