

# Sport for the masses - spectator sport : not well enough rooted in society

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# Not well enough rooted in society

1993 was a good year for Swiss sport. Reason enough for Swiss Review to put some questions to René Burkhalter, central president of the Swiss National Sports Federation, about the general significance of sport, about sports clubs and about promoting both sport for the masses and spectator sport.

**Swiss Review:** For you, Mr. Burkhalter, sport, "the world's finest irrelevance", stands for performance, education and free-time occupation. Are these ideals all equal, or do you have priorities?

René Burkhalter: I don't see things quite as abstractly. For me all three are connected. The performance component is also part of free-time occupation, although in the last few years this idea has unfortunately lost ground. Covering 100 metres in so-and-so many seconds may have something alarming about it, but don't forget that even the most harmless ball game has a competitive aspect. Everybody is trying to get the ball from someone else. Performance of any kind requires effort and self-discipline, and that brings us straight to education. Going offside is an offence in football. But unhappily in our present society the line between offside and on-side has become rather porous.

**In your 1993 Pro-Sport-Club campaign, you advocate joining clubs, and you say "sport heals". Are clubs not popular enough, or is it a matter of just taking part in sport?**

There are clubs in decline and clubs expanding. It was thought for a time that businesses like fitness centres would be



## Biography

René Burkhalter, born in 1934, is married and has two grown-up sons. He is a free-lance architect in Ittigen, Canton Berne, so his job with the National Sports Association is part-time. He is still an active fencer and belonged to the national team for years. He was instrumental in making it world famous. Originally elected to the National Sports Association to represent the 'minor' sport of fencing, he became central president in January 1993.

dangerous competitors. But a survey has shown that this is not true – they simply activate other social groups. But established clubs are losing ground because of a shift to new types of sport. These are mushrooming out of the ground. Take squash, for instance. Our campaign aims to put life back into traditional but increasingly dormant club life. Clubs must open up, offer new services and take their social functions more seriously. Only in this way will sport become more deeply rooted in society.

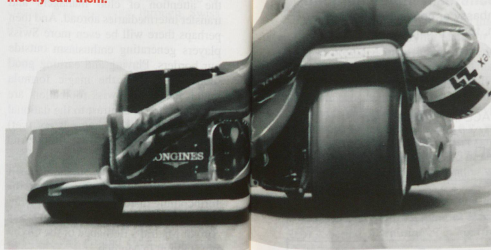
**Is it true that Switzerland is a worldwide leader in sport for the masses?**  
I would very much like to hope so. I don't know what is going on in sport all

over the world. But we have over 27,000 sports clubs – which is a pretty dense network. You have to imagine that a gymnastics club might set up a light athletics or a handball section. Ramifications of this kind would soon cover the whole sector. But I would like to come back to the place of sport in social life. People nowadays often complain about the loss of community spirit. But where does this really have its roots? All Swiss men go in the army, and that gives them things to talk about around the table. But women are coming up now, and sport could be a big potential joint-interest subject.

**How do you see the link between sport for the masses and spectator sport? Would it not be a good thing to promote and support spectator sport more? Or is this being done by the private sector?**

The Swiss want results. They want to see medals. But they don't want to pay for them. As citizens the Swiss don't think the government ought to spend too much money on spectator sport. I think this is right. We have to go to private industry to beg for the resources we need. And the result enables Swiss Aid to Sport to distribute four to five million Swiss francs a year amongst the specta-

**This is how the opponents of the 1993 Billand/Wattisberg side-car duo mostly saw them.**



Reason to celebrate: the Swiss women's volleyball team...



...and the same goes for the horse-jumpers. (Photos: RDZ)

tor sports. But of course we need more than that to bring our sportsmen and sportswomen up to the top professional level. An analysis has shown that in Switzerland today sport generates between 16 and 18 billion francs. Nowadays gym shoes are worn wherever people go, and not just for sport. Sport influences fashion, and it's mixed up in the hotel trade. So there is no harm in business making a substantial contribution, so that sport – which is used so much in advertising – continues to be promoted and encouraged to an ever greater extent.

**Interview: Heidi Willumat**

Youth and Sport

## Meaningful free-time activity

Unlike many other countries Switzerland has no Ministry of Sport. But this could change if a National Council motion put forward by Free Democrat members Otto Schoch and Paul Wyss is accepted. At present the federal government cooperates with cantonal authorities mainly in the context of the organisation, Youth and Sport. This was set up in 1972, and its aim is to encourage young people aged 14 to 20 to take part in sport.

Youth and Sport is now much appreciated by young people. In 1992, 480,000 out of a total population of 530,000 young people in the age group concerned took part in training in 33 different sports. The organisation is based on Article 27 quinquies of the federal constitution and is directed mainly towards young people who have completed compulsory schooling. In the last few years, however, young people under the age of 14 have been allowed to take part in 23 out of the 26 cantons. This downward extension has taken place mainly for social reasons, since boys and girls are being confronted at an increasingly early age with social reality and its negative sides. They are gaining access to alcohol, tobacco and drugs at an ever earlier age, which means that they should also be given the opportunity to practice sport in their free time earlier than before – so that they will be

protected in some degree from the pitfalls of life.

The Federal Council has recognised the role which sport can play in affording such protection, and on May 5, 1993, it proposed to parliament that the age limit should be reduced from 14 to 10. Parliament accepted the proposal.

In considering the promotion of sport for young people at the national level, the needs of Swiss Abroad children are after all not being neglected. A good example is the four well-attended camps which the Youth Service of the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad organises every year.

**Giuseppe Rusconi**

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