

## MILITARY SPORT AND CIVILIAN SOCIETY (Continued)

Lt-Col DE CANIO (Italy)

I am Lieutenant-Colonel and, since 1994 I have the pleasure and the honour to carry on the office of Commander of the 1° Athletes Special Unit in Rome, which, in accordance with the law n° 459/88 accommodates the athletes of national interest in all sports disciplines.

Specific task of the Unit, formed by two companies, whose shape is clearly heterogeneous, is the maintenance of the bodily and athletic form of the athletes of national interest of all disciplines, more or less noble and famous they may be.

The athletes of some disciplines carry on the agonistic activity as for their belonging sports societies, while the others take part in the national sports activity as for the sport society of Armed Forces and army.

Of course, all them share to the composition of the national representative team on the occasions of sports competitions which are promoted and organised by the International Military Sports Council.

Mainly, the 1st Athletes Special Unit manages the following sports disciplines:

- with the army representative team:
  - fencing;
  - athletics;
  - military pentathlon.
- with the Armed Forces representative team:
  - wrestling;
  - weightlifting;
  - judo;
  - karate;
  - taekwondo;
  - triathlon;
  - boxing;
  - badminton.

Besides, the Unit carries on an important social function, putting at disposal of the families of regular soldiers or of civil employees of the military system, sports grounds and skilled technicians who, beginning from basic techniques, are able to bring youngest members of these families, step by step, to first agonistic levels.

Particularly the Unit has a fervent juvenile activity in swimming, in tennis and in handball.

The manifold activity is carried on also with the aid of the respective competent national federations, who provide skilled technicians while the Armed Forces have lack of.

The activity absorbs completely the energies of the whole available staff, technicians and others, because the management of 11 championships of 11 different sport disciplines, each one with its characteristics and necessities, with away matches on the whole national territory, engages also, and above all, the logistic apparatus of the Unit, which has to provide, of its own, for:

- the provision of technical equipment, more and more sophisticated and peculiar to each sports discipline;

- the organisation of the home matches and of the away matches, with the involving of the Armed Forces authorities, whose headquarters, located near the towns where the matches are played, in order to control the exercise costs of these activities, attend to the board and lodging of the military athletes.

Naturally, in this whole context, the military aspect, as it is normally intended, must be conserved, because

also the athletes take actively part in barracks's life:

- they carry daily on a slight drilling programme;
- they take part in the barracks's armed services;
- when the Unit is involved, they take part in the services of public order in the cases of calamity or of general elections or of particular events;
- they carry out all the shooting lessons provided by the 2nd part of drilling;
- before the end of conscription service they carry out a tactical task, divided in organic platoons, in drills out of their barrack.

Moreover, the athletes are really good soldiers during these activities, as they have excellent physical capabilities, they have a great spirit of adaptation and they are used to pain.

Sport, ancient form of body training, is in strict correlation with the forming of individual's character and morality.

Practised with responsible intentions, it invigorates the person, fostering his health and his resistance to weariness and to pain; it's synonymous of discipline, it's also an antidote against too comfortable life.

It promotes the sense of order and of self-control.

More than ever, these positive effects identify themselves, nowadays, in the purposes which characterise the drilling and the formation of a young soldier.

As a matter of fact, the training and the care of physical efficiency show out at the base of any technical-military activity.

In fact, the task of inciting and refining, in the soldier, the necessary qualities to face the realities of life and react with ready with to all events, aware of one's physical and moral abilities, prevails.

Nowadays military life constitutes an heritage which, perhaps unintentionally, enriches the greater part of citizens and that's why, often, their return to civil society and to labour world happens with a more conscious confidence in one's means and potentialities.

The two kinds of athletes, formed by those who compete for the belonging sports societies and those, who compete for the Armed Forces representative team, are distinguished, above all, by the following aspects.

Let's consider, as an example, a soccer and a volleyball player: it's true that at the Unit they are in a position to train with federal technicians, but it's even true that they are separated from the context of the team, they haven't got the possibility to live the group (these sports are characterised by the habit of living in a constant stage, two or three training sessions are carried out each day) so, from a merely technical point of view, they try and try again those outlines which are more suitable during a match.

As a conclusion, the coach welcomes hardly the military athletes as regular players.

The athletes belonging to the second kind , instead, who practice less noble or poorer sports, exploit the military service in order to compete mainly against themselves, to test their capabilities.

During their civil life ( I refer above all to boxers, wrestlers, runners, etc.) they have never practised full-time their beloved sport, they have always alternated it to their job or to study while now they have got the chance to train through a whole year without anyone of these problems and, moreover, assisted by experts that their societies cannot afford. Finally, the athletes with great potentialities come out and reach results of absolute level.

Living together with these young people for three years, following, step by step, their careers, their successes, the failures, the very searing delusions, the huge joys, playing a so important role in their lives, whether in a positive or in a negative way, constitutes an incomparable experience of life, even with the awareness that it's impossible not to mistake.

Sometimes, surely, even though the maximum enthusiasm has been put, event though all the possible solutions of a problem have been carefully considered, it might have happened to have chosen the least right one which, instead, has penalised an athlete or a sport society.

In most cases the solution is told by intelligence and by logic, without letting influence oneself by an « important name » or by an « important sport » , and above all, it is aimed to support only the young athlete who, unlike other professionals, has few years of activity to guarantee his future. And we perfectly know that among hundreds of young people who start their careers with great prospects, only few, or better still very few of them succeed.

I end thanking, first of all, my senior officers who have trusted me and who have given me the opportunity t live this incommensurable experience of life and work.

I thank Colonel Perotto, who has chose me to compose this relation about my activity within the Unit and I would like to thank mainly you all, who have been so kind and patient to listen to me.

Friendship through Sport.

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