

Fritz Leutwiler on sport

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Fritz Leutwiler on sport

He looks as if he is in the mid-fifties, drives a snazzy Porsche and talks lucidly, tersely and – on sport too – with authority: Fritz Leutwiler, 63, Chairman of the Board of Brown, Boveri & Co. since 1985. In spring, the company was renamed BBC Brown Boveri AG.

Until the end of 1984 he held the high office of President of the Governing Board of the Swiss National Bank, the central bank for which he had been active 32 years long, being regarded as its supreme currency custodian. «Fritz the Great» and the «Eighth Federal Councillor», they have called him; and many people have described this self-made man as as the «best-known Swiss abroad».

Sport was always one of Leutwiler's favourite subjects. On his mother's side, he came from a football-crazy family and he grew up in Baden (just a stone's throw from BBC) where from his garden the family could follow the matches played on the old

pointed with the Swiss footballers because, unlike in other «professions» the income-performance relationship is not quite right. In a private undertaking, such as they wouldn't be able to keep their jobs for long».

He immediately qualifies this however: «It's the fault of the officials, of course, who are not managers and who are not noted for any particular sense of responsibility. We should look after the young players better. I regard it as humanely irresponsible not to insist that they complete a trade apprenticeship. And I find it», he adds, alluding to the example of Alain Sutter, «grotesque that we sign on «apprentices» who learn nothing outside football. It must become a precondition in Switzerland that every young footballer be obliged to learn a vocation».

In addition, according to Fritz Leutwiler, players must be paid on performance and with a modest fixed salary.

Further, we should give the public some-

and I've had enough of the ballyhoo. Tomorrow, there will doubtless be yet another skier who, at the finish, quickly takes off his boots to do some advertising for them».

Leutwiler is no jogger but he swims a lot. As a winger in soccer, he turns his innate swiftness to good account. And he also likes bicycling (on a racing bike) «because that's also elegant». But, above all, he plays golf – as a member of the Zumikon Golf Club. Yet even towards this sport he has quite another relationship than most golfers (which is again typical of his self-will). «I am not obsessed by it, I don't take it dead seriously and I don't like those grim players who get annoyed, because, on a week-end, I simply refuse to get upset about a game that should relax me. So I often prefer just to sit in the garden on a Sunday and read a book rather than go to the golf course».

Even though golf in Switzerland is still «unfortunately» an élite sport («the atmosphere on the golf links in the USA is quite different»), he finds it fascinating, educationally significant – «because golf is a humiliating game; suddenly you fall far behind or you pick up again but you never know the why and the wherefores».

Leutwiler praises team sport, which teaches both initiative and subordination which, in the same team, brings people of varying social and ideological background closer together; and which thus fulfils the function of an important social and personal link between them. But he also grumbles about the fact that young people get so «ruthlessly burned out that, at 30, they become either invalids or duffers». Perhaps, too, because they are «intellectually not up to coping with the enormous increase in earnings at an early age and are often taken advantage of or exploited by «advisers»».

«It seems to me that one of the most important things to do», he says, «is to assign mentors to help them: trusted, unselfish (and expert) counsellors to guide them in such questions and to chaperon them, as it were, almost like a kindly father, or guardian».

In Fritz Leutwiler's eyes, this is today not only one of the main problems of competitive sport and one of the great failings of the club managers, but also a matter of tremendous importance for the social standing of sport and its stars. «For I am interested, above all, in what becomes of a youngster, what we really do for him and his future, so that later he can cope with his, or her, new life».

Walter Lutz (condensed from «Sport»).



Amateur-footballer Leutwiler: at 63, still right on the ball (right: former Federal Councillor Kurt Furgler).

Baden Football Club field and where a salute would be fired to every BFC goal from an old cannon which stood there. But in the mid-1930s soccer was either not yet or no longer socially acceptable. Leutwiler could not join a football club: «I still regret it to this day; it was just something that passed me by». In the local school and later at the gymnasium «only handball was played; football was forbidden, and I had no other possibility because unorganized games were of no interest for an active member of a fraternity».

«Football is still the finest and most fascinating team sport» for Leutwiler. He watches every great match. And he even bought a video-recorder before the world championships in Mexico. Yet he is «disap-

thing («more playing than booting»), for football should also be entertainment and relaxation, should give expression to a certain elegance (Brazil, France) and should be an aesthetic pleasure.

A sponsor, too, does a cost-benefit analysis. Indeed, confronted by the wretched mismanagement of many clubs, he has got to be distrustful when officials allow themselves to be ruled too much by business and too little by play. For this simply triggers a chain reaction (falling gates) leading to a vicious circle you can no longer escape from.

However, in contrast to the big athletics and track-and-field meetings on the TV screen, Leutwiler no longer cares to watch ski racing. «That's pure circus; I really dislike it. I'm fed up with forever the same pictures,