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In 1993 Swiss sport saw many highlights. Amongst them the world champion title for hurdle sprinter Julie Baumann. (Photo: RDZ)

IMPRESSUM

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 20th year of issue and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 20 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 298,000. Regional news appear four times a year.

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In the 1960s, on the question of whether gym or mathematics was more important the majority of both pupils and teachers would have come down heavily on the side of mathematics. Now, however, the same groups would probably be much less sure, and it is quite possible that many people would be firmly on the side of gym. This would imply that over the last few decades physical fitness has gained in importance in peoples' minds. This is so not only at school but in all aspects of daily life. The increasing number of fitness courses available bears ample witness to this.

This change in the climate of opinion is due partly to the fact that families now have more available income – although the recession probably reduces the importance of this factor. But it is also true that the maxim "mens sana in corpore sano", the idea that intellectual awareness requires physical fitness, has become deeply rooted in a broad spectrum of public opinion. This conviction has been supported by a number of well worked out and widespread advertising campaigns intended to demonstrate clearly that physical health requires just as much care as intellectual development. All-round health needs a sound and orderly life style, and taking part in as much sport as possible should be a part of this.

Sport is important at all levels of performance and at all ages. It includes the notions of play and pleasure, both of which distract the mind from the toils and troubles of everyday life. Sport also has an important social role, since it brings an extra dimension to community and group life. Sport also has important psychological advantages, since positive results can be obtained only by those who keep themselves under control and exercise the virtues of self-discipline, concentration and sacrifice. This is true right down to the morning gymnastics which each one of us should perform.

Alongside sport widely practised as a means of keeping the ordinary citizen in good physical and mental shape, spectator sport plays a role which

should not be underestimated. It makes people in Switzerland happy when Manuela Maleeva Fragnière wins the Swiss indoor tennis tournament in Zurich thanks to her power and intelligence or when Tony Rominger flexes his muscles in the Tour de France. It makes them unhappy when they hear that Diego Maradona has taken drugs, and they are very ready to criticise football stars for requiring too many privileges. Spectator sport also has the function of setting examples – the case of Pirmin Zurbriggen is a fine instance of this – which has a particularly strong effect on young people. Unluckily it does not always assume this role.

Careful reflection should take place on the relationship between young people and sport. For members of the coming generation who practise sport over and above the gym lesson a healthy life style is of the greatest importance. Those who pass their time in a sports hall, those who play ball with each other, those who ski in the snowclad mountains are all far away from musty air and resorts of doubtful repute. And they are less likely to be hanging around street corners in polluted urban areas. It is in this sense – and because in the last few years scourge after scourge has fallen upon our heads – that the importance of large-scale sport for our young people, and not only for them, is constantly increasing. It may be seen as both part of education and as having social and preventive goals. The government has surely reacted in the right way by opening the Youth and Sport programme to children between 10 and 14. Sport across the board can also make an important contribution to the fight against drug abuse. Even at a time when austerity is the order of the day we should not forget these elements. Sport needs the support of us all.



Giuseppe Rusconi

Swiss
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