

## The Armed Forces and Sports

Promoters of Education

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1. Sport in the armed forces is closely related to sport in society. It adopts the latter's structures and basically pursues the same general objectives. Sport in the armed forces is an important element of training and education. Physical training is intended to advance each serviceman in the development of his talents and the offsetting of his weaknesses. It is meant to be an effective back-up to overall military training and must be wisely integrated into it. Sport in the armed forces hence not only helps improve physical fitness, but also enhances mental powers, promoting comradeship and a sense of community.

The aims of sport in the armed forces are to :

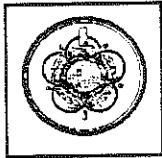
- improve sporting ability,
- make service personnel physically fit for their military functions,
- have a positive bearing on their social behaviour and
- impart knowledge of sport.

Being integrated into sport in society, sport in the armed forces must also ensure that the serviceman acknowledges the values, aims and norms immanent in sport, accepts them and is prepared to regularly engage in sporting activities as an element of life during off-duty hours and even beyond his term of active service.

These basic views on sport in the armed forces are reflected in the Federal Armed Forces' regulations on the topic. Similar views will also be expressed no doubt in the armed forces' regulations of other nations.

2. This makes sport in the armed forces an essential factor and integral component of the process of education and training as a whole. It does far more than just make service personnel physically fit and improve motor skills - the main ones among them being in my opinion coordination, speed, flexibility, endurance and strength; it makes an indispensable contribution towards forming personality, it is an educator.

What is education? Being good military people, we are accustomed to working with clear-cut definitions. My definition is this : "Education comprises all planned activities helping to form a person physically, mentally, and morally. The aim is for him to become a fully adequate, responsible personality of firm character, one who conforms with accepted norms" ... I believe that the wide range of opportunities sport offers makes it a distinct field of activity for work of this kind, even sport in the armed forces!



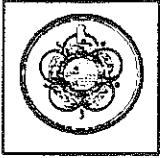
3. Let us take advantage of it! Let us use the opportunities it provides for education people! The value of physical exercise - what we nowadays call sport - was recognized way back in the days of the Greeks and Romans. Admittedly, the priorities in the aims pursued in the various cultures varied considerably : in ancient times, emphasis was on the "perfect man" (objective : the harmony of mind, soul and body) and - not only then!- fighting strength, but attention was nevertheless paid to the educational objectives. Even then, the Greeks and Romans were keen on promoting individual characteristics and attitudes; these were followed later by the social and socially integrative aspects.
  
4. Characteristics and attitudes can only develop when people do things - our minds are on sport as an area in which people do things (Note : the term "sport" is used here as a synonym for sport in the armed forces). Their spectrum may be of considerable size, but sport is also a huge playing field. What specific characteristics and attitudes are actually promoted, trained when people engage in sporting activities?

The first thing that usually springs to mind is fairness. Fairness means remaining controlled and disciplined and is based on recognition of oneself and other, the willingness to help and self-control. Fairness means treating your opponent as a partner, making sure that opportunities and conditions are the same for everyone involved, limiting the motive of winning, and having your own powers under control. Fairness means gracefully accepting the fact that your opponent is better than you; using none other than honest and indisputable means to beat your opponent; to retain the right attitude in the face of victory and defeat; to avoid any vicious rivalry from developing, despite all the competitiveness involved; to shake hands with your opponent after the race, bout or whatever, even in the rough combative sports!

Fairness is both a prerequisite for playful sport and something that people can learn and train during their sporting activity.

Sport enables the serviceman to get to know what kind of person he is. He can practise being considerate, indeed charitable, tolerant, modest, able to withstand prolonged strain, self-confident, self-assertive and self-controlled. What is being tested are his competence to act, his respect for other people, whether or not he recognizes his own abilities and their limits, his self-determination, his ability to assess his own qualities as opposed to arrogance, his decisiveness and his initiative. Although a hallmark of sport is pleasure (see below), it does not preclude effort, self-imposed exertion, persistency in training, the willingness to go without something, sometimes even the willingness to make sacrifices. The serviceman learns to overcome difficulties, to grit his teeth, to push himself hard. He will readily seek situations in which he must overcome obstacles and demonstrate that he is prepared to exert himself... provided sport is structured properly and he is approached (motivated) the right way!

These situations in which the serviceman faces a challenge and is called upon to show that he can meet it set changes of behaviour in motion! The serviceman experiments with his attitudes in the way he engages in sport and play : he tests them, corrects them, consolidates them, rejects them. During sporting activities, the serviceman exposes his attitudes to greater strain than usual, and that as it were of his own free will!



Sport enables him to experience how his own body works, to get to know it and to do as well as he can. Anyone who engages in sport wants to improve, enhance his personal best performance, achieve a personal record he will have fond memory of. (Note : the word "record" comes from the Latin "recordari", which means to bring back to the memory, to keep the memory alive, to carry in the memory).

The will to do as well as you can is what is called for. Forces are released. The willingness to exert yourself and exercise your will-power are trained. Feelings of inferiority are reduced. Self-confidence is enhanced : every one of us has experienced the feeling you have, for example, when you dive for the first time while swimming, when you jump for the first time the 5-meter board, when you score a goal in an important match, or when you complete the course in a running or long-distance skiing race over 20, 30 or even 42 km, the marathon. This knowledge of yourself leaves its mark on you; educational processes take place. But despite all the toil and sweat it involves, sport is meant to be a pleasure, even, perhaps particularly so, in the armed forces, where barracks seldom radiate any special joy! None but foolish and stubborn superiors question the importance of sport because it is fun. Generally speaking, though, even sport in the armed forces must ensure the serviceman has scope to do what he wants to do.

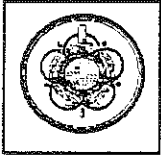
The word "sport" is derived from the Latin "disportare", which means to amuse oneself, to revel in something, to relax. Fun, joy, pleasure, entertainment, inclination and joie de vivre are intended to take our minds off our problems. The object of learning here is to educate ourselves in how to enhance the quality of your lives. To attain this goal, we must take care that fun and enjoyment are and remain constitutive elements of every physical training activity.

The more profound purpose of sport and play lies in its pastime aspect, an important factor considering the constant increase in the amount of leisure time we have in our modern industrial society. People should put their work-filled time or boredom aside in order to play. Playing means doing something you do not have to do. To stay a person, and not become a machine! Children live almost entirely in a play world : this explains why the ancient Greeks had no specific word for play, calling it "childlikeness". Sport and play help develop personality. It is in sport that people find happiness, scope for expression, enjoyment, fulfilment, and contentment.

5. The individual objectives of education are at least matched by its social and socially integrative aspects. Sport brings people together. Sport is a playing field where people can meet and acquire social characteristics. We develop relations with other people, and in doing so form our own characters.

Sport promotes life, co-existence in the community, especially when service personnel of all ranks engage in sport together : it makes it easier for everyone to get to know each other; it generates understanding for each other; it produces a sense of community. Sport establishes ties, sport creates confidence.

Subordinates and superiors automatically come into unstrained contact with each other in sport. It goes without saying that this has an extremely positive impact on routine military life (see below).



In team games, common objectives are pursued, common tasks performed, common lessons learned, with everyone helping and correcting each other. The spirit of solidarity is promoted and everyone gets to feel what it is like to be part of a group : outsider behaviour is reduced. The demand is for group loyalty. Group dynamics takes its course.

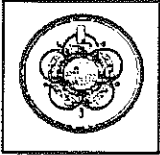
People are called upon to stand up for each other and be reliable. They must decide between considering their team's interest (cooperation) and pursuing selfish goals (their own advancement). They are given an opportunity to experience resistance and success, risk and self-scrutiny, threat and enrichment - in short, to try out and test their own abilities with others and against others. Engaging together in sporting activities provides a great deal of help in the social development of young service personnel in particular. Sociologists have discovered evidence that engaging in sport for sport's sake is not the sole reason why people opt for sporting activities in their leisure time. They do so in order to satisfy other needs, such as being in the company of others, experiencing solidarity and public spirit in a group, finding social recognition, and learning something new. Sport teaches people to think of others and be cooperative. It promotes team spirit, communication, cohesion and the willingness to take one's place in a team. The serviceman learns how to adapt socially and integrate into a group : his social behaviour is hence enriched; he accepts written and unwritten rules. He freely accepts a certain degree of order, that is to say, rules of the games. He realizes that a certain degree of order is a must for any kind of game. The willingness to accept these bonds is considered an essential prerequisite for education. The binding character of this order is not a consequence of heteronomy, but one of autonomy. Sport trains servicemen to behave and act among each other in a standardized manner. Sport offers them a range and selection of behavioural options. The serviceman can go through them and test; here too, sport - when engaged in on a voluntary basis - is a test area containing tasks and trial situations for each individual as the member of a group, designed to benefit the development of his personality.

In addition, sport allows servicemen to experience democratic patterns of behaviour. It conveys a positive concept of democracy. It has a positive bearing on the development in personality of a democratic citizen.

6. We have already seen that sport is not confined solely to the body. Sport is meant to embrace the whole person. Besides physical and social well-being, sport is intended to create and enhance a person's mental and spiritual well-being; sport provides a new quality of life.

This claim to embrace the whole person also reveals the mutual dependencies involved. Physical fitness, for example, brings about mental stability and makes people able to tolerate emotional strain; going for a run reduce emotional frustration or mental over-exertion. No less than 2000 years ago, the Roman writer Juvenal identified these connections between physical and mental well-being, writing : "Optandum est, ut sit mens san in corpore sano", which roughly means that his idea of wholesomeness was having a healthy mind in a healthy body.

7. I do not intend to go into detail on the health aspect of physical activity here, but it is one that ought not be forgotten. Sport in the sense of physical effort is a necessity for good health. It must not, however, be engaged in - as with a number of competitive sports - so as to damage one's health. For many young servicemen, sport in the armed forces is - if engaged in sensibly - often the last chance they have to learn to assume responsibility for their own health for the rest of their lives by means of sport. Let us take advantage of this opportunity to educate them in this way!



8. Sport promotes the serviceman's willingness to strive for achievement. He enjoys trying to do his best in sport if he is approached, motivated the right way. Sport can as it were spur him on to do his best in any field. It is in the nature of things that achievement in sport is reflected in the results obtained in practical and military training. The controlled intensification of physical training can lead to optimum proficiency in the way a serviceman accomplishes his military mission.
9. It is relatively easy to prove the bearing sport has on the military mission, considering the physical fitness it brings about among service personnel and the motor skills they thereby develop. What about the educational objectives regarding the development of personality and character, though? What I mean by personality in this context is the structured entity of characteristics and abilities of an individual produced by the interaction between a person's disposition and the environment.

Generally speaking, sport - as described here - enables people to develop their personalities. There is no doubt that "sport" as one sector of the environment can generate, influence and promote certain characteristics. Many people retain the fair and sporting attitude deriving from their experiences of competition - we often talk of sporting virtues - in everyday life, in civilian life and in military life. From the sociological point of view, it is certainly hard to ascertain in terms of quality and quantity the extent to which sport moulds people's characters, and notably the extent to which they can be applied to other areas of life. Over 30 years of training experience have shown me that sport has a positive effect on the serviceman. As regards the social system within the area under my command, I have often been able to observe that the serviceman moulded in a positive sense by sport assumes a higher social rank than other service personnel and that he has a greater chance of being nominated or selected for key functions such as spokesman, mess president, etc., by his superiors and fellow serviceman.

Judging by the knowledge we have, it is obvious for us to assume that the positive educational effects of sport outweigh the risks. Sporting virtues can very well indeed co-determine behaviour and action in other areas of life, even in the armed forces! (Note : this does not necessarily mean that an attitude acquired in sport is transferable *eo ipso* to other areas of life. What is more, many of the characteristics quoted earlier are non-normative; their mere existence says nothing about what they are used to do. A strong will, for instance, can be just as well used to help someone who is drowning as it can to rob a bank or commit a rape!).

#### 10. Conclusion

The positive elements of sport, with its specific patterns of behaviour and tendency to mould people in particular ways, can have a bearing on working life, on the armed forces. They can indeed constitute a certain substitute for widely lost moral standards. For this to be the case, however - and this is the great challenge facing the military establishment -, physical training in the armed forces must be conceived and practised in such a way that the attitudes and characteristics described in this presentation can truly be formed, that an educational influence can be exerted.