

# GREAT BRITAIN AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES

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*The fact that the Olympic Games are to be held in Great Britain this year has naturally caused the greatest satisfaction among those engaged in every branch of British sport. Nowhere, however, is there greater satisfaction than among the countless thousands of the followers of the game of Association Football, more popularly known throughout the world as "Soccer", since Great Britain can justly claim to be the cradle of a game which is now played in almost every part of the world, in fact, wherever there is a piece of ground big enough for several enthusiasts to kick a ball about.*

*I am often asked what are the chances? of Great Britain in the forthcoming Olympic Tournament, and quite frankly I find it very difficult to provide an answer. We have had, of course, a wide experience of the Olympic Games, but a number of factors arising from World War II make it impossible with any degree of accuracy to assess our chances. Perhaps we can best arrive at some sort of conclusion by a brief survey of the period since Soccer was first introduced into the Olympic Games.*

*It was in 1908 that the first Olympic Football Tournament took place. In those far off days there were no international organisations such as F.I.F.A. and it was left to the initiative of the English Football Association to control and manage the Tournament. Having taken the initiative, its decisions on all matters were accepted as final and without appeal. We have advanced a long way since those days, and today the game is organised through national and international organisations which provide machinery for full discussion of the many problems which naturally arise when a game is played in so many different countries. Perhaps the English Football Association may be forgiven a sense of paternal pride when it sees the number of healthy offspring to which its early inspiration has given birth.*

*At the Tournament in 1908, each country competing was entitled to enter four teams, and they competed for a trophy presented by the English Football Association. As is to be expected, the Olympic records for the period show that Great Britain was then supreme in the football world, and the fact that a team composed entirely of players from English clubs defeated Denmark in the Final of this first Tournament by two goals to nil occasioned no surprise. History repeated itself at Stockholm in 1912, when a team similarly composed of players from English clubs again defeated Denmark in the Final, this time by four goals to nil. In looking through the records of the Football Association I discovered a Minute recorded at the time which gives an interesting sidelight on the dress which was worn at this particular Tournament. It reads — "It was decided to provide*

*blazers, straw hats and hat bands for the Representatives."*

*British amateur football was probably at its highest level during the years immediately prior to the First World War, and famous clubs such as the Corinthians and Queens Park were able to hold their own with the best professional sides. Individual players, too, were often to be found playing alongside professionals, and maintaining their places on the high standard of their play. This position was partially extended into the post-war period when the Corinthians, for instance, often made progress in the Cup Competition at the expense of some of the best professional clubs. Nevertheless, a definite decline had set in, and this was seen in the Olympic Football Tournament held at Antwerp in 1920.*

*On the occasion of the Antwerp Tournament the effect of this decline was seen in the check which Great Britain received to her supremacy in Olympic Football, her team being beaten by Norway by three goals to nil. It is not in the best interests of sport to make excuses for a well-earned defeat, but since we are concerned in attempting to assess Great Britain's chances in the forthcoming Tournament, we are justified, I think, in drawing lessons from this set-back. There were two main reasons for this set-back. The first was the undoubted effect of the First World War on Football in Britain. Many of the players who would normally have found places in an International team had either been killed or, if survivors, were in process of finding their way back again into civilian life with little time available for fitting themselves for football to international standard. Thus, players who might have been promising material had lost their skill through lack of opportunity for getting the "big match" atmosphere.*

*The other reason, and I record this with genuine appreciation, was the immense progress which other nations had made in Football, much of which was still primarily amateur. It is a consolation to British prestige to note, however, that this progress had been brought about by English coaches attached to Continental clubs who, over a period of years, had introduced the coaching methods upon which they themselves had been trained. All this led to an intensity of effort on the part of the Continentals to beat the English at their own game. As a matter of interest, this 1920 Tournament was won by Belgium.*

*Sixteen years were to pass before Great Britain again competed in Olympic Football. In the 1924 Games held at Paris, Great Britain did not enter a team because the four British Associations could not see eye-to-eye with the International Football Federation over the definition of an amateur. This unfortunate*

estrangement extended to the Games held at Amsterdam in 1928 when, once again, Great Britain did not enter a team. The Olympic Records present a picture of the intense interest aroused by Association Football during those years, and the results — both Finals being won by Uruguay — set the seal in no uncertain manner to the successful entry of the Americas into the realms of International Football.

In 1932, The Olympic Games were held in Los Angeles, and for the first time since 1908 there was no Football Tournament, and it was not until 1936, at Berlin, that Great Britain was once again matched in an Olympic Football Tournament. At Berlin, the lesson was learnt that if Great Britain was to hold her own against the strong challenge of her one-time pupils, more preparation and planning would be necessary. Great Britain was beaten in the Second Round by Poland by five goals to four, her conquerors losing to Austria by three goals to one in the next Round, and after extra time in the Final, Italy defeated Austria. From the performance of the British team it was apparent that they lacked practice as a team, and their individual ball control left much to be desired. The latter, however, was in part due to the fact that the Olympic matches were played in the British close season when the players had not touched a ball for some time.

At this point I would like to digress to deal with an aspect of pre-war International Football which occasioned considerable concern to a number of participating nations. It became apparent that two or three countries were using Football as a part of a political campaign, and the importance of winning matches was stressed at the expense of the true spirit which should alone inspire those participating in the Olympiad. Of course we all want to win matches, but it is senseless to pretend that the result of a game in any way reflects upon aspects of national life unassociated with, for instance, the playing of football.

Great Britain then, is eagerly looking forward to the forthcoming games as an opportunity for pitting her prowess against all-comers in a specific field of sport. It is obvious that if this challenge is to be met successfully, lessons learnt at Berlin in 1936 must be taken to heart, and already a number of important steps have been taken towards this end. Commencing with the young players, since 1945 an inter-County Football knock-out competition for Youth Teams has been organised in England. These young players have thus been given the opportunity of taking part in representative football with a view to getting them accustomed to the atmosphere of big matches. During the current season, these opportunities for big match play have been further extended by the inauguration of an International Youth Championship between the four British Associations, which provides a chance for young players to represent their respective countries. All this, of course, is a long-term policy, and it will be too soon to have any effect upon Great Britain's chances in this year's Olympiad.

Once again, then, those responsible for selecting a team to represent (h-eat Britain will be faced with many of the same problems which arose between the two World Wars. It is true that the Amateur leagues from which most of the players will be drawn, have had two seasons of competitive football, but generally speaking it cannot be claimed that the standard of play, although rapidly improving, is high enough in itself to provide experience of the kind of opposition which Great Britain will have to meet in the Olympiad. To provide this experience of big-match play, The Football Association has arranged an International Triangular Tournament which is additional to the normal programme of International and Representative matches. This new Tournament provides an opportunity to the Selectors to give experience to players on the borderline of International class without the risk of including them prematurely in full International teams.

I now come to what is probably the most important problem of all — training. Britain's normal social life has been greatly disturbed by the supreme effort which her workers of all classes are being called upon to put into the Nation's drive for increased production, and such adjustments as the introduction of staggered hours, make the planning of consistent training extremely difficult. Nearer the time of the Olympic Tournament, however, it is hoped to be able to call together the best amateurs throughout Great Britain to undergo intensive training, probably being assisted by some full International players. This training, under the control of an experienced team manager would do much, I am sure, to weld a team together with the necessary skill and confidence to put up a hard fight against opponents from any part of the world.

All this leads me to an emphasis of the fact that we in Great Britain are taking the Olympic Games as seriously as present circumstances will allow. We appreciate that all our possible opponents have reached a standard of play which will demand the very best we can produce if we are to stand a chance of regaining our former supremacy in Olympic Football. Thus our policy for 1948 is directed towards hard work allied to long-term planning. The effectiveness of this policy cannot be judged until the 1948 Games are over, but even if we do not achieve our aim this year, I feel sure that 1948 will mark the first step towards our goal.

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Stanley Rous.