Rule 51 of the Olympic Charter and FIFA Law 4 forbid any form of political or religious expression on the sports ground. This neutrality is being called into question by sports authorities. What line will they take, with the 30th Modern Olympic Games only 150 days away?

Modelled on the "Olympic truce" of ancient Greece, sporting competitions are designed to be a time of unity, over and above differences (political, religious, racial and sexual), with a shared goal of sporting excellence.

This immutable rule, enshrined in the Olympic Charter (Rule 51) and in all sporting regulations, has on many occasions served as the justification for interventions by the sports movement to preserve the neutrality of sport. It was not a question of adopting any position regarding the political and other messages expressed, but of preserving a specific space for sport (a time, a place and the same rules for everyone).

On 3rd March, sports authorities, in particular the International Football Association Board (IFAB), will have to make a decision on the question of wearing the hijab on the football pitch. This issue went through various twists and turns during 2011, and the IFAB must now decide.

The Sport and Citizenship think tank, without taking a position on the basic issue and the enormous interests at stake (ideological, geopolitical and economic), draws attention to the fact that the IFAB decision could in any case mark a turning point in the political history of sport: by reaffirming its neutrality, it would send out a strong message to the whole of the international community. By agreeing to change the rules, on the other hand, it would create a precedent which could have long-term consequences threatening its oft-claimed specificity.
Sport and Citizenship is the 1st European think tank devoted to the societal impact of sport. It is a forum for reflection and a source of recommendations for future sports policies. The association aims to promote the fundamental values of sport in society to public authorities, the economic sector, civil society and the media. More than a hundred European experts pursue multidisciplinary, cross-cutting reflection.

Let’s meet on sportetcitoyennete.com

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