

Li-Hong (Leo) Hsu* FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME: A RECONSIDERATION OF THE AMATEURISM IN SPORT¹

ZA LJUBEZEN DO ŠPORTA: PONOVA PREUČITEV AMATERIZMA V ŠPORTU

Abstract

Many people might think that amateurism is dead. This paper seeks to clarify some misconceptions of amateurism and argue that amateurism can still play an important role in competitive sport. The following points were addressed.

1. The original meaning of amateurism refers to "love" the game for its own sake. It is not only related to a "state of mind" and a "passion" but also a "pattern of behaviour" for doing sport.
2. Although the International Olympic Committee and other sports governing bodies have abolished the amateur rules, this does not mean that the amateur spirit no longer exists in our sports society. On the contrary, it still exists in most of the non-competitive sports activities and some competitive sports.
3. The moral sense of amateurism helps one to rethink the relationship between athletes and "natural values" (direct desire). While nowadays some educators recognize the importance of "fair play" and "good sportsmanship" and try to implement them into our moral education system, one should not forget the original meaning of amateurism: "to love". To "love" sport is positive. Without this "passion" as a premise, "fair play" and "good sportsmanship" could just as well be a kind of "indoctrination".

Key words: amateurism, love, state of mind, moral education

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Izvleček

Marsikdo je morda mnenja, da je amaterizem zamrl. V tem prispevku želimo razjasniti nekatera zmotna pojmovanja amaterizma ter dokazati, da ima lahko le-ta še vedno pomembno vlogo v tekmovalnem športu. Obravnavane so naslednji vidiki:

1. Prvotni pomen amaterizma izvira iz pojma »ljubiti« igro zaradi nje same. Pomen ni povezan le s »stanjem duha« in »strastjo«, ampak tudi z »vzorcem obnašanja« pri ukvarjanju s športom.
2. Čeprav so tako Mednarodni olimpijski komite kot tudi druge ustanove, ki delujejo na področju športa, opustili pravila amaterizma, pa to ne pomeni, da amaterski duh v športni družbi ne obstaja več. Prav nasprotno, v večini netekmovalnih športnih dejavnosti še vedno obstaja, prav tako pa tudi v nekaterih tekmovalnih športih.
3. Moralni vidik amaterizma posameznika usmerja k ponovnemu razmišljanju o odnosu med športniki in »naravnimi vrednotami« (neposredna želja). Čeprav nekateri vzgojitelji že priznavajo pomen »fair play« in »pravega športnega duha« ter ju želijo vpeljati v moralno-vzgojni sistem športa, ne smemo pozabiti na prvotni pomen amaterizma: »ljubiti«. »Ljubiti« šport je pozitivno. Če »fair play« in »pravi športni duh« ne bi temeljila na »strasti«, bi lahko pomenila le način »indoktrinacije«.

Gljučne besede: amaterizem, ljubezen, stanje duha, moralna vzgoja

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I. Introduction

Amateurism might be seen as “old wine in an old bottle” which is undrinkable now. Many people believe that amateurism is dead. Nowadays, to many sports governing bodies it is not so important to stress this spirit, since it would bring some difficulties to distinguish the pure status of amateur and non-amateur athletes such as in the Olympic Games. However, many are probably not aware of the original meaning of “amateur spirit”. Since modern sports have become more and more competitive and many sports federations have also cancelled the code of the so-called “amateur rules”, some might wonder whether the amateur spirit still exists in our sports societies. If not, should we just forget about this spirit? If yes, do we still need to promote this spirit?

This paper seeks to clarify some misconceptions of amateurism and reveal that amateur spirit is still alive in the modern sports society. At the end, I will argue that the amateur spirit can still play an important role in sport with respect to its value of moral education. Thus, the following questions shall be addressed:

- a) What is the original meaning of amateurism?
- b) Does it still exist in our sport?
- c) Do we still need amateurism?

II. The Original Meaning of Amateurism

When looking at the history of sport, especially of the Olympic Games, many ethical problems have been caused not just by violence, political issues or drug-taking, but the worst was the athletes’ status, that is, whether the participants were “pure” amateurs or not. There were some misconceptions about how “amateurism” was interpreted in sport. The English aristocracy first took it mainly as a means of “social distinction”. They perceived amateurism as a connoisseurship of fine and polite arts by gentlefolk who dabbled nonchalantly and without desire for excellence of performance. This explained their disdain for those who strove mightily for precisely this, namely the professional and quasi-amateur who by definition therefore could not be gentlemen (Glader, 1978; Neil, 1996). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and other sports federations took it as a category of “fair play” and adopted it into their sports rules system. Moreover, the majority also tended to differentiate the good and the bad between “amateurism” and “professionalism” as if the former were better or decent human beings and the latter bad or evil ones.

To know the original meaning of amateurism can help us recover whether this spirit really contained the senses of “hypocritical ideology” or “historical anachronism”. From an etymological point of view, the original word “amateurism” does not come from ancient Greek but ancient Roman times when Latin was the common language. In Latin, “amatorem” means “of amator”. Amator means “lover” and its verb “amare” means “to love” (Hoad, 1987, p. 13; Partridge, 1958, p. 14). This was later on taken in French “amateur”, which means people who appreciate art works or “a lover of something” (Ernest, 1966, p. 59). The English language then took it and interpreted it in many senses including for sport, such as:

1. An “amateur” is one who has a marked fondness, liking or taste; devotee; admirer.
2. An “amateur” is one who follows a pursuit from his love of painting, performing in plays, participating in sport etc. for enjoyment and without being paid for it (as opposed to professional) (Latham, 1882, p. 79).

3. An “amateur” is a disparagement, a dilettante and a dabbler (Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language, 1936, p. 80).
4. “Gentleman Amateur” is used for those who watch competitive sports.

Amateurism in the later English dictionary has been defined as a kind of belief that people “should” take part in sport and other activities as a hobby, for pleasure, rather than as a job, for money (Collins English Language Dictionary, 1987, p. 42). This is related to the English social historical background. If we recognize that the original meaning of “amateurism” comes from the Latin root which means simply “to love” something, then some misconceptions can be clarified.

Misconception 1: Amateurism is a means of social class distinction.

The amateur ideal, as a social distinction, was associated with the upper class attitude (Victorian ideal) prevalent in England during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. This attitude as a custom or tradition can, of course, never be an objective moral norm for those who love doing sport but in a lower background or/and less supportive situation, because if one agrees that “tradition” can be revolutionalised, then it would not be a universal principle. As Beardsmore (1969, p. 64) argues that:

“... For there are certain principles (even if we are unable to formulate them) which enable us to draw a limit to what can count as a moral judgement. But we must avoid the mistake of equating ‘tradition’ with any finite set of moral standards, with e.g. the status quo. For to do this would be to rule out the possibility of moral revolution. Tradition, in the sense in which I have been using the term, does not decide the moral beliefs which a man holds, but places a limit upon what it is intelligible to offer as a moral belief. To draw attention to this is a purely philosophical matter.”

Moreover, it would be unfair to see that amateurism was used as a means to distinguish between different social classes. Sports are not specific properties of certain people or groups.

Misconception 2: Amateurism should be restricted by the rules of the game.

“To love” doing sport in fact is not only a “state of mind” or a “passion” but also a “pattern of behaviour”. This spirit should not be restricted and applied to everyone, because each individual has different interests and no one could be forced by anyone to love someone or something that s/he does not like. This can also be applied to sport. From a historical point of view, it is clear how the IOC did indeed fail to apply this “love”, this amateurism, to sport, since they treat “amateur spirit” as a “rule system” and eventually it could only bring more hypocrisy.

Misconception 3: Amateurism is opposed to professionalism.

The original meaning of amateurism did not contain a negative sense in the fact that it appears not opposed to professionalism. However, in the later development of sports history during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century when one gave a positive definition to amateurism, it was like giving virtue to amateur athletes whereas professionals were given a negative definition. This needs to be explained.

First of all, one cannot in fact find a strong argument to prove that an amateur is better than a professional in matters of virtue or righteousness. Basically, amateurism and professionalism should not simply be distinguished through “financial consideration” and “time for practicing”. More precisely, this distinction should be made only between “amateur sport” and “professional sport”. The confusion here is that people generally mix up “spirit” with “sport” as if people who participate in amateur sport would automatically show amateur spirit, whereas professional athletes never show their “love” towards sport, since it is done only for a “living”. Although professional sports’ main considerations are “financial income” and “winning”, one cannot deny that professional athletes also have the “right” to “love” and preserve their own sport.

In addition, some professional sports might have more strict ethical codes than amateur sports such as golf and soccer. On the other hand, when an athlete participates in amateur sport, it does not mean that s/he will never act unethically. That is to say, taking part in “amateur sport” does not automatically produce “amateur spirit”. In other words, anyone who participates in sports (either amateur or professional) can act “amateur spirit”, if s/he wants to. Therefore, it is unfair to say that amateur athletes are “good” people whereas professional athletes are “bad” people.

Misconception 4: Amateurism shows that an amateur is one who refuses financial support in order to participate in a sport.

In today’s many highly competitive sports, people need certain support (equipment, travelling and nutrition) to take part in sport. This is not only for professional sports athletes but also for amateur athletes. As Keating (1973, p. 171) puts it:

“If the competitor is truly an athlete, if his desire is to excel on ever-increasing levels of competence, he must make the sacrifice of complete dedication. Such dedication requires great expenditures of time and effort which, in truth, are very expensive commodities.”

Nowadays athletes who compete in the Olympic Games or other highly competitive games need hard daily training, if they want to win or break records. As a result, they would need certain support from clubs, associations and governments. Here, one recognizes that certain support for participating in sport should not necessarily be seen to diminish participants’ “love” for sport as long as they wish to keep it.

Misconception 5: Amateurism shows that an amateur is one who is an unskilled practitioner or not an expert, imperfect or untrained.

Amateurism is a kind of spirit but not a “status” of someone. Again, this misconception mixes “amateur spirit” with “amateur status”. The other point is that an amateur, of course, can be either an unskilful or skilful practitioner, for the latter is the one who has more talent and can devote more time to the sport s/he likes. But this does not automatically show that s/he has amateur spirit in sport.

III. The Amateur Spirit in Sport

The next task is to argue that the amateur spirit still exists in some of our sports (including non-competitive and competitive sport). Before doing so, I shall clarify the concept of sport and see where the amateur spirit is still alive.

The Concept of Sport

The concept of sport has been growing wider and wider in recent years. One may acknowledge that sport is indeed hard to define under certain circumstances. Steenbergen and Tamboer (1998, p. 47) suggest that sport finds itself in an identity crisis, partly as a result of its increased popularity. In this section I shall briefly sketch what the *most* acceptable concept of sport is. I suggest that competitive sports must have their:

- a) Original feature: Sports derive from play.
- b) Involving feature: Players' intention.
- c) Essential feature: Test of physical prowess.
- d) Central function: Playing or doing.

I shall explain these four important characteristics. First, I assume that sport has its root, namely, according to Schmitz (1979, p. 22) "*sport is primarily an extension of play, and that it rests upon and derives its central values from play*". This idea comes from Huizinga (1980), namely that sporting activities are one step forward from play and civilization derives from play. As Huizinga would recognize that play is a kind of free and creative activity, sporting activities have been shaped up by the modern institutions such as sporting governing bodies and other organizations.

Regarding the second characteristic - players' intention: players' intention is their "awareness" of "playing" or "doing" sports but it does not necessarily refer to voluntary participation. Sports participants may participate in any sport according to their free will and wishes but it is not always like this. For example, some children or youngsters might be forced by their parents to do some specific sporting activities according to their talents. Players must be aware of the fact that they are playing a particular sporting game (e.g. playing a football game) or doing a particular sport (e.g. swimming). These discussions have pointed out the third and fourth characteristics of sports respectively.

From many perspectives², the "test of physical prowess" is the major criterion of sports³. It is hard to imagine that football or other sports are still called sports if we remove the feature of the "test of physical prowess". This "test" of physical prowess implies "challenge to yourself or others or both". This also implies that any form of activity which involves the test (or challenge) of the physical prowess could be developed as a sporting activity. There are lots of potential possibilities for some activities to become sporting activities but one has to analyze them carefully and see, if they have the other three features as well. In a way, one cannot judge them purely by intuition.

Now the fourth characteristic – the central function of sports: "playing" and "doing". Some sports are not just for playing but for doing as well. Baseball, cricket, basketball etc. can be seen as sporting games for "playing". By contrast, mountain climbing, swimming and jogging and so on are for "doing". However, "watching a football game" is an entirely different matter and it should not be seen as playing a sporting game and or doing sport.

With these four characteristics of sports, it is important to stress again that this is not to define sports but to state that most of the sports contain these characteristics, which are more reasonable and commonly acceptable. Following this line, I can at least preclude some sceptical activities

² Such as historical perspective, dictionary definition, sociological perspective, philosophical perspective and our common belief.

³ Perhaps some of them do not state clearly about the physical prowess. This is not necessarily restricted to vigorous physical activity but to the following: skill, strategy, strength, speed and the specific purpose of each sport.

such as chess, taking garbage out, washing the dishes and sun-bathing. The rationale can be traced to the above characteristics. Mostly, either they do not involve a “test of physical prowess or they are just part of “ordinary life”.

On the other hand, I shall claim that sports can generally be divided into two major groups. That is to say, sports can be: a) non-competitive sports, b) competitive sports (see Table I) (Hsu, 1995). While we mostly recognize that sports involve competition, it would be inadequate to ignore the non-competitive side of sports.

Table I: Competitive sports and non-competitive sports

Category	Competitive Sports	Non-competitive Sports
Contents		
Participants	Sports for all	Sports for All
Meaning (main purpose)	Play to Win!	Participation, Self-Realization, Pleasure, Health, etc.
Measure standard	Results; Distance; Speed; Power; Strength; Endurance; Coordination; etc.	1. Self performance 2. Mass participation
Examples	Ball games; Physical activity contests; Olympic Games; World Cup Football; etc.	Mountain climbing; Biking; Leisure Swimming; Jogging; Weightlifting, etc.

Non-competitive sports normally refer to individual sports such as leisure swimming, diving, skiing, gymnastics, weightlifting, cycling, mountain climbing, etc. Doing these sports does not necessarily involve rules. By contrast, competitive sports (sports contests) are those which involve competing against opponents in any sporting games such as dual sports (tennis, badminton, etc.) and team sports (football, basketball, baseball, field hockey, water polo, etc.). Playing or doing those sporting games must involve rules and those sports are commonly recognized and governed by various institutions⁴.

Competitive sport may also consist of three forms of activity. These are amateur sport, athletics and professional sport. The basic distinction of these three is based on “time spending” (can be during the leisure time or non-leisure time) and participants’ “attitude”.

There are also two parts to amateur sport. They are non-competitive and competitive recreational sport. In amateur sport participants spend their leisure time to do sports. Nevertheless, they spend less time than those doing athletics and their attitude are not so much about winning and financial rewards. Athletics is an extension of amateur sport. The participants normally spend more time practising and their attitude is more concerned with winning. More importantly, from the etymological point of view, athletics most of the time involves “financial consideration” or “prize reward” because these activities can be more highly competitive and they are organized by certain institutions such as universities or sports federations, especially in America. Some of

⁴ For example, football, basketball, baseball, swimming, track and field, etc. are governed by International Olympic Committee (IOC), International Sports Federation (ISF), Football Association (FA), National Basketball Association (NBA), etc.

them are even at the professional level, which is a kind of “work” in modern society (see Figure 1) (Hsu, 1995).

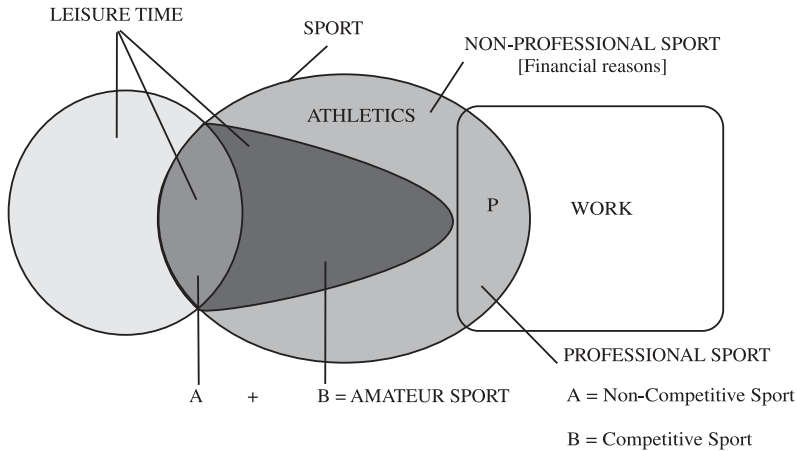


Figure 1: Amateur sport, non-professional sport and professional sport

The Amateur Spirit is still alive in Sport

After clarifying the concept of sport and the relationship between amateur sport, athletics and professional sport, it is time to address whether or not the amateur spirit is still alive in our sport. If we look at our surroundings, we frequently find people who are fanatical about doing sports (non-competitive and competitive) during their leisure time. Among such popular sports are jogging, mountain climbing, biking, swimming, and playing tennis, football or basketball. Although one cannot ask all of these people why they are so fanatical about doing sport, it is reasonable to assume that they just “love” to do sport. This kind of “love” echoes exactly the amateur spirit, and mostly this kind of “passion” exists in the whole range of amateur sports (A+B).

In athletics (including professional sport), one can still find this kind of passion but it is normally less pronounced than that one can find or observe in amateur sport. The major reason lies in the fact that the activities in which participants are involved and which can be very competitive, can bring external good such as money, prize and fame. Hence, the motivation of purely enjoying doing sport for sports sake is easily affected. This brings us to the question of whether amateur spirit contains moral meaning. If so, one can argue that amateur spirit should be defended and preserved in our sports context.

IV. Justification of the Amateurism in Sport

Not all actions have a moral meaning, except when normally related to interests of other people. For example, a soccer player participates in a soccer game and there is no moral or immoral meaning in her/his decision to do so. But if s/he deliberately injures her/his opponent while the opponent was dribbling to score, then this action has a moral meaning. This might be called immoral or unethical behaviour in soccer. To participate in a game is a neutral action. But when the player influences the opponent’s normal interests, then a moral question might appear.

How do moral situations usually arise? First, when we decide to take action and this action involves our character and secondly, when this action influences others (Chen, 1994, p. 214). It is not easy to know whether there is moral meaning in an action. But if we think about some examples of immoral behaviour in sport, we can infer something from it.

First of all, an athlete's motivation starts to change. Her/his initial internal motivation (love of sport) transfers to external motivation (seeing sport as a mere means) and s/he is especially attracted to "external goods". Here I take MacIntyre's view (1987, pp. 190-191) to differentiate between external goods, internal goods, practices (sports) and institutions (sports governing bodies)⁵. According to MacIntyre (1987), external goods are always some individual's property and possession, such as power, fame, money, and other material benefits. They are objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners. On the other hand, internal goods are the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community participating in the practice.

Therefore, if a participant is in need of this external support for participating in sport, then there is no moral setting yet. But if s/he sees this as the "main purpose" to participate in sport, then it might easily raise the moral question because this involves treating "means" as "ends". In this sense, the possibility of violating sports ethics by mainly seeking external goods is raised even though not all immoral behaviour in sport is related to external goods and motivation of participants.

Athletes nowadays are very easily influenced by external goods, because most of the competitive sports are operated by certain sports institutions (such as IOC, FIFA, ITF, FINA, etc.) which are characteristically and necessarily concerned with external goods. Such institutions are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. Many sports (especially competitive sports) cannot survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions. As a result, not only sports themselves but also participants in sports are always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institutions.

In this sense, the moral meaning of the amateur spirit is clear. It can be seen as a kind of virtue for participants to control their own "natural desire" and therefore also to resist the corrupting power of institutions. Schneider and Butcher (1993, p. 461) suggest that the centre of amateurism is to play a game "for the game's sake" or for the activity itself. This is a faithful attitude towards sports itself, that is to preserve and cherish sport in its pure integrity.

Sport is part of a big society. In sporting history, many examples of failures in athletes are shown as a consequence of their pursuit of too much "external good". One cannot deny that the position of external goods should have the same position as doing sport for pleasure, health, friendship and happiness. However, the former normally has in its nature "quantitative, visible, accumulative and practical values". It often attracts people and it can easily cause a moral problem, whereas the latter normally has the nature of "qualitative, invisible, unaccumulative, long term and unpractical values".

From the practical scientific point of view and psychological analysis, we come to the same conclusion. In Lin's research (1994, p. 28), external rewards indeed influence the "motivation" of sports participation. When a person's motivation to participate in sport changes from internal to external, her/his motivation has changed. For example, a child participates in a sports team

⁵ Although MacIntyre's distinction between practices and institutions faces certain methodological limits that have been addressed by McNamee (1995), in my view, his theory is still quite persuasive in the matter of amateur spirit here.

not out of interest but for a jacket s/he will receive after the game. From this, we see that the reason to take part in sport has changed from inside (interest and pleasure) into outside (for jacket). This transformation makes the participant lose her/his self-decision. And if the rewards no longer attract her/him, s/he may easily lose her/his internal motivation and stop taking part in that sport.

To recover the original meaning of the amateur spirit also helps us to rethink and reflect the relationship between athletes and their natural desire for external goods. While nowadays many put so much stress on the importance of “fair play” and “good sportsmanship” and try to implement them into our moral education system, perhaps one should also not forget the original meaning of the amateur spirit “to love”. To “love” sport is positive. This kind of love for sport is “selfless”. As Kretchmar (1998, pp. 32-33) noticed that ethics in games has not only to do with loving other athletes but also with loving sport. His own experience with baseball shows his deep “love” towards his own sport:

“Baseball can be cared for because it is antecedently and independently valuable and thus a thing that merits such attention, or because it is simply the object of selfless love and thus a thing that is embraced apart from its objective assets or liabilities. In either case, it (baseball, in this example) must be acknowledged as a concrete item in our world.

When we know that we have something to share and that something is either meritorious or a potential object of selfless care, we have at least a partial additional answer to the question of Why be ethical in the first place? In addition to pursuing excellence consistently, we have something worth taking care of, at least for today.”

This insight is very instructive. In our educative systems in sport, many of us have stressed much importance on “how” to be ethical in sport but we more or less ignore “why” we need these ethical principles or guidelines. Most of us might agree that the respect of rules, athletes, and games are surely necessary in keeping sport in healthy circumstance, nevertheless, that seems to be incomplete, if we are determined to wipe out unethical behaviour in sport. We can surely support commonly acceptable fair play norms that, according to Loland (1998, p. 99), “when voluntarily engaged in sport competitions, keep the shared ethos of the practice as long as the ethos does not violate basic ethical principles and includes a sense of fairness”. However, we do not seem to have enough reasons to force any participant to keep this kind of shared ethos without considering her/his attitude, intention or motivation towards sport.

Here, comes the need for education for those participants. But purely to implement this fair play norm to those participants is not enough since there is no guarantee that anything unethical will happen in sport if participants’ attitudes towards sport are not considered. It is here that we need one more essential element for doing sport. That is, only if we develop and cultivate participants’ pure and selfless “love” towards sports, can sport be preserved for its better integrity. With this “passion” as a premise, it is unlikely that the valued characteristics of fair play and good sportsmanship would be mere “indoctrination”.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to recover the original meaning of the amateurism in sport, namely just to “love” the game for its own sake. This spirit is not only related to a “state of mind” and a “passion” but also a “pattern of behaviour” for doing sport. Therefore, some misconceptions can also be

clarified: amateurism should not be seen as a means to distinguish social class; it should not be restricted; it does not have to be against professionalism; it does not oppose necessary financial support for an athlete to participate in sport; and it does not reflect athletes' status.

Secondly, I have shown that although the IOC and other sports governing bodies have abolished amateur rules, this does not mean that amateur spirit no longer exists in our sports society. On the contrary, it still exists in most of the non-competitive sports activities and some competitive sports. At the same time, the concept of sport has also been addressed.

Lastly, the moral meaning of the amateur spirit helps us to rethink the relationship between athletes and their natural desire for external goods. It also gives us a minimum reason regarding why we need ethics in sport. While nowadays many stress so much the importance of "fair play" and "good sportsmanship" and try to implement them in our moral education system, one should not forget the original meaning of the amateurism, "to love". To "love" sport is positive. Without this "passion" as a premise, "fair play" and "good sportsmanship" could be just as well "indoctrination" which has less strength in our moral education system.

In both professional and amateur sports, whatever the material incentives to the participant are, it is the sportsman's own passion for her/his game that is of ultimate importance. It is argued that amateur spirit has not vanished yet and it is still in some people's mind and action. It can still be defended, if we believe in it and cultivate it in the right way!

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