



– JO Paris 2024, J9- Clichés & stereotypes - cognitive «noise»

For a very long time, French sports commentators invariably predicted the victory of the German football team, which had a reputation for invincibility and excellence. Until it was dethroned by other football nations- Italy, Spain, Portugal and even France. With such a reputation, you are bound to impress your opponents. Repeated and well-maintained positive clichés have a deterrent effect.

Japan was considered unbeatable in judo, until the French judoka Teddy Riner (after other French judokas) came on stage on tatamis, competing with the best Japanese champions. He didn't let himself be impressed. We used to see the American swimmers win all the medals, Léon Marchant after Laure Manaudou, are impressive figures of the French swimming school. They stayed focused on their training and take advantage of their extraordinary physical abilities, and they won the podium.

Whether positive or negative, clichés and stereotypes are very disturbing and reductive. They lock up beings, or nations, in caricatures from which they have the greatest difficulty in getting out. A laborious and repetitive work is at work- labeling like butterflies to store in dusty and convenient drawers that avoid too much breaking the head. The Paris tourist office has published curious advice for the Olympic Games, from «training at the reception» to «French hospitality» which multiply the clichés. The Japanese would «make little noise and do not raise their voice, and often wear a mask». A female Japanese judoka, in Paris, crying and screaming in the arms of her trainer, immediately denied their caricature. A sports commentator, former judo champion, did not escape these stereotypes, being surprised that a young male Japanese judoka challenges the referee's decisions and refuses to leave the tatami. No matter the nationality or culture, some emotions are universal - disappointment, anger and sadness are expressed in the same way.

The most surprising thing is the strategies inspired by a cognitive approach that would multiply failures and mistakes, over several years. Coaches, supported by a team of “scientists”, claim to know better than the athletes themselves what they feel, their emotions. Yet they are unable to anticipate their reactions, and multiply counter performances. A scientific approach would be to consider the feedback from their «test subject». Yet they persist in using the same methods, convinced that they are right and that their «patient» is wrong. Negative reactions multiply, further deepening their approach. These coaches have clearly been victims of themselves but especially of the clichés and prejudices they have about their test subjects which they have reduced to a grotesque caricature. This is a well-known cognitive bias- the «noise» source of repeated fiascos.

“When you want to drown your dog, you say it has rabies”. Intent, benevolent or malevolent, is essential to be able to analyze the reasons for serial errors over several years. Persisting in repeating *ad nauseam* the same strategy, hostile, brutal and unsuccessful, is surprising and raises a question - who benefits from crime?

- (1) Daniel Kahneman, Olivier Sibony, Cass R. Sunstein (2021) “Noise. A Flaw in Human Judgment” , New York: Little, Brown Spark
- (2) Mickaël Gamrasni « Olympiques ! La France des Jeux”, France, diffusé le 16 juillet 2024 sur France 2
- (3) Site officiel du COJO-<https://olympics.com/fr/paris-2024/les-jeux/ceremonies/ceremonie-d-ouverture>
- (4) Bénédicte Halba, ed « Manuel de Gestion de la diversité », iriv pour le projet Think Diverse (Erasmus +, 2021-2023) <https://www.iriv-publications.net/documents/manuel-think-diverse-de-la-creativte-a-la-diversite-/275>

© dr Bénédicte Halba, PhD in Economics of Sport (University of Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne - January 1996), Paris, 4 August 2024