

AFTER THE GAMES OF THE XIVth. OLYMPIAD

LONDON 1948

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It became obvious in very short order that the passage of a decade and the shattering experiences of the greatest war in world history had done nothing to smooth the rugged path laid out for those who would organize a celebration of the Olympic games. The world was greatly changed, but the human race remained pretty much the same.

Tremendous problems, from the very beginning, began to develop ahead of the Vth Winter Olympics at St. Moritz and were, as time proved, to create difficulties of unusual magnitude. And, for the games of the XIVth Olympiad, things were by no means going smoothly.

Even though the chairmanship for the London games was in the hands of an outstanding citizen, Lord David Burghley, opposition arose. The former Olympic 400-meter-hurdle champion, who had served with distinction in numerous posts during the war, climaxing with the post of governor general of Bermuda, found that British opinion was by no means unanimous in support of the games.

Times were difficult, money was tight, housing was short, food and transport were tightly rationed, and there was strong opposition from certain quarters in politics and in the press. In addition to these conditions at the site of the games, a similar situation, varying only in degree, prevailed over much of the world, providing ammunition for those who opposed the games.

One of the oldest problems—Sunday competition—arose and had to be dealt with. As far back as 1900, when the great American athlete Alvin Kraenzlein returned from winning four championships at the games of the IIInd Olympiad at Paris, his reception was not unanimously favorable, although his individual feats were not to be duplicated for a score of years. He was, as a matter of historic fact, publicly denounced in Philadelphia for having participated in one of the championships that took place on a Sunday.

In 1924, at the games of the VIIth Olympiad in Paris, a Scotch ministerial student named Eric Liddell was deprived of the opportunity to participate in his favorite event, the 100-meter sprint, when his religious scruples prevented him from running on Sunday. In his case the affair turned out most fortunately since a countryman, H. M. Abrahams, won the 100 meters and Liddell, who switched to the unfamiliar 400 meters only because it was run on a weekday, captured the gold medal in that event.

Sunday competition caused bitter discussion at Amsterdam in 1928 and Los Angeles

in 1932. There is no record of public opposition in Berlin in 1936. But when trials for the Winter Olympics of 1948 were run off in the United States, one of the outstanding speed-skating prospects withdrew because the trials took place on a Sunday.

The London organizing committee headed off any problems from this source by scheduling no events at all for Sundays at the 1948 celebration. And, despite opposition and criticism in certain quarters, the sports-loving Britons staunchly supported the Organizing Committee verbally and financially and more than counteracted the efforts of those who saw no good in the games.

But the London committee suffered somewhat from the unfavorable publicity caused by a major complication at the opening of the Vth Winter Games at St. Moritz. It was a fierce argument involving the United States Olympic committee, the International Ice Hockey Federation, the St. Moritz organizing committee, and, ultimately, the International Olympic Committee. It had been developing for some months and had become so complex that when it exploded suddenly on the eve of the opening ceremony of the Winter Games it created an atmosphere in which the ordinary debates and happenstances of normal competition became swollen to the proportions of mammoth international problems.

It not only involved the vital but always touchy matter of amateurism, but likewise probed the tender area of jurisdictional authority on the part of the Hockey Federation, the U. S. National Olympic Committee, and the right of the Organizing Committee to accept or reject entries, and even challenged the supreme authority of the International Olympic Committee itself.

The recognition by the International Ice Hockey Federation, and later by the St. Moritz Organizing Committee, of a United States hockey team whose amateur standing was in grave doubt created a situation that could not possibly be resolved between the two American groups involved; as a result the International Olympic Committee, meeting on the eve of the Winter Games, found itself faced with a problem in the solution of which somebody was sure to be hurt. The rules of the games were inadequate to cover such a problem and had to be redrawn to prevent a recurrence.

The International Olympic Committee finally announced action as severe as any in the history of the Olympic games. The blame was placed squarely on the International Ice Hockey Federation, which

had precipitated the impasse by recognizing a team that was definitely ineligible. The federation was barred from representing ice hockey in future Winter Olympic Games. The St. Moritz organizing committee, which, faced with the federation's threat that the whole ice-hockey program—major source of Winter Olympic revenue—might be canceled, had supported the federation, was removed by the International Olympic Committee, which « expressed regret » at the action of the Organizing Committee. The hockey competition itself was at first ruled from the program, but later, recognizing the injustice that would be done to thoroughly eligible teams from many nations not otherwise involved in the squabble, the International Olympic Committee restored it to the program.

This incident provided an unpleasant atmosphere for the opening of the games—an atmosphere not improved by charges that American bobsleds had been tampered with on the eve of the first dangerous trials. There were other difficulties : bad weather caused postponements and forced some skaters to compete under conditions worse than were encountered by others in the same event, and the badly scuffed ice in the hockey rink unquestionably bothered many of the entrants in the figure-skating events and resulted in bad falls by some of the outstanding contestants. However, as always, when the actual competition commenced and attention was drawn away from the arguments of the officials and concentrated on the competitors, much of the bitterness was forgotten in the thrill and excitement of the contests.

Almost a thousand athletes and officials from twenty-eight nations marched in the opening ceremony at St. Moritz. Audiences numerous beyond expectations and quite beyond the ability of the functionaries to control swarmed over the mountainsides to watch the events in the open and packed the small stands to watch the ice hockey and the figure skating.

As might well be expected, three were few champions of other years on hand seeking to repeat victories scored before World War II. Two who came close were Jack Heaton of the United States, Olympic champion in 1928 in the skeleton bobsled, who finished second after the span of a score of years, and Birger Ruud, the durable Norwegian ski-jumping champion of 1932 and 1936, who failed only by the smallest of margins to win his third crown in this test of daring, skill, and co-ordination.

Norway's long-standing domination of the skating events was challenged, but not successfully, by Americans in the shorter races and by Swedes over the distances. It was notable, however, that whereas in 1936 the great Norse skater Ballangrud was able to win three of the four events, in 1948 there was a different champion at each of the four distances, three of them Norwegians, the

fourth a Swede. Records were broken in two of the four events and closely approached in the other two.

The Swedish ski athletes found themselves faced by stiffer opposition than usual in many of the events on the comprehensive ski program. They maintained their supremacy in the longer events, but not without difficulty. Finnish contestants pressed them strongly in the 18- and 50-kilometer cross-country races and took a threatening second in the 40-kilometer relay, in addition to winning the first two places in the Nordic combination of 18-kilometer cross-country and jumping.

The other skiing events were sharply divided. Norway won the ski jump, as usual, a Frenchman captured the downhill and alpine combination events, and a Swiss captured the individual slalom title. Skiing events for women were likewise divided. Belgium took the Alpine combination, Switzerland won the downhill event, and Gretchen Fraser, in capturing the slalom, won the first ski title ever taken by an American.

Figure skating produced three new champions, all outstanding. Eighteen-year-old Richard Button of the United States captured the men's event with a performance that was almost perfect. Barbara Ann Scott of Canada was equally in a class by herself among the women, and the Belgians Micheline Lannoy and Pierre Baugniet nosed out an exceptionally strong field of pairs.

Bobsledding honors were divided, with a slight edge to men from the United States, who placed well in all three divisions. Switzerland took the two-man bob, the United States captured the four-man event, and Italy was victor in the skeleton.

During the course of the Winter Games there were a number of developments within the International Olympic Committee. President Sigfrid Edström announced that following the London games he would resign. Several new countries were admitted to Olympic membership—Colombia, Lebanon, Pakistan, Syria, and Puerto Rico.

It was also clear that the perennial problems of amateurism, payment of « broken time » to athletes, and questions of jurisdictional authority among various Olympic bodies had not disappeared. In fact agitation for some form of compensation for athletes was growing.

There was further evidence of a new and important change in the personnel of the International Olympic Committee itself as Bo Ekelund, long-time Swedish Olympic athlete and official, was named to membership on the I. O. C. to replace the veteran Count Clarence von Rosen, who had served since 1900.

Ekelund, who tied for second place in the high jump at Antwerp in 1920, brings to a very important total the number of former Olympic games contestants who have moved up from the ranks of the athletes to a place

on the supreme body of the Olympic games. Others include Lord David Burghley (Great Britain), 400-meters-hurdle champion in 1928; Lieutenant Colonel Pahud de Mortanges (Holland), Olympic all-round equestrian champion in 1928, 1932, and 1936 ; M. Armand Massard (France), Olympic *éppée* champion, 1920 ; Avery Brundage (U. S. A.), Olympic pentathlon contestant in 1912 ; Herr Thomas Fearnley (Norway), captain of his country's tennis team in 1912 ; Dr. A. E. Porritt (New Zealand), third in the 100 meters at Paris in 1924 ; Baron G. de Trannoy (Belgium), contestant in equestrian events in 1512; Major Albert Mayer (Switzerland), bobsled participant 1924, 1928, 1932, and 1936 ; and several others.

There is no doubt that Lord Burghley voiced the thoughts of many Olympic athletes when, some time previous to the 1948 games, he delivered an address honoring J. Sigfrid Edström, whom he was succeeding as president of the International Amateur Athletic Federation. Said Lord Burghley :

« I have wondered sometimes exactly where our strength really lies, and what principles we should make sure never to lose hold of, to ensure the success and progress that we all desire. I think it is that all who are in the administration of amateur sport are interested in what they put in, and not

what they take out. At the same time I feel that it must be a cardinal rule to all of us that we must keep an ear close to the ground—we must never forget that we are in fact administering sport for the thousands of active young competitors of the day, and although we may advise, and strongly advise from the deep well of our experience, yet, in the long run, and rightly so in my opinion, the wishes of youth must prevail. In the third place I urge that we should do all that we can to draw competitors into the administration of sport when they retire from active competition. Not only will we thereby ensure a great fund of technical knowledge, but also we will maintain that vital confidence of the active athletes in the administrators of their sport. »

There is, and will continue to be, argument over the success of the Olympic games as a builder of international good will. It is the fate of the games that the good will goes largely unnoticed while the inevitable incidents to the contrary are given undue prominence. No one can doubt, however, that the chances are improved for 'reaching' Coubertin's goal of a « stronger and better individual » tested by the searing heat of Olympic competition, when the Olympic torch is being kept alight by those who themselves have been exposed to its flame.