



I. FAIR PLAY – WHERE DOES IT COME FROM? WHAT IS IT?

Fair play is a term that is employed in various ways. Although mainly associated with sporting vocabulary, it is also applied to different situations where people either get along or confront each other (in politics, at work, in traffic, etc.). But what do we really mean when we use this expression? What are its origins? Has it always been linked to sport?

Some etymology...

The word "fair" comes from medieval English, in which it meant "beautiful", "pleasant", "pure" or "immaculate". Its first appearance (1205) was in reference to the weather. From the 14th century onwards, the adjective began to be used in the figurative sense, encompassing the idea of rightness. The word "fair" has been associated with sport since the mid-19th century. Thus things that were "fair" were those that were beautiful, both aesthetically and morally.

The word "play" also came from medieval English, and meant "to occupy oneself in a physical activity, frolic, make music". "Swordplay", referring to fencing, was its first use linked to physical activities.

Put together, the words *fair* and *play* appear for the first time in Shakespeare's *King John*. They are used in a sense similar to that which we still use today: referring to the courteous rapport between opponents in confrontation.

*"Shall we, upon the footing of our land,
Send fair play orders and make compromise [...]?"
Shakespeare, King John, V, I.*

Since the 19th century, the word has frequently been used in relation to the acceptance of rules and traditions associated with the games practised particularly by the British ruling classes. Certain expressions show to what extent the practice of a sport was bound up with a fair play attitude: for example, the use of "*That's not cricket!*" to mean "*That's not fair!*"



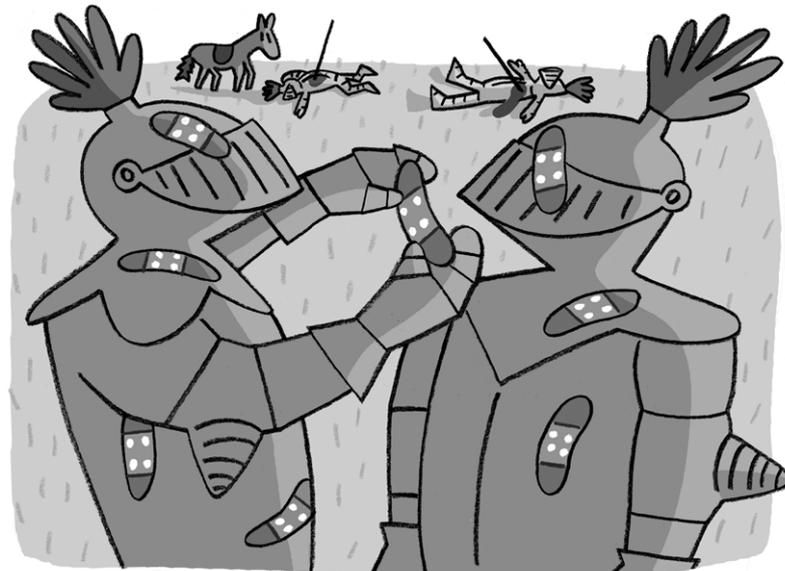
- > Knowing the origin of a word can help to better understand its meaning
- > **Look up** the following words in an etymological dictionary (one which gives the history of words):
Sport, game, performance, competition.
- > **Discuss** the results.

Some history...

Fair play and chivalrous tradition

Fair play is a western notion. Its origins can be traced back to the Middle Ages, to the period of knights. Knights were expected to live by a **code of conduct (chivalry)** which entailed military, social and religious responsibilities. In his work, the *Book of the Order of Chivalry* (~ 1265), the philosopher Raymond Lully lists the principles of the chivalrous ideal. Here are some examples:

- never attack an unarmed enemy;
- demonstrate self-discipline;
- be courageous in word and deed;
- avenge the offended; defend the weak and the innocent;
- never abandon a friend, an ally or a noble cause;
- keep your word, and remain true to your principles;
- have good manners, apply the laws of propriety, respect your host, authority and women;
- be faithful to God, the sovereign, his kingdom and his code; show respect towards authority and the law;
- be generous and hospitable to strangers;
- avoid pride, lechery, false oaths and treachery.



THE SPIRIT OF CHIVALRY
The origin of fair play

Little by little, the ideals of chivalry lost their military and religious connotations. The nobles, progressively deprived of their military functions, became nostalgic for the age when they were knights. This longing for a bygone era meant that certain values were transferred into the physical activities they practised outside of a military context – for

example, in jousts.

"In the art of arms, if one causes an opponent's arm to fall, one should pick it up promptly and return it to him politely."

Pierre Massuet, *Science des personnes de cour, d'épée et de robe*, 1752



> **Look up** the name of a knight from the Middle Ages (eg. Lancelot, Tristan, Palomedes) and **write** a description of him: **What** was he good at? **Why** did he become famous? **What** qualities was he recognised for?



> **Discuss** the Code of Chivalry proposed by Lully. Could this Code still be used today? **Which** parts of the Code do you find old-fashioned? **Why**?

> **Summarise** the Code using values to replace the phrases.

Fair play and sporting tradition

The transfer of values continued with the development of sports practised in the 19th century by the aristocrats and gentlemen who succeeded the knights. These people were amateurs, that is, people who had enough money not to have to work. Chivalrous values, inculcated into the representatives of this social class, thus became important in the practice of the sports they played.

In British colleges, sport was part of the educational programme, along with the moral values attributed to it such as fair play. Pierre de Coubertin was particularly impressed by this during his trips to England and North America. It reminded him of the chivalrous spirit, and at the same time made him see sport's educational potential.



> **PIERRE DE COUBERTIN**
(1863-1937)

Founder of the Olympic Movement and the modern Olympic Games.

"In our view, the Olympic idea is the concept of a strong physical culture based in part on the spirit of chivalry – which you here [in England] so pleasantly call "fair play," and in part on the aesthetic idea of the cult of what is beautiful and graceful".

Pierre de Coubertin, in *Selected Writings*, p. 588



> **Make** two columns. In the first one, **list** the sports you think have a certain aristocratic connotation. **Research** each sport briefly, then **explain** why you feel it is linked to a specific social class.

> **Do the same thing** with the sports you think are more popular.



> **Compare** the contents of the two columns and **discuss** your results.

> **What role** does fair play appear to have in each case ?

Fair play, a value lauded by Olympism

Coubertin's conception of chivalry should be seen as typical of a historical period in which chivalrous values (heroism, devotion, loyalty and bravery) were idealised, to the extent where they became myths that greatly affected western mentality thereafter.

The 19th century perception of Antiquity can be viewed in a similar light. The Greek athlete was considered a role model. The Games held in Olympia were an example to follow. Less ideal aspects, such as cheating, violence, and the importance placed on victory, were therefore disregarded.

However, Olympism has not only inherited an idealised past. With the modern Olympic Games, Coubertin hoped to show that the practice of sport could contribute to improving the quality of life and human development. He also hoped that sport would convey certain values.

These ideas were at the origin of the fundamental principles of the Olympic Charter.

The emotional appeal of the rituals and ceremonies in Olympic culture also play an important role in the symbolic transmission of values lauded by Olympism.



FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLES

Fair play – a shared value



> EXTRACT FROM THE CHARTER

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"Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles."

Principle no. 1

"The practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practising sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play. The organisation, administration and management of sport must be controlled by independent sports organisations."

Principle no. 4



> OLYMPIC PROTOCOL

- five interlaced rings;
- a flag;
- a motto;
- a torch relay;
- an oath;
- highly-codified Games opening and closing ceremonies.

Are these elements enough to guarantee the application of the values on the field of play? Can a fair-play attitude be acquired through simply practising sport or participating in the Olympic Games?



> **Identify** the meaning of the Olympic rings, then **link** it to Principle 4 of the Charter. **Explain** how these rings can symbolise values.

Do you think there is a link between the rings and the notion of fair play?



> **Identify** the highlights of a Games opening ceremony. **What** emotions do such rituals provoke? **What** messages are conveyed?