

## FOCUS

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

## Muhammad Ali, the Greatest Sportsman of the Century

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

*America, which had prevented Ali from practising his trade for three and a half years of his prime, honoured Ali by letting him light the Olympic torch at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. Corporate America is going to honour Muhammad Ali, the Sportsman of the Century, by letting him ring the opening bell at Wall Street on the final trading day of the Century and the millennium!*

On December 2, America's premier sports magazine, Sports Illustrated, telecast on CBS television a programme from Madison Square Garden, New York, honouring the greatest sports personalities of the century. The function featured such old and new mega-celebrities as Pele and Tiger Woods, Wayne Gretzky (Ice Hockey), Michael Jordan (Basketball), Carl Lewis (Olympics), Babe Ruth (Baseball), Babe Didrikson (outstanding female athlete) and Jack Nicklaus (golf) were adjudged the Best of the Century in their individual sports. The Sports personality of the century, the sportsman who topped all other sportsman was Muhammad Ali. The show would have been faree had anyone else been chosen.

In a sports well known for viscous checks and fistcuffs, (hence the joke, "I went to a boxing match and a hockey match broke out!"), Wayne Gretzky, "the Great One", stood apart. He was all skinny and finesse. There were other great hockey players; Gordie Howe, Bobby Orr and Mario Lemieux, among them. But no one approached Gretzky's speed, grace and the uncanny ability to read the defence and score goals. The writer was fortunate enough to watch Gretzky, a native of suburban Toronto, Canada, for his entire hockey career (1978-99). He broke into the league with Edmonton Oilers, winning four Stanley Cup Championships, before transferring to Los Angeles Kings (1988), almost winning another Championship in 1993, and finally finishing his career with the New York Rangers this year. In the 21 years he was in the league, Gretzky broke or established 61 scoring records, scoring nearly 1000 goals. No doubt Wayne Gretzky is the Ice Hockey Player of the Century.

The writer was surprised at the selection of Carl Lewis as the best Olympian of the century. Not because he did not deserve it — he certainly did, according to this writer — but because he receives such bad press in America. (Lewis is revered in the rest of the world.) Popular vote could not have elected him; the selectors were the editors of Sports Illustrated. It all started during the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics when Carl Lewis was attempting to match the legendary Jesse Owens's 4-gold medal winning performance of the 1936 Berlin Olympics (100, 200 metres, long jump and 4X100 metres relay). Because he had to run or jump every day, his coach asked him to conserve energy! But the press wanted him to take all his jumps and attempt to break all the records. Lewis kept to his coach's plan. The press was furious and that was the genesis of Lewis's bad press.

Of course, Lewis won four gold medals in Los Angeles matching Owens, and added five more at the Seoul, Barcelona and Atlanta Olympics.

Lewis is the only male sprinter to win 100 metres in two successive Olympics, the long jump at four successive Olympics, and is only the second athlete to win selection to the US Olympic team five different times (19-year old Lewis was a member of 1980 US Olympic team in long jump. America boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympic because of Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.) Lewis had tough competition from Jesse Owens himself, Al Oerter, who like Lewis won his event, the discus, in four successive Olympics (1956, 60, 64, 68) and Mark Spitz, who won seven swimming gold medals in 1972 Munich Olympics. However,

Then there was Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (born Lew Alcindor, before embracing Islam in the late 1960s), who scored about 39,000 points, 9000 more than anyone else. He also won the world championship six times and the most valuable player six times. Instead of relying on the bang, Kareem, the gentle giant, relied on finesse and the unstoppable sky hook. With his no-look pass and the sheer enthusiasm for passing instead of scoring, nominee Magic Johnson, Kareem's teammate, introduced the concept of "show time" not only in the Los Angeles Laker's arena, but in basketball courts throughout America.

They said that the only white basketball nominee, Larry Bird, was too slow, and as a non-jumper had no future in the league. Instead, Bird redefined the power forward position, demonstrating that jumping ability was less important than positioning, and taught

everyone that winning required even a superstar to pass the ball to someone in a better position to score. Nominee Oscar Robertson was the Willie Mays of basketball. He invented the triple-double — he would routinely score in double figures in points, rebounds and assists. His gravity-defying dunks, six championships in six attempts, countless scoring titles aside, Michael Jordan, "His Airness" is the one player the Airness has seen who could single-handedly take over a team game.

In the category of a sportsman's contribution to his sports, golf legend Jack Nicklaus won. That was fine except that Muhammad Ali too was nominated for the award. As Jack Nicklaus stepped up to accept the award, there was a chorus of "Ali, Ali" in the background. Jack Nicklaus, an alumnus of the Ohio State University like Jesse Owens, certainly deserves to be the Golfer of the Century. However, Jack cannot win when up against the Greatest of All Time. Poor Jack! A life long promoter of diversity on the golf courses, in 1994 he made the unfortunate remark that the reason why African-Americans were not prominent in golf is because of their "muscle structure." Only three years later Tiger Woods came along and smashed all of Nicklaus's records at golf's prestigious Masters tournament!

There has been notable omissions. There is no way Pele is not the Footballer of the Century.

I would take him to finish runner-up to Muhammad Ali. Starting as a 17-year old boy at the 1958 World Cup at Sweden, through World Cup Championships in 1962 and 1970, Pele not only mesmerised opponents and fans for two decades, he

underwent long periods of intern-

TOM & JERRY



By Hanna-Barbera

IT'S GOOD TO KNOW THE CANNONS STILL WORK.

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was the writer's privilege to see Ali in person for the first time in June, 1974 when he attended a fight at Madison Square Garden between Joe Frazier and the late Jerry Quarry.

If Ali had come on the scene fifteen years earlier and expressed the same strong opinions he would probably have been lynched to death. If he came fifteen years later, his views would have been routine. Ali's rise coincided with Dr. Martin Luther King's civil rights movement for the emancipation of the African Americans. Ali became a part and parcel of the movement. His refusal to fight in Vietnam was extremely popular with the young conscription-age white students; he became a most sought after speaker on college campuses. By demanding that he be paid most of the money from fights, because he was the star not the promoter, Ali paved the way for the current crop of superstars to earn mega-bucks.

In his "Sportsman of the Century" acceptance speech, Ali began, "all praise be to Allah," and thanked his fans. The writer had not heard Ali speak for fifteen years, since he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Ali, the writer's greatest hero, had transcended his sports a long time ago to become a worldwide cult figure. From the philosopher Bertrand Russell to the Beatles, Ali was everyone's hero. The Beatles met Ali at his training camp in Miami before his first bout with Liston in 1964. "You are not as dumb as you look," Ali teased the Fab Four. "But, you are!" the late John Lennon taunted back! Bertrand Russell was so stunned by Ali's willingness to sacrifice his career rather than fight in Vietnam that he corresponded with him regularly till his death in 1970. "You surprise them," Russell wrote to Ali once about the American government, against which he had assembled a War Crimes Tribunal in Sweden. After learning who Russell was, Ali apologised to Russell for greeting him in his customary flippant manner in his first letter ("You are not as dumb as you look!"). The literature Nobel laureate wrote back saying that he actually enjoyed Ali's teasing!

In a sport known for brawn, Ali introduced brain. In a sport known for brutality, Ali introduced compassion; often he would ask the referee to stop a fight rather than knock out a helpless opponent and stand over him gladiator-style. In a society that decreed that the blacks be subservient, Ali was defiant; when blacks were expected to be Christians, Ali converted to Islam; when blacks athletes were supposed to be grateful for bread crumbs, Ali demanded the whole bread!

America is a better place today because of people like Muhammad Ali. Louisville, Kentucky, Ali's hometown which refused him entry into its white restaurants even after he won the 1960 Olympic gold medal (in disgust Ali threw his medal into the Ohio River), has renamed the city's main thoroughfare, "Muhammad Ali Boulevard."

America, which had prevented Ali from practising his trade for three and a half years of his prime, honoured Ali by letting him light the Olympic torch at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. The International Olympic Committee replaced the gold medal that Ali had thrown into the Ohio River in anger. Corporate America is going to honour Muhammad Ali, the Sportsman of the Century, by letting him ring the opening bell at Wall Street on the final trading day of the Century and the millennium!

electronic equipment, because private servicing centres are not familiar with digital troubleshooting and repairs. This lag will always be there; the target is to reduce the gap.

The subject of training is too vast to cover in this short introduction. The point at stress is to plan and strengthen schemes for the "Training of Trainers," in addition to the training of the trainees. Unless the base is established at an early stage, the later structure on a short or weak base will cause many problems in this age of technology.

Some sectors, such as electronics, are very high-tech and modern; therefore maintenance becomes a big problem in the LDCs. For example, now digital technology has replaced the analogue engineering in electronic equipment used in the DCs at home, office or factory.

But the training of technical staff in digital technology, maintenance and repairs, cannot keep pace with the market load. While the hundreds of motor workshops in Dhaka can somehow keep the automobiles running (note the number of under-age staff), there are big problems in the servicing of

Administrations must be

sensitive to the BMRE concept

— look at the pathetic condition of the SOEs under GoB, which can neither run itself nor compete (loss-incurring enterprises).

The culture has to change, and more professionalism has to be introduced in the public sector at the vertical and lateral stages. The basic point is training, in various kinds and degrees.

## Hail the Month of Self-Purification

by Kazi Aulad Hossain

*Siyam does mean fasting and fasting means abstention from food and drink, but unless such abstinence is coupled with glorification of Almighty Allah and supplication to Him for achieving self-purification fasting for a period of 30 days from dawn to dusk is like a fruit without kernel or a rose without scent.*

We are aware that when vast areas are inundated owing to the onslaught of flood then there happens to be scarcity of pure drinking water, then the concerned authorities start distributing water purification tablets among the flood affected people. And these small tablets work like life-saving drugs. In the same way, fasting or 'Siyam' for a prescribed number of days cleanses the 'sick' or 'ailing' inner being of a human, particularly of a Muslim.

Now let us see what we understand by the word 'Siyam'. It may be mentioned here that the grand edifice of Islam stands on 5 'Rokons' (pillars) viz: (1) 'Iman' (faith), (2) 'Salat' (formal prayer 5 times a day), (3) 'Siyam' (fasting), (4) 'Zaka' (dua of the poor) and (5) 'Hajj' (pilgrimage). The literal meaning of Siyam is fasting which is one of the five strong 'rokons' of Islam. And usually by fasting we mean abstinence from food, drink etc. A Muslim's fast is not, however, only abstinence from food, drink etc. during certain fixed number of days from dawn to dusk. It is also something else besides that. According to the interpretation of the relevant Ayat (verse) of Sura Baqara (the cow) of the holy Quran a Muslim must also simultaneously abstain from all evils, in any shape or form.

It transpires from Ayats 183 and 184 of Sura Baqara of the holy Quran that Benign Allah is very considerate. If any one is ill or on a journey then he is advised to make up the prescribed number of days from days later. And if one has to fast with hardship then for him is a ransom and that ransom is that he is required to feed an indigent person for each fasting day that he missed. While abstaining from food and drink for certain hours of the day Muslims prepare themselves during this holy month of Ramadhan to attain self-purification and blessing of Benign Allah through prayer, contemplation and acts of charity.

## Running the DCC

by A Husnain

How to run normally an established institution has become a problem in Bangladesh, due to excessive, and abnormal political activities even in the third decade since independence. This unusual phenomenon, centering on political instability, due to changing regimes, and discontinuity in long-term national policies, is a pestering bug in many nations in the Third World. The politicians, with all the good intentions, just cannot devote enough time and energy to the long-term problems of the nation, busy as they are taking up positions and creating openings in the playing field. This limits the vision, and forces the policy makers to go for options less than called for in public interest.

Ad hocism is introduced rather unwillingly, due to the forces of circumstances. The great advantage of the industrialised and established nations is that they operate from a solid foundation build up in a century or more. Now, during this century, the table has been turned, and migratory international policies have been introduced to keep the economy flowing, from the North to the South. That is why it is alleged that WTO is a one-way stop to prosperity.

This changing flux is a problem in both these worlds, but more so in the Third World, as the base or foundation is unstable, and the ability to resist international pressures are limited. Achieving national consensus is not that easy in the practical sense as it looks on paper, as Bangladeshis have well realised by now.

Coming back to the national institutions, erosion of the same take place in two main ways: internal corruption and polarised policies; the latter is a reflection of the central policy. In the case of the Dhaka City Corp, even with independent Mayoral election, the party im-

age and influence can neither be hidden or resisted. The negative sides are revealed first, starting with nepotism and favouritism. The rent-seeking business has a strong base in the DCs and LDCs; and it is accentuated in over-populated countries (it is personnel-driven). In the case of DCC, recent media exposure on gobbling up of the open land and water spaces in the metropolis is an example.

In the municipal corporations, where the Mayor belongs to the same party as that of the ruling regime, acts of omissions and commissions are more likely to be condoned than is justified by national interest. This results in systems loss, and erosion of accountability. The cycle continues with the change of regimes.

It is clear that a number of vicious circles operate in the less developing countries, and the administrations are polarised and weak, because the political will just cannot afford to be tough in most cases. The role of the Opposition is defeated by the establishment, and the former's nuisance value is seen in another light.

Overcrowded metropolitan cities will continue to suffer from maladministration, as short bursts of political will and consensus cannot sustain the complex system. Even non-politically, daily operational systems take a long time to stabilise, and the upkeep of periodic maintenance is as elusive as ever.

All these problems lead to one basic conclusion: lack of professional space to relax and ponder, and come back afresh to the job. There is that elusive environment known as professional security, not dependent directly on politics, but on infrastructural technical and administrative support services, which is so much lacking in the underdeveloped countries. DCC has to tighten its belt to perform.

## The World of Training

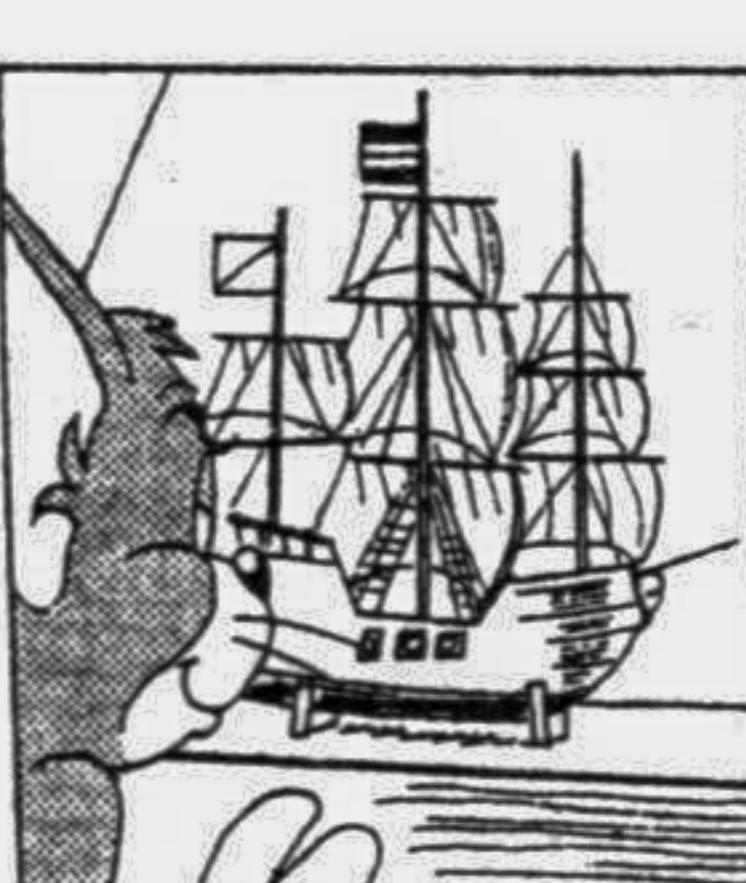
by A M M Aabid

*The science of training is in the background, and invisible, like the roots of a tree. What the people observe is the art of professional accomplishment.*

Professional and vocational training in the developing countries always lag behind current usage and practice. In a competitive market new technologies and techniques produce newer products and services. Therefore orientation courses is a part of any professional career. The trainers who train others need regular training of themselves to keep up-to-date. Hence there is a permanent need for "Training of Trainers" schemes in any recurring or operational budget. In the LDCs, keeping up with this type of regime is a formidable logistics exercise, without proper infrastructural support (administrative, technical, financial, and human resources).

It is a fallacy at the popular level to presume that the simple availability of funds can solve problems. Maintenance is a big invisible world behind the scenes, manned by trained personnel, who work on equipment during non-operational hours. They also work (checks, repairs,

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James Bond

BY IAN FLEMING

DRAWING BY HORAK

COME ON! WE CAN MAKE IT DOWN THIS CLIFF I THINK! IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!



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