

The Olympics: A Celebration Of What?

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said on CNN television today:

“The greatest moment of the race is not the touching of the wall, or when one swimmer begins to pull ahead of the pack. The greatest moment takes place before the pistol even fires, when, for a brief time, no nation is greater or smaller, stronger or weaker, than any other. For me, that is the Olympic moment.”

Should the Olympics be more a celebration of equality than excellence, then?

A charitable interpretation of Annan's statement would call it a celebration of a moment of fairness, openness and civility among nations, and not as a howl of deep, suppressed resentment that there is a nation (let's not name it, shall we?) that *is* both greater and stronger, politically as well as athletically, than any other. But on either interpretation, this quote illustrates the fact that it is high time that the Olympic Games, and sport generally, ceased to be about *nations*. The spirit of the Olympic Games should become more like that of the Wimbledon Open Championship and less like that of the United Nations General Assembly.

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Fix the Scoring Too

It would be nice if the events with subjective scoring involved voting that was less like the UN as well.

by [Gil](#) on Wed, 08/04/2004 - 01:00 | [reply](#)

Subjective Scoring

I agree. But subjective scoring is highly unsatisfactory in any case. Perhaps one day, technology would allow the judges to watch performances in high-resolution virtual reality, with the competitors disguised by some real-time algorithms.

Even then, I suppose in many cases competitors could be recognised by their style alone. Well, ultimately, computers should do the judging...

But who would do the programming?

Oh well, back to the drawing board.

by **David Deutsch** on Wed, 08/04/2004 - 02:40 | [reply](#)

objective scoring

Would we want to remove the human element from scoring competitions?

I mean, humans have bias in the forms they prefer in any given endeavor. And if a judge has indigestion from lunch or had a fight with his spouse before leaving the house that morning, it might influence how the judge is going to score that day's competitors.

Seems to me that competitors know this, going in, as part of the conditions of competition.

A computer does not have- and I question as to whether it will ever be possible or desirable for a computer to have- the inexplicit knowledge to be able to judge, say, a Grand Prix dressage horse and rider. Yes, it could perhaps record the mechanical completion of the required pattern to be ridden, but to 'get' the intangibles such as the presence of the horse and rider and how they work together... I don't know that a human judge can pull out and make explicit the process by which such things are judged. Can a computer have and interpret a 'gut feeling'? And yes, I think that gut feelings are important and to be taken into account when making decisions in life, even though such things cannot necessarily be quantified in the harsh light of day.

On another note, I thought the Olympics were supposed to be a competition among amateurs but it seems that most competitors are amateur in name only. Are these competitors nurses and accountants who indulge their passion for their sport on weekends? And are never paid for the practice of their sport, in any way?

Reading on this site:

http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/movement/index_uk.asp

it does seem that equality and peace are the goals of the Olympic movement, not excellence. I am particularly intrigued by these stated activities of the Olympic Movement:

"Opposition to all forms of commercial exploitation of sport and athletes"

and

"Raising awareness of environmental problems."

Perhaps the Olympic Movement is actually the UN in disguise! hoping to do away with capitalism and save the world by substituting sports for wars...

by a reader on Wed, 08/04/2004 - 15:46 | [reply](#)

Commercial exploitation of sport etc.

Interesting that an organisation that states they are opposed to commercial exploitation of sport and want to raise awareness of environmental problems seems to be based around a four year cycle of countries having to bid (commercial exploitation) to host the olympics at a huge cost entailing the building of large sports stadiums (environmental impact). Will the white water canoing facility built in Athens be used for training amateur canoists for the next olympics? More likely it will become part of a nice commercial enterprise known as a theme park.

by a reader on Wed, 09/15/2004 - 14:53 | [reply](#)