

„A sportsman in competitive sports must be able to handle the systematically occurring structural problem by at the same time doing everything to win, and supporting a just competition in an equally determined way.“

(GARZ)

Fairness and Fair play

Sport permeates its immediate area, reaching well into society at large. Its indirect tasks are to act in the fields of pedagogy, health, and social matters, not only according to its own ideas and aims, but also to serve society in general. This includes an active role in the formulation of principles of conduct that are relevant in society, and the setting of examples to the outside world. This is particularly relevant for the central and classical principle of sport, namely *fairness*. Any discussion on it finally hinges on the answers to questions of sport-ethics, that is the attitude towards, and purpose of sport. Sport as such is neutral in its moral dimension, there is no specific ethic of sport.

„The ethics of sport has been determined by ideals and convictions throughout its history, and the determination of content has never been intrinsic in sport, and have neither gained prestige nor effect through it, but through the sum total of the training institutions in society effective at any specific period.“ (HERMS)

Fair is the term for a periodical gathering of buyers and sellers in England during the early Middle Ages, and which, apart from its economic meaning, also stands for *just, respectable, and honest*. This means that *fairness* also stands for *justice and righteousness* as implied meanings. With the development of sport in the 19th century, the notion of *fair play* soon became generally accepted, giving rise to the idea of acting honestly and according to certain rules. Later on, the meaning of *fairness* shifted from the designation of a purely formalized way of acting to an ethic concept; it went beyond the mere rules in sport, rising to an elitist attitude of sport, finally becoming a catchphrase for other rules, too, including the human values of sport and other areas. The present understanding of *fairness* is characterized by relatively wide differences in its perceived meaning. One common denominator is the

requirement to stick to the rules of a competition, and to obey the decisions of an umpire, to act sensibly in view of victory or defeat, and to meet moral criteria in the widest sense, since these are inseparable from sportsmanship. In its declaration of December 1973, the IOC has made it clear that

„Fairplay begins with respect for the written rule, but in most cases it goes beyond this respect, even if it is permanent, of the written rule. Fairplay is respect for the contender and for oneself, it is a way of being that expresses itself by having the sincere desire that the contender may struggle against us with equal weapons.“

Therefore, the idea of *fairness* can be summarized as follows:

- *Fairness* refers to sports activities in which sportsmen compete against each other; it is thus part and parcel of the dynamic of sports competition.
- The interaction of sportsmen in a sports competition is governed by rules and norms. The *rules* include the regulations of the game, as well as further agreements; the *norms* govern the mutual expectations and values to be applied to sport as a social field of action.
- *Fairness* refers to such actions that comply with the norms. The idea of a sportive competition includes
 - sticking to the rules without exceptions, even if the conditions are less than ideal,
 - forgoing any inappropriate advantages to maintain equal opportunities, and not utilizing any inappropriate disadvantage the opponent may have, and
 - honoring the other competitor by regarding him not as an enemy, but as a person and partner who contributes to the materialization and continuation of the competition.
- In *fairness*, the intention counts, and not necessarily the result of an action. In sport, intentions and attitudes are decisive factors.

Fair play understood in this way is the hallmark of a certain ethics in sport, together with specific moral values.

Wherever *fairness* is called for, *unfairness* may occur. That is not only a simple truism, it can be witnessed in any sport activity on any level. For many experts the level of *unfairness* has increased in such a way that they regard the present state of affairs as a situation where it is almost to late. In fact, one can not overlook a trend towards increasing brutalization, not even

paring dangers to life and limb of the opponent. Very often, the spectators are involved, too, and they often lack the inhibition provided for *fairness*, and do not exhibit proper behaviour. This leads to riots of any kind, requiring more and more intervention by state authorities. *Unfairness* also infects those sports, the rules of which are based on *fair play*, for which they have been renowned. The media with their amplifying effects contribute to the blurring of the distinction between *fair* and *unfair* actions in an increasing way. *Unfairness* is nothing unknown to sports officials any longer, and the problems posed by doping that are in the limelight these days are simple to explain, once victory at any cost is the aim. These many regrettable facts are, of course, counterbalanced by a number of examples of *fairness* that is being exhibited. Some remnants of the basic agreement still seem to be present, through which real *fairness* manifests itself especially in borderline cases and outside or beyond the established rules. This consensus, however, is obviously losing more and more ground. The often presented picture of a widely accepted informal kind of *fairness* is a treacherous one, because the examples of *unfairness*, to be tactically approved, or even praised as a means of achieving success, are becoming more frequent and more serious. Is it not an alarming situation if regular conduct, in itself quite normal, is specially praised, and even honoured with prizes?

The following three thesis by HESS might explain what changes in both, society and sport, have a special influence on this development.

- Any pressure to perform, and any dependence which sport and sportsmen alike are subject to, endanger *fairness*. This is the case, wherever sports is being abused for political, commercial, or media purposes.

„Wherever sport is no more controlled by those who have made it great, but by those who make a profit out of it, and are not interested in its cultural value, but in its financial one.“ (THIESS, 1928)

- The closer sport comes to its quantitative goals, which means to gain attention through worldwide expansion, the more its qualitative goals will be missed, which is to set standards and to be an educational factor. With the increasing importance of sport, activities that have nothing to do with sport find it more and more attractive to use sport as a vehicle of ideas and commercial messages for their purposes, thus sport is externally

determined and changes its essence. Competitive sport is the first segment to be subject to pressure to succeed. When this happens, the educational function of sport goes down the drain as well, particularly the ideal of the balanced development of man as a whole and the idea of human self-realization through achievements in the field of sport.

- Modern meritocracy progressively develops into an *unfair* system without morality in which self-interest and egotism are forced through in a ruthless way. Thus, the ethic independence of sport is increasingly curtailed, as this is in contradiction with the prevalent trends in society.

This crisis situation that has been looming for quite a while, requires a search for solutions, for ways and means, for initiatives, and actions, since only a *fair* kind of sport is trustworthy and creative. The basic problem is to resuscitate *fairness* in sport as a whole, and in all of its facets, and not just to continue *fairness* in areas where it is still largely present and not so much under pressure. CISM, too, has not been spared in this development, and therefore we are also called upon to contribute our share towards a change to the better. Such cooperation will be successful if we act accordingly, at any place and at any time, particularly in the field of competitive sport. For us it is important to revive *fairness* as an attitude of the sportsmen under our guidance, and to continue these efforts in practice, regardless of our function or field of activity. These efforts, however, must not be limited to sportsmen as such; they also must include their environs: trainers, coaches, team captains and other officials, sports teachers, spectators, and, as required, the regulations, too. We must consider *fair play* as a minimum requirement of sport-ethics and *fairness* as the living basis of sport. There must be no graded *fairness*, resulting from specific conditions in limited areas of sport, and a devaluation to the least common denominator is out of the question. *Fairness* in all walks of life, with sport as a driving force of *fairness awareness* is a far-reaching goal.

In sport there is no alternative to the above-mentioned guiding principle, because sport without *fairness* would be a kind of sport that has been stripped of its highest values and thus of its identity.