

peaks towering above and the plains spread out below him, with his enemies visible as small figures marching in search of their quarry, the Western artist is like Abbey's Jack Burns. But in practicing his craft upon his subject, he will, I suspect, prefer to make a stand instead of retiring into the "timber," or some other country of the mind. If we wait and watch his performance, we should enjoy the "ruckus" that is bound to occur.

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## SPORTS

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### Amateurs and the Olympics *by Ed Markey*

In 1889, when the Baron Pierre de Coubertin was in the middle of formulating his plan to revive the Olympic Games of ancient Greece, one of his primary worries was the use of cash as an incentive for performance. He feared that "a mercantile spirit threatened to invade sporting circles," and that amateur sports had to be "purified and united." In the first modern Olympics held in 1896, first and second place finishers were awarded silver and bronze medals; gold was thought to connote greed. The third place finisher settled for a hearty handshake.

After 92 years, the prize structure has escalated to three Olympic medals, including gold, and "unofficial" awards, mostly green. In addition to competing for a medal in Seoul, athletes from Korea, the Soviet Union, and France, among others, were striving for government-granted financial rewards. An Olympic judo champion from Korea now has a gold medal around his neck, and 900,000 won (about \$1,250) per month in his pocket. For Soviet athletes, the value of a gold was 12,000 rubles, or roughly \$19,200. After his

1984 Olympic victory in the 5,000 meters, Morocco's Said Aouita moved into a new house, donated by the king of Morocco.

These are examples of just one form of professionalism in the Olympics. For many years, Eastern bloc athletes have been among those who are given "jobs" that enable them to concentrate on their athletic training. This year, professional tennis players were allowed to compete for Olympic medals, and it appears that NBA basketball players will be allowed to wear Olympic colors in 1992.

As things stand now, the definition of amateur or professional cannot be applied equally in all sports. Take four examples: Danny Manning, Edwin Moses, Sergei Bubka, and Heike Dreschler. These four all make money through sports, they are all, in some sense, "professionals," yet they cannot be treated equally. Just out of college last summer, Manning played on the Olympic basketball team as an amateur. He then signed a \$10 million contract

with the LA Clippers to play pro ball. Edwin Moses is self-employed in that his money is made on a per-appearance basis. When, years ago, Moses was asked how he could make a living on track as an amateur, he responded succinctly that he was "an enlightened amateur." The Athletics Congress, the governing body of track and field in the US, has a trust fund system, in which an athlete's earnings are placed into an account in his or her name, and withdrawals are made for "training" expenses. It is a *de facto* savings account. Bubka (from the USSR) is reimbursed by his government for each world record he sets and gold medal he wins in the pole vault. And Dreschler is essentially an investment of the East German government, which has paid for her education and funded her training.

New rules must be introduced to conform to the new status of Olympic



*Edwin Moses at the World Championships in Rome, September 1987.*

athletes. Coming up with such regulations is going to be dicey, because there is not a worldwide definition of "professional." It may be impossible to find a common ground. Financially-assisted foreign athletes may still be thought of as amateurs in their own countries, especially when compared to American-style pro basketball players. Even if the IOC makes a ruling on what constitutes a professional, ways to circumvent its limits will be surely found, just as there are now ways around adhering to the strict concept of amateurism.

International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch has been at the forefront of the attempt to get each nation to send its best athletes, regardless of how they make their income—in other words, to get rid of this already-eroding concept of "amateur" athletes.

Representation of each country by its best is a noble idea. But as far as the United States is concerned, that is only the first step. Professionalism in the Olympics is as much a fiscal question as an ideological one, and the United States is at the crossroads. It can follow the path much of the rest of the world has chosen, paying athletes outright, covering training expenses or offering performance incentives. Or it can hold fast to the idea of sending only "amateur" athletes. In that case we can't complain about the medal count, because our "nonleague" athletes will not be able to compete with the privileged rest of the world.

If this country wants to do something about fostering athletics, there are going to have to be some changes made.

Winning an Olympic medal is the highest athletic aspiration for most of the sporting world. That is one of the essential reasons foreign athletes receive financial assistance. Emphasis in the US is on basketball, baseball, football, hockey, and tennis, because those are the sports where money can be made. That is where the competition and training and opportunities are, and those sports do not need any help. But if the US is to compete on equal footing in the less glamorous (i.e., most Olympic) sports, there has to be "opportunity." There has to be professionalism.

James Michener has said that "the

costs of becoming a top athlete in most fields have become so great that amateurs cannot pay for them out of their own pockets." But unlike the Soviet Union or Eastern bloc nations, the United States government would have a hard time justifying tax money going to talented, healthy athletes while there are bigger problems at home. Similarly, the general public is not going to fund—through attendance at events, purchase of associated merchandise, etc.—a sport that does not play well on television, has no recognizable personalities to promote, is not popular with a sizable number of Americans, or cannot be wagered upon.

What's left is corporate sponsorship. Some already exists. The Miller Brewing Company sponsors the US Olympic training center in Colorado Springs. Miller has obviously made a significant financial commitment to present and future Olympic athletes. Rather than providing this broad assistance, perhaps companies such as Miller should become sponsors of individual American teams, in association with each sport's governing body or federation.

Yugo now "sponsors" the US men's volleyball team to an unknown degree. Perhaps an agreement should be made with the federations by which athletes are selected by the governing body, given jobs by the team's sponsor, and have training, living, and miscellaneous expenses paid for by the companies. The federation would have "sport" control while the companies would have financial control. The athletes could also become spokesmen for the companies, appear at various events, wear their companies' logos on their uniforms, etc.

Corporate sponsorship is now a given with major sporting events. In case you haven't checked, some of New Year's Day's biggest bowl games are the Sunkist Fiesta Bowl, the USF&G Sugar Bowl, the Mazda Gator Bowl, and the John Hancock Sun Bowl. That's the same sort of setup from which most of American sport could benefit. It would not take as much money to support the US handball team as it does for, say, Gulf & Western to run the New York Knicks. Wouldn't a company such as McDonald's stand a lot to gain by being the sole and complete financial

backer of the US Olympic gymnastics team? And wouldn't US gymnastics as a whole benefit from an infusion of support?

Of course, if Americans are worried about their sports and teams being overrun by corporations, or being tainted by the color of money and becoming too much like the Europeans, that's fine, too. Just don't complain about the lack of American medals.

*Ed Markey is currently a publicist for NBC sports. He worked on NBC's coverage of the Seoul Olympics and ABC's coverage of the Los Angeles Olympics.*

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## LETTERS

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### On Poetry by Richard Eberhart

People want to save their souls by writing poetry, or so they say. Should we take that seriously? Did Smart save his soul in the madhouse writing all those lucid lines? Perhaps it's enough to say that from primitive times there has been a need for expression.

Poetry is older than prose. Poetry was the morning cry when coming out of the cave to see that the sun had arisen again, a high song of joy in the treble clef. It was also the low sounds of grief at the death of a child who had wandered away from the cave and been killed by an animal. Our early ancestors probably knew the whole range of emotions from joy to sorrow, from lyric cry to threnody.

Nowadays prose must outnumber poetry quantitatively nine to one. Millions of Americans get along from birth to death without poetry—well, maybe they read a poem in a newspaper, but they then forget it. Yet however mechanical our age becomes we have to deal with prose all the time. We have to read, if only traffic signs; we have to be instructed; we have to give instructions. The prose of the day may be some kind of computer language, part mathematics, part English, as a Harvard Phi Beta Kappa orator warned at a commencement not long ago; and it may be a dangerous sign of possibly losing the