

Fair Play - Mediterranean Games

By Chrystalleni Trikomiti

When Pierre de Coubertin revived the Modern Olympics, he set out to accomplish many goals – one of which was to bring the world together to compete in sport in “a spirit of Fair Play”. Fair Play is a virtue of rule devotion whereby players and athletes stand by the rules of competition. Is a complex concept that comprises and embodies a number of fundamental values that are not only integral to sport but relevant in everyday life.

Fair competition, respect, friendship, team spirit, equality, sport without doping, respect for written and unwritten rules such as integrity, solidarity, tolerance, care, excellence and joy, are the building blocks of fair play that can be experienced and learnt both on and off the field.

It is also a commitment to contest in a good spirit and encourages a good attitude towards. Since Coubertin’s time, the Olympic Games have met more challenges to Fair Play than perhaps at first imagined. It is now more important than ever to educate players and athletes in the principles of Fair Play and to spread its lessons not only within the sporting world – but everywhere.

The three core values of the Olympic Movement, which inspire us on individual and organisational levels, are:

Excellence: This value stands for giving one's best, on the field of play or in the professional arena. It is not only about winning, but also about participating, making progress against personal goals, striving to be and to do our best in our daily lives and benefiting from the healthy combination of a strong body, mind and will.

Friendship: This value encourages us to consider sport as a tool for mutual understanding among individuals and people from all over the world. The Olympic Games inspire humanity to overcome political, economic, gender, racial or religious differences and forge friendships in spite of those differences.

Respect: This value incorporates respect for oneself, one's body, for others, for the rules and regulations, for sport and the environment. Related to sport, respect stands for fair play and for the fight against doping and any other unethical behaviour.

Rules and regulations are not only established to keep people in line and monitor Fair Play but can also enhance the enjoyment of the sport for everyone involved. Most recognized sports have an international federation which writes and upholds an extensive list of rules for their sport. However, it is important that at every level of sport players and athletes learn and respect rules and regulations from the grass roots level and up and do not leave it to the international bodies to enforce. If young people learn the value of respecting the rules then our future sports champions will grow up to value them also. Further to following the rules – fair play describes the right attitudes of sportsmen and sportswomen and the right spirit in which they conduct themselves, showing respect for not only the rules but also for their opponents, officials and coaches. Fair play is the responsibility of each individual to participate in a positive manner, show good judgment and encourage the enjoyment of everyone involved. A game played with its rules strictly observed and its players exhibiting the right attitudes is enjoyable for everyone. The ancient Olympic Games were protected with rules and laws so strictly enforced that the high standards of the competitions were maintained. Athletes who violated these rules were punished with fines, disqualification or public beating, according to the gravity of the offence.

The major threat to fair play comes from the excessive importance now attached to winning. This pressure to be the best at any cost, to be “faster, higher, stronger”, has led to ever-increasing cases of violence, cheating, drug abuse and exploitation

In recent times, the International Olympic Committee has taken an aggressive approach to protect one of its essential objectives – “... dedicating its efforts to ensuring that in sports the spirit of fair play prevails and violence (and other forms of corruption) is banned”.

As an institution, the Mediterranean Games constitutes part of the Olympic movement and purportedly shares the same philosophies of multiculturalism and universalism as the Olympic Games. Like other events within the Olympic movement, such as the Continental Games, the criteria for entry to Mediterranean Games are based on territorial divisions so the nations eligible for the Mediterranean games are the countries surrounding the Mediterranean sea making for an interesting mix of African, Arab and European Participants. Israel has been the only country excluded. The idea of the Games was proposed at the 1948 Summer Olympics by Muhammed Taher Pasha, chairman of the Egyptian Olympic Committee and vice-president of the International Olympic Committee (I.O.C.), assisted by the Greek member of the I.O.C.

Ioannis Ketseas. His project received approval, albeit a generally unenthusiastic response on the part of the European representatives. In 1949 an unofficial event was held in Istanbul, Turkey but the first official Mediterranean Games were held in Egypt in 1951. Then 13 sports along with the participation of 734 athletes from 10 countries attended the games and at the last Games there were 24 nations that participated with 2,995 participants.

It is important to state that the participation of women in physical activities and the Olympic Games has steadily increased however it is significant to note that the Mediterranean Games can be perceived as a reflection of the uncertain reception of women's sport in the region, particularly in southern Mediterranean nations. Unlike other Regional Games, females were not included in the Games initially, being forced to wait until the 1967 Games in Tunis this delay is particularly remarkable given that women had competed at the Olympic Games since 1900.

The lengthy absence of women from the Mediterranean Games is certainly linked to prevailing attitudes towards female participation in sport in the Mediterranean basin in general and in Muslim countries in particular. The star of the Mediterranean Games in 1991 - the Algerian middle-distance runner, Hassiba Boulmerka - is of particular interest in this regard. Victory over 800 metres and 1500 metres at the Athens Games, Boulmerka went on to become the first-ever woman from an African or Arab nation to win a world track-and-field championship and Algeria's first-ever Olympic champion at the Barcelona Games in 1992. Concluding this point is very important for young women athletes to have the opportunity to compete in such Games enriching their experience in the sport arena. Making a sport career means that the importance of participating in such Games is vital.

For states of the European Union the Mediterranean Games present a chance to improve and progress the sporting infrastructure and enthusiasm for sporting activities in a particular city or region. For the other nations, mainly those from the south and east of the Mediterranean region, the competition is an opportunity to achieve international recognition and affirm their status in the region. Perhaps most importantly of all, for developing nations, the hosting of the competition may provide an important boost in terms of sporting and economic prestige and facilitate the emergence of a wider range of sporting activities. Furthermore, for newly independent countries, the Mediterranean Games have been used as a means of affirming their independence on an international stage - a phenomenon evidenced most strikingly by the Algiers Games in 1975.

In conclusion the Mediterranean Games bring together different variety of cultures making the Games interesting and pleasant to be part of. Especially for smaller countries in population such as Andorra, Malta, Monaco, San Marino, Montenegro and Cyprus the Games give them the opportunity to enrich their athletes sports career and prepares them for greater international recognition. Furthermore is significant to state that the Mediterranean Games have verified the potential to provide a vital means of legitimation for newly independent nations, and has been most strongly embraced by these countries.