

# That you act justly . . .

[Br John Deeney](#)

## Who's winning?

Sport is not quite the same as a battle. In the latter the opposition might well be killed, or 'neutralised' in modern jargon. In sport the participants agree to play according to a set of rules, desire to live healthily to play again another day and, it is to be hoped, they respect the efforts of their opponents. Bill Shankley famously said that football was not a matter of life and death, it was much more important than that. But now matters of life and death are becoming publicly linked with the Olympics and the rules to do with sporting events are under pressure.

Should we mix politics and sport? Or human rights and sport? The need for extreme protests probably arises almost always because other means of expression are stifled. If you cannot campaign for human rights without being arrested, if you do not have the freedom to live and to express your religion or culture without being oppressed, then you probably will feel desperate to have these injustices acknowledged and redressed.

And there is surely a place for restrained and non-violent protest in ways which will highlight the issues concerned. Life and death, for most of us, is much more important than sport.

China does need to be put under pressure to change its record on human rights at home as well as some of its dubious involvement with Burma and African regimes. We can sign petitions, demonstrate and use our spending power to apply economic pressure. (See [www.avaaz.org](http://www.avaaz.org) – Save the Olympics.) Protest, however, should not degenerate into a hate campaign. If we feel great sympathy for the figure of the Dalai Lama and the predicament of the Tibetan people (and other minorities), we should also be able to recognise the difficulties of modern China and encourage its positive moves. It is not so long since the cruelty and madness of the Chairman Mao era. Since then the country has endeavoured to find a saner path, to modernise and to establish a more responsible political system. There are now obviously huge problems there to do with urbanisation, industrialisation, environmental pollution as well as the more spiritual task of trying to bring unity and purpose to an enormous and very varied human population. The publicity that surrounds the Beijing Olympics should also be able to acknowledge the efforts and achievements in the less contentious areas – or what can we expect for London in 2012?

## Enjoy – a bit less a bit more

Sitting on a rock on a mountain top in the Lake District

tucking into cheese sandwiches and admiring the view can be a delectable experience. Sitting in the Dorchester Hotel with the same cheese sandwiches and a water bottle while all around were being royally fed would not be quite such a delight. An Indian man was quoted recently as saying, "What hurts is not so much the poverty as the inequality." He was referring to his own country where there are extremes of wealth and poverty in close proximity. But I think the sentiment is one that we could well apply to our situation at the present time. Food prices are rising: probably we have all noticed by now. For many of us that will be inconvenient. For the greater part of humanity it will be real problem. In the UK we would typically spend about 15% of our income on food and can easily find a bit more if necessary. In Africa that figure is in the range of 40-50% or more and people then struggle to find the extra even to purchase their staple foods. It is crucial for us to ask whether we even think about the consequences for other people? Does it matter? Should we/can we do anything about it? "Well, it's too big a problem for me to solve." If that is our response then I would suggest that we are missing something. Should we not at least restrict our consumption or expenditure out of solidarity with the less well off? And aim to waste less? The Dorchester would be a more comfortable place for the cheese sandwich eater if the other guests were dining on mashed potato and omelette – and if they could spare a glass of something tasty for the water-drinker.



Should we/can we do anything about it? "Well, it's too big a problem for me to solve." If that is our response then I would suggest that we are missing something. Should we not at least restrict our consumption or expenditure out of solidarity with the less well off? And aim to waste less? The Dorchester would be a more comfortable place for the cheese sandwich eater if the other guests were dining on mashed potato and omelette – and if they could spare a glass of something tasty for the water-drinker.

## How not to behave

More pressure on religious schools and the reasons why many do well. A government (DCSF) survey on the use of the new admissions code named a number of faith schools as breaking the rules. The DCSF later had to admit that some of its statements were wrong (so everyone can make mistakes). What was stranger was that one school was criticised for saying that it expected new students entering the 6<sup>th</sup> Form from other schools to adhere to "high standards of behaviour and attendance", thus breaking a prohibition on taking account of behaviour when awarding places. That sounds to me like political correctness tying itself in knots.

## World Debt Day

This is set for May 16<sup>th</sup>. There is also an event at Birmingham on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May. Information from: [www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk](http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk)