

SPORTS

by MANUEL RAMOS OCHOA
Sports Editor

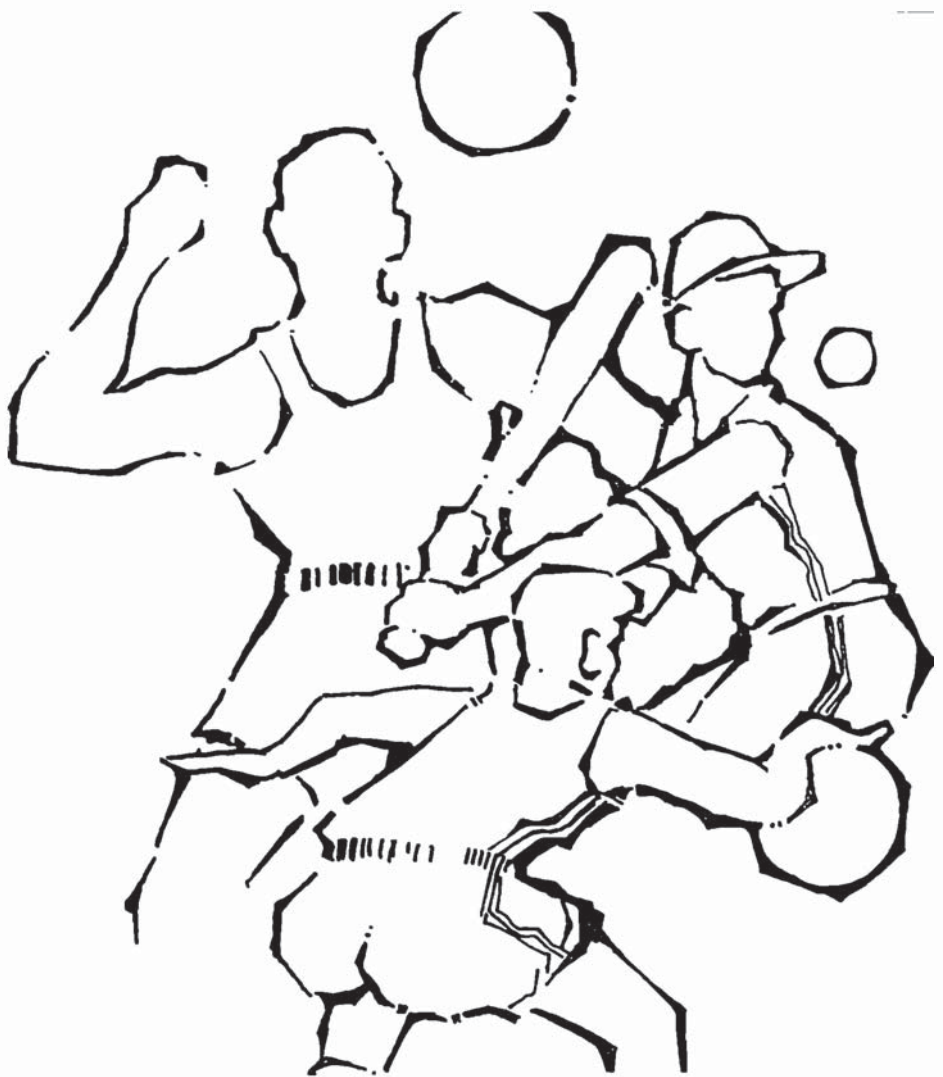
Local sports has indeed taken a deep dive since that debacle in the Rome Olympics.

There was time when the Filipinos were the unrivaled kings in Asia and a power threat in world sports. We had had our share of glory, fate denies it to us now. Or is it? Our athletes used to swagger on the hardwood and raise their heads in haughty grandeur. Time has changed the faces of the victors. Everybody seems to be getting in the "swaggerin" act. The Japanese, Indonesians and Koreans are out-swaggering us. We had every right to do that then. Basketball was our chosen religion. And kings we were. In the 1954 world Basketball in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Philippine team stopped three notches short of the top. The world was stunned and people everywhere stood in awe and respect for the brown supermen who played like they were not scared of the devil himself. There were the Loyzagas, the Mumars, the Manulats, the Tolentinos, the Ballesteros, etc. Twelve years have passed. Now everybody else in the world is browbeating us. The Asians are stepping on our toes and, worse, the Europeans are knocking us cross-eyed and bow-legged. Canada, whom we beat in Brazil, licked us in 1962 right under our noses. Let's call a spade a spade. Basketball is not for us "kids". We're through. [Kaput!]

Baseball had its great moments, too. Men, like Jarop Ilo, Briones, Oncinian, etc., placed the Philippines in the baseball map and made a sorry mess of the slit-eyed and yellow-skinned beings dwelling in the lands north of the Philippines. Just imagine: the national team beating the Japanese nine in their homeground, a Filipino smashing a home-run after he steals the catcher's signal. It seemed incredible, but true.

Today, baseball has been relegated to a sport mainly for the balding and the grey-haired. Even the fans are the old fanatics of baseball. They come to ball park dragging and bribing their little ones along in a vague hope to turn their innocent minds to play ball. A very noble gesture! It is interesting, though sad, to see on week-ends fathers booing, cheering and yelling their hearts out at ball games in the Rizal Memorial diamond, with little boys oblivious of what is happening in the ball park. An American spectator once shook his head in disgust and remarked: "Fer crissake, baseball is dead out here".

Like baseball, tennis has become a sport for old timers. This statement is very self-evident that only the uninformated contradicts. Who played in this year's Davis Cup ties? Felicisimo Ampon and Rey Deyro, of course. There's no denying their skill and courage. Ampon, the greatest Filipino racket-welder, was once considered one of the world's best, pound for pound and Rey Deyro is undoubtedly one of the finest. But age is one's greatest enemy. There will come a time, no matter how hard a man will try, when skill and endurance will vanish and only courage will remain,



REQUIEM FOR PHILIPPINE SPORTS

If we are all aware of the critical state our sports is in. Then why hasn't there been anything done about it? Is it because we live so snug and comfortable in self-satisfaction? Is it because the youth had developed a love for the soft life and had deserted the Philippines? Or is it because our officials are strictly all-talk and no-action bums?

Whether the first, the second or the third, all seems to be the right questions.

We are so self-conscious and so self-centered that we forget about our country. That's what all seem to be doing. If there's any "self" to be spoken about, it should be self-sacrifice. Without self-sacrifice there will be no patriotism. And without patriotism, there'll be no progress. It is love for country that makes Japan one of the greatest in the world of sports.

And what of the youth? The Filipino youth has preferred the life of mimicry than sports. There's nothing wrong with imitating. It's just that it has reached the point of excessiveness. Too much of anything is poison. If the teenagers are so good in mimicry why can't they utilize it in the right direction. Why not imitate the American teen-agers ripping world-swimming,

track and field records, etc. Though, of course, it will take more time, effort and discipline to break records than grooming mop-hairs or wearing turtle-neck sweatshirts in hot weather. Think, not only of the personal glory but the honor that will be bestowed on the Philippines. But, of course, the young won't have anything of this sort. Let's not take them away from their Jam sessions, jerkings, "jala-jalaings" and drinking sprees. Let them be. They might even establish a record. World's fastest jerker. A Filipino sets world mark by guzzling two kegs of beer with a tremendous time of 19: 1. 3. Or a world's record of imitating nine foreign pop-singers in 6.8 seconds. Phew! That's something. They aren't softies or cuties after all. Who says they are?

Triumph is fast becoming a rarity in our country. It is only a thing of the past. Progress is a mere fantasy and dream. A dream that will never come to life unless there's no action. We don't have to be pushed by anybody. We can push ourselves to action. It's been done before and it can be done again. Gabriel "Flash" Elorde, the saviour of Philippine sports, has held sports on a slender thread. After Da Flash's retirement, who next?