

»When money is seen as more important than values, sport loses its cultural and political relevance,« said Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen

## WHEN THE MONEYMEN TAKE OVER

Denmark's Minister of Culture sounded a warning against sport allowing itself to be dominated by the profit motive

»No-one can deny that plenty of money is being made out of sport today,« commented Denmark's Minister of Culture Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen in her address to Play the Game. »But if the pursuit of large profits leads to sports organisations thinking and acting like private companies, then sport's cultural dimension will suffer.«

Today, she said, sport is producing greater profits than ever before. It is estimated that global sport-related turnover amounts to three percent of the world's total economic activity. Champions League football annually furnishes UEFA with approximately one billion Swiss Francs from sponsorship and TV rights. Manchester United FC is a limited company, with a turnover of approximately £100 million, while the IOC's income from sponsorship and TV rights amounts to almost \$2 billion.

»These are sums that would make a minister of culture green with envy. But when money becomes more important than values, sport loses its cultural and political basis. Sport must feel it is bound to certain fundamental values - it should not have profit as a primary goal. If this tendency continues, it will become more and more difficult to protect the cultural vision in sport, and receive public support on a broad scale,« said the minister, adding that if the trend continues, sport also risks losing financial support from governments.

However, despite their huge influence on the world of sport, Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen pointed out that the IOC, UEFA and many more of sport's highest governing bodies are still suffering from a conspicuous lack of democracy

»Along with the tradition of the vo-

luntary sector, sport has been an important factor in the construction of modern welfare systems, and in advancing democracy and responsibility to all levels of society,« she continued. »However, I have some difficulty detecting recognition of these principles among the leaders of international sports organisations.« The Minister cited the example of a major international doping conference in Lausanne in February 1999. Top representatives of world sporting institutions listened to addresses by no fewer than 40 government representatives. All speakers were united in their demand for the establishment of an independent doping agency and the harmonisation of sanctions. However, as soon as the government representatives had left, the sports leaders immediately began to discuss ways of avoiding harmonisation.

»I think that the democratic deficit is a barrier to the advancement of sport built upon mutual responsibility,« she added. »And furthermore, I believe that some kind of reciprocity is necessary if we are to prevent modern, top level sport simply degenerating into entertainment for profit.«

In order to maintain their credibility and help sport to become a positive factor in a globalised society, sports organisations must be fully open to the press, warned the Minister. She added that journalists must cover sport with a more critical eye, and not simply print news about world records and champions.

»I hope this conference will enable journalists to adopt a more critical, passionate, committed and independent view of sport,« she concluded. »A view that will commit sport to ethical values, culture and cultural policy.« ♦

