

The daily sport: A gift to the media

»If the media really wants to make an impression in the fight against doping, journalists must - somewhat paradoxically - learn to write about something completely different.«

This was the message of one of the conference arrangers, editor-in-chief Jens Sejer Andersen.

»Just as journalists often take their role in a democratic society seriously when reporting on politics, culture or the economy, they must also play the democratic card in the area known as physical culture,« he said and continued:

It is strange that the media seemingly couldn't care less about the culture of the body - the same culture that engages their readers, listeners or viewers on a daily basis. It is a colossal, uncharted area that offers itself.

Think about the forces set in motion every day by completely average people practicing sport. Think of the passion that hundreds of millions of people put into their daily sporting routines. Those very same people that the media is in daily contact with.

OK, you'll say, no-one is bothered about reading about chubby Mrs Smith's cycle ride in the countryside or Mr Smith's exertions in the aerobics centre.

And who cares about a junior, third division ice hockey game? To this I offer the answer: Should the sports sections of newspapers be the only pages where people do not want to read about themselves?

Of course, there should still be a place for David Beckham and the Laudrup Brothers - but this does not mean that all sports coverage shall be of similar content.

It is an inconvenience to take this kind of sport seriously: One cannot, as in elite sport, turn on the camera and the microphone, lean back and be sure that a group of well-trained millionaires will create the drama. It needs an active and investigative journalistic contribution.

Ruling by fear or trust

But which TV station follows a team of minor players over a long period, and reports on which ideals the youth is taught in their everyday life in the sports club? Does the trainer appear as a stopwatch dictator, or does he teach the boys the value of co-operation? Does he rule by fear or trust?

Which newspaper bothers to take a close look at the sports facilities of a local community?

Questions such as who is in charge of the facilities, who gets the best deals and training times, and which members of the community find themselves excluded?

Which media analyses how the big national associations receive more funding from central government, and higher subscriptions from their members? - just to throw money out of the window on a new "elite" project or luxurious lunches?

For the past ten years, I have been working as an editor of both weekly and monthly magazines that exclusively concern themselves with average people's sporting activities in the very average country of Denmark. I can guarantee that there are plenty of interesting stories to write about - also following normal journalistic criteria. [...]

Affect youngster's perception

To underline how important this is, I would one more time like to remind you of the discoveries that Baron Pierre de Coubertin and other great sporting thinkers have made - that there is no stronger method of shaping people's character than through the body, through play and through sport.

Therefore, a change in the focus of the media is not just a gift for the media's own development.

The pictures and examples that the media brings forward do also affect youngsters' perception of what is good and what is bad in sport.

Similarly, the media has a great effect on global, national and local sports policy. - and with it on the framework that people use to characterise and influence each other in their daily sporting lives.

Any media committed to building democratic values has not only an opportunity, but an obligation to promote future development in which sport's current motto - Faster, Higher, Stronger - be replaced with forms for the culture of the body - such as "healthier, more fun and more enriching".

For every step that the mass media dare to take into this new land, they remove themselves a little more from their sorry role as the victims of passive doping.

PHOTO: EMIR MORINA



Fun for democracy

For Anders Levinsen, project leader at the successful "Open Fun Football Schools", the sports sector has a tremendous unexplored and under-utilised potential with regards to social cohesion and the rebuilding of a democratic civic society. This is proven in the war-torn Balkan where the football schools are spreading at an impressive pace:

Each Open Fun Football School last 5 days. It is organized according to our comprehensive sets of manuals, and it comprise approx. 200 boys and girls from 8-14 and minimum 15 leaders/trainers that all serve Open Fun Football School on a voluntary basis.

Its basic idea is a "Fun Concept": What is important is the playful aspect, the joy derived from playing, rather than the results, the score, the advancing skill levels. The many exercises and small games are so designed as to make everyone feel successful again and again [...]

It is not about developing and harvesting talented players, but about giving kids a rich and rewarding experience with ball playing, so as to promote the game, recruit players for football and develop their talents. Thus, in our Open Fun Football School players are not divided according to skills, gender or ethnic or social background. Trained and un-trained, boys and girls, "black and white" is playing on the same teams during a whole week.

As mentioned above the Open Fun Football Schools was transferred for the first time to war-torn Bosnia Herzegovina in 1998. It is built from the memory of broken communication lines and the immobilities of the war, so harmful to peace and the public's mental health. Using ball games and pure play, the schools aim to be a strategic instrument to move people, physically and psychologically, across the numerous, invisible front lines that still cut through the country.

Thus, they aim to counteract the fear and claustrophobia of war and stimulate the process of minority return by re-establishing old but broken friendships and sport co-operation among the football clubs involved their trainers, leaders and the children.

Read more at www.play-the-game.org

