

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 30 (2003)
Heft: 5

Artikel: Sport : "Patriotism is nourished by victory"
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907393>

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"Patriotism is nourished by victory"

Like any other nation, the Swiss like to identify with their successful athletes. Can this be called patriotism?

Christophe Jaccoud, a sociologist, scientific assistant at the International Centre for Sport Studies (ICSS) in Neuchâtel, and co-publisher of "Sports en Suisse" is firmly convinced.*

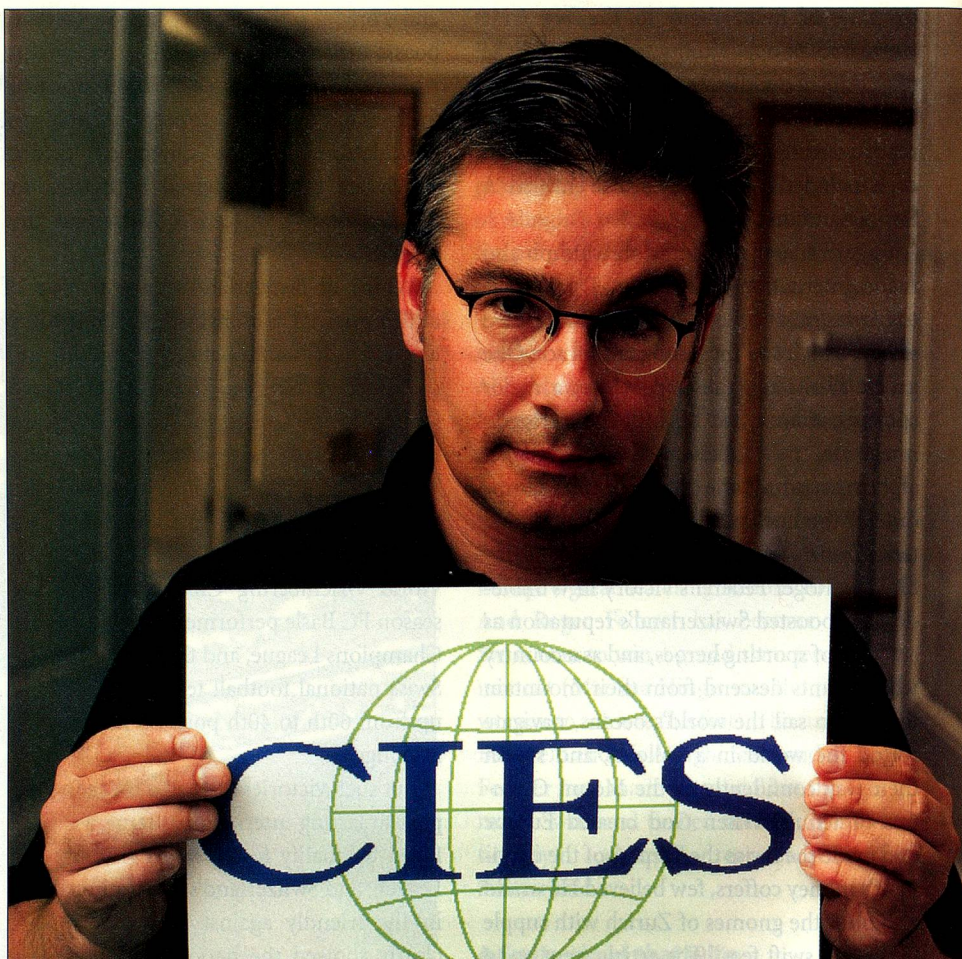
SWISS REVIEW: *How do you explain people's identification with their athletes?*

CHRISTOPHE JACCOUD: If you're interested in football, you are interested in a game that, in itself, offers major potential for identification. Some anthropologists even talk of a dramaturgical distillation of existence. Whether or not athletes are merely a way of identifying with the national or cultural values they represent, is another question. A person can identify with his national team as well as with the local or regional cultures which the team represents. Football cultures often have their origins in a community, a company or a local club – for example Juventus and Fiat, or Socheaux and Peugeot. Added to this, there is also a form of identification that is based on the exploits or achievements of the athlete.

A great many competitions and tournaments feature national teams. Is this one of the reasons for patriotism in sport?

National teams are ambassadors for skill, quality and excellence. If a person identifies with a national team, he also identifies with the values and strengths of his country. I believe that is a form of patriotism.

Patrick Lüthy



Social scientist Christophe Jaccoud is a scientific assistant at the International Centre for Sports Studies (ICSS) in Neuchâtel.

A very open patriotism that often celebrates sports personalities who do not fit the image of "ethnic purity" that some nationalistic supporters advocate...

Patriotism has changed. It has adapted to multicultural societies. A good many popular Swiss athletes are of non-Swiss origins. So this type of patriotism is not rooted in the exaggerated nationalism of right-wing extremists. There are exceptions. At the ICSS we aim to investigate this issue to find out whether there are any transparent links between the supporter scene and the extreme-right milieu.

Are there any changes in identification?

For many years, skiing had a strong national identification factor, among other things because, as with a number of other sports, it owes much of its evolution to the army. But patriotism feeds on victory, and on the superior achievements of the athletes that people support. Nowadays the identification factor has shifted to the national football team, which has distinguished itself through quality and individual performances.

Are Federer and Alinghi objects of identification?




Keystone Press

Nations come closer together at sporting events. Swiss and Australian fans at the British Open.

I'm not sure whether Alinghi is a symbol of Swiss sport. There was great enthusiasm when Alinghi won the Americas Cup, but does Ernesto Bertarelli really instil feelings of identification? Naturally Alinghi symbolises a victorious Switzerland. But people certainly do not identify with Ernesto Bertarelli in the same way as they did with skiers Roland Collombin and Bernhard Russi, in whom everyone could recognise something of themselves. Federer is interesting. He can induce this effect. He is likeable, young, modest, brilliant and friendly: altogether very popular.

You specialize in new, urban sport disciplines. Do patriotic values play a role in this area?

Snowboarding, skateboarding and the like really have nothing to do with a nation, a flag, or a country. Unlike more established sports, they have not united under a national association. They started from zero, and their proponents do not need to belong to a club. That is a new concept. What drives these sports is something far removed from nationality. They also, by the way, do not comply with the so-called English model: They are not based on direct confrontation, where one side's victory means the other's defeat.

Interview: Charly Veuthey 

* "Sports en Suisse. Traditions, transitions, transformations". Published by Christophe Jaccoud, Laurent Tissot and Yves Pedrazzini, Editions Antipodes.

Doping damages the image of our athletes

Over the past fifteen years, the growing number of doping cases has tarnished the image of world-class athletes and triggered a crisis in the sporting world. Swiss doping specialist Matthias Kamber talks about the problem.

The "Festina Affair" at the 1998 Tour de France, endemic doping in some countries, and the premature death of former professional athletes have greatly damaged the public's view of athletes. Matthias Kamber, Head of the Anti-Doping Unit at the Federal Office of Sport in Magglingen and member of the "Ethics and Education" working group of the World Anti-Doping Agency, has called the frequency of doping cases a "blight on the image of athletes". This is confirmed by various surveys. "In 1998 we asked the Swiss population whether athletes should be seen as idols. Only twelve percent said No. Three years later, forty percent of the 1500 Swiss who took part in the survey believed that athletes should no longer be viewed as role models."

However, as Matthias Kamber explains, the Swiss population's interest in sport has not abated: "Interest in sport remains high, but people have become more critical about doping. It's interesting to note that this growing intolerance and the social debate on decriminalising drugs are at completely opposite ends of the spectrum." This, in turn, illustrates the special role-model status accorded to athletes.

Doping may influence the level of identification with athletes themselves, but because doping has now become "globalised", it no longer affects the image of a country. However, there are plans to produce a doping map of the world, showing the efforts of individual countries to combat doping. According to Kamber, "some countries such as Canada, Australia, Norway and France, have adopted a very tough approach to doping. Switzerland itself is one of the ten countries most strongly involved in the campaign against doping."

In the course of various surveys, the Swiss public has made its opinion on doping abundantly clear: our country should take action against athletes who take performance-enhancing drugs, even if the result is a decline in international sporting achievements. "The Swiss," concludes Matthias Kamber, "still trust in sport; but they want to see tough measures being taken to clamp down on doping."

CV

Federal Office of Sport, Doping Prevention: <http://www.dopinginfo.ch/>

Translated from German.