

More safety for champions

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THE FOOD OF THE FUTURE

While we are still warm on the subject of food industry, we ought to mention some of the fascinating disclosures at the international conference on synthetic and substitute food recently held at Rüsclikon.

According to an American professor, the day when we will be buying synthetic chicken is not so far off. The future appears far brighter than is popularly imagined. We shall not just be told to swallow tasteless pills containing the ingredients of a fillet steak, but shall actually be enjoying faithful, although artificial, replicas of the softest and juiciest steaks—the kind that we now have to pay 18s. a pound. It's quite simple: scientists have been able to produce artificial proteins for some time, they now have to learn how to spin them into yarns and pack them into slabs of meat economically. It is quite within the foreseeable possibilities of technology to reproduce the exact texture of animal meat. Man-made meat would be produced in attractive colours, it would be free of nerves and fat, it would be preservable for years without the use of a fridge. For the benefit of those intent on eating a piece of meat

that looks as natural as possible, it would be conceivable to include (at an extra cost) artificial nerves and fat and shape the manufactured pieces into chops and slices. Artificial ham has already been produced in America.

The onset of artificial food will have far-reaching consequences. Man will be able to do away with agriculture altogether. The developed country of tomorrow won't have any more farms and tilled fields but automated food factories and zoos with the last remaining cows. Primary material for food will be found in coal, oil, algae and (why not?) in the sand of the sea. The trouble is, and this was pointed out by M.I.T. Professor N. S. Scrimshaw, one of the lecturers at the conference, that an interruption in production, either through a strike or by a war, would have heavy and well-imaginable consequences. The "farmerless" society will just have to adapt itself to this new reality. One of the advantages of artificial food will reside in its unlimited variety. We shall certainly be a long way ahead of the cyclamate drinks of intermission-time.

(information taken from the Basler Nachrichten)

MORE SAFETY FOR CHAMPIONS

The death of the French ski-champion Michel Bozon, who crashed against a post at the edge of the run during a competition, gave rise to an interesting feature on the dangers of ski-ing competitions in the "Weltwoche".

In the course of the years, ski-ing has become the most dangerous sport next to motor-racing. Descents have become steeper and longer, ski-ing equipment has improved tremendously and the level of competition has increased in such a way that all serious competition-skiers have to be semi-professionals. A fall in a giant slalom race is worse than a fall in a slalom competition, but falling during a descent almost invariably means a lasting injury. Light falls with trivial injuries are quite rare at speeds of 120-140 km/h. Invariably, the luckless racer will suffer from sprained muscles, fissured bones and contusions. In the worse cases, laid up with a fractured pelvis, a champion may have to keep out of a ski-run for the rest of the season.

This means that champions, however fit, however trained and however well insured, always start a descent race with fear. Jos Minsch, the Swiss champion, who has suffered from every kind of fracture in the course of his career, has now decided to retire. At 28, he was getting to be a doyen of the slopes but not over his career yet. The in-

creased danger of the sport and the worsening conditions of racing had been his reasons for abandoning international competition before his term.

Jos Minsch believes that some of the regulations of the International Ski Federation should be applied more stringently. These regulations forbid a champion to derive material benefits from his sport: a provision which is obviously non practicable and not held. Ski-ing has necessarily become professionalised and better with the result that competitions are speedier and more dangerous. Jos Minsch is not against the ski payoffs—the regulation on this question must now be altered—he is against the lax preparation of ski-runs for important competitions. This preparation is the responsibility of the managers of the race. The International Ski Federation, however, stipulates that three experienced competition-skiers should take part in the laying-down of the track because they alone have the experience to judge which bumps are dangerous and are to be avoided. They are in a better position to place the slalom gates in such a way that the racers do not incur unnecessary risks. Jos Minsch maintains that this job is presently being done by 60-year-old ski-supporters who, in many cases, have not got a sufficient concern for the safety of the competitors.

A second regulation of the Ski

Federation is that high speeds which could lead to dangerous and harmful falls must be prevented by speed-reducing bends and obstacles.

Descent runs have so far been designed to make the competitors whizz down as fast as possible. Small bumps are levelled down so that skiers can go at 80 m.p.h. Although the smoothness of the run may lessen the chances of a fall, it permits speeds of 80 m.p.h. and over which are risky in any circumstances. The competitors must take risks: they cannot decide to brake when they feel unsafe unless they're not interested in winning the race. They are bound by the very nature of competition, the organisation of ski-racing and the shape of the tracks to take risks.

A third regulation provided by the I.S.F. is that runs should not have hard-edged bumps making skiers dangerously lose contact with the ground. This refers again to the preparation and testing of runs by experienced skiers.

Another important regulation is to border the sides of bends and stretches where a racer might be carried away with a soft barrier of straw or snow. This appears particularly important after the death of Bozon, who crashed to his death on a railing-post. When a competitor falls at 80 m.p.h., he usually somersaults for a good 50 yards and protective barriers should therefore be spaced well away from the descent.

To get these vital measures carried through, Jos Minsch thinks that competition skiers should league together (as they do in motor-racing) and impose their conditions collectively. A lone skier can do nothing against the will of the management of a race and the hierarchy of sports. If all the skiers partaking in a competition agreed that the safety of a run was insufficient, then they ought to refuse to compete. They have recently done this at the Kandahar Race. Fog had settled on the track, visibility was reduced to 20 yards and competitors (who had the death of Michel Bozon vividly in their minds) refused to take the risks presented by such conditions.

There have been five deaths in professional ski-ing since 1945. The first two were in 1959, the third was in 1964 (on the Olympic run at Innsbruck), the last two, the deaths of the Swiss champion Silvia Sutter and of Michel Bozon, happened within the past year. The figure may not appear large and is still smaller than the toll of motor-racing, but it is quite large enough for those who are directly involved.

Ski champions might not like danger for its own sake, but this doesn't appear to be the case of Sylvain Saudan, a ski instructor and guide from Martigny who has skied down the south-west face of the Eiger, a snow-wall 1,000 metres high and slanting at 50 degrees. One slip meant a kamikaze's death, one rough jerk with the skis meant an avalanche. This kind of sport however will never become an Olympic event. (PMB)