

## *The Amateur “Ideal”*

**T**his is an Olympic year and, like every Olympic year, it is a good time to contemplate the curious relic of “amateurism” that threatens to wreck every Olympics and many sporting events. At the Winter Olympics in Grenoble there was, and still remains, a recurring threat to disrupt and wreck the games on the altar of the amateur “ideal”; for a while the Olympic authorities almost ruined the ski events by insisting that the players wax over the names of the ski manufacturers, and now there is talk of robbing the great Jean-Claude Killy of his skiing medals because he might have accepted money for appearing in a photograph.

The phony amateurism ideal is based on the aristocratic, pre-capitalist theory that there is something wicked and evil, something tainted, about accepting money on the market for an expenditure of one’s efforts and one’s talents. And that there is something holy, pure, and noble about refusing to earn money for expending one’s talents. This is a hangover from the old sneering by the feudal nobility and the court at engaging in trade or in business; at earning money for one’s ability on the free market.

There is no question about the fact that the amateur principle is unrealistic; hence, all the evasions and short-circuiting of the amateur principle, and endless squabbles about how much non-athletic work an athlete must do for the corporation or organization that hires him before he can qualify as a simon-pure “amateur.”

It is possible that the quality of American tennis might be saved because, at long last, amateur and professional tennis players will be allowed to participate in some of the same tournaments, a battle that was won in golf long ago.

There is no question that scuttling the amateur concept is the wave of the future, and that someday the distinction between amateur and professional will be dead as the dodo. But the point is that we should cease to regard octogenarian Avery Brundage and his fellow last-ditch champions of amateurism as battlers for the noble ideal; amateurism is a feudal remnant, a moral slap-in-the-face at everyone who earns his living honestly, and to the best of his abilities, on the free market.

It should be repudiated not only as unrealistic, but as pernicious and the opposite of an "ideal."