



Olympics Paris 2024 – D6 – Sport spirit & the two sides of the coin

When the French swimmer Léon Marchand sets historical records (triple gold medal) at the Paris Olympics, the effect is the same as Teddy Riner for judo, Marie-Josée Pérec for athletics or Laura Flessel for fencing – thousands (probably millions) girls and boys sign up for their local sports club or the sports association in their neighborhoods. Perhaps future champions ... the federations are waiting for this “medal effect”.

The practice of sports has democratized throughout the 20th century and is no longer the social belonging to a «leisure class» (Veblen). It is easy to play football without any equipment in the favelas of Rio or in any disadvantaged neighborhood in the Northern or Southern Hemisphere. It is different to regularly practice a sport according to the rules and benefit from a training worthy of the name. Sport is not just a game or a physical exercise; it is a school of life. The best demonstration that any young person, boy or girl, can be successful, whether he or she was born in a more favored environment or not, in a big city or in a small village, in a country of the North or the South. Personal performances, a physical but also psychological capital (a mental) will make the difference «in the fair» with other young people more supported by their family, and chance on their side.

For all its virtues, sport is part of compulsory education, a discipline taught from primary school in France and Europe. In a White Paper on sport published in 2007 by the European Commission, all the qualities of a sporting practice were recalled, essential values such as “team spirit, solidarity, tolerance and loyalty, contributing to personal fulfillment and happiness.” Sport “promotes the active participation of EU citizens in society and thus contributes to active citizenship”. Within the Council of Europe, a Steering Committee for Sport (CDDS) was the first to systematically address all facets of sport-related Social, political, economic... among its member countries - all European countries from the Atlantic to the Urals, first bridge with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEEC) which will join the European Union in 2004.

The White Paper (2007) of the European Commission also insists on the dark side of sport, the drifts that we observe in high level sport (champions) but also in sport for all (“normal” practitioners)-“commercial pressure, exploitation of young athletes, doping, racism, violence, corruption and money laundering”. Any amateur athlete can be confronted with it (especially violence, racism or doping). The Council of Europe was the first to address threats to sport but without the EU’s power, an effective legal arsenal to combat the excesses of sport, a faithful reflection of society.

In a medal, there are two sides – the bright part that is so motivating that it arouses enthusiasm and support; the dark part is just as important. Young people must be aware of the double side of the coin so that sport would remain the best school of life, and a crucial learning.

- (1) Wladimir Andreff, Jean-François Bourg, Bénédicte Halba, Jean-François Nys, « Les enjeux économiques du sport en Europe », rapport remis au Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports, pour le Conseil de l'Europe, Strasbourg, 1994.
- (2) Commission européenne (2007) « Livre Blanc sur le sport » - <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0391&from=DA>
- (3) Mickaël Gamrasni « Olympiques ! La France des Jeux », France, documentaire diffusé le 16 juillet 2024 sur France 2
- (4) Bénédicte Halba (1997) « Economie du sport », Paris : Economica
- (5) Bénédicte Halba (1999) « Dopage et sport », Toulouse : Milan
- (6) Pierre-Emmanuel Luneau-Daurignac (2024) « Futurs champions, le prix de la gloire », diffusé sur Arte le 23 juillet 2024
- (7) Site officiel du COJO-<https://olympics.com/fr/>
- (8) Jules et Gédéon Naudet « Au cœur des jeux », France , 2024- **série de documentaires** diffusée sur France 2 (juillet 2024)
- (9) Thorstein Veblen (1899), “Théorie de la classe des loisirs », Paris : Gallimard, traduit de l'américain “The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions ». New York: Macmillan.

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