

The real result of the London Olympic Games 1948

by JACK CRUMP, *Hon. Secretary British Amateur Athletic Board.*

During the recent world war, when active sport was a more matter of improvisation than planning in Britain, and when talking about sport was the only alternative to watching it, I was privileged to be one of a number of well-known sporting personalities who spent their leisure time visiting camps, hospitals and recreation centres, answering questions and expressing views about sport. These Sports Brains Trusts were extremely popular and were also a regular feature of B. B. C. programmes.

Questions asked us were naturally varied, but I cannot recall a single occasion when one of those posed to us was not on the subject of the Olympic Games. The nature of the questions convinced me that however ardent we in sports legislation were in our support of the Olympic movement, the public generally were ill-informed and in consequence far from satisfied that the Olympic Games served any really useful purpose.

Indeed, more often than not, we on these sports brains trusts platforms were invited to agree that Olympic Games were not truly sporting occasions, and were even dangerous to the cause of international goodwill.

More than once the views expressed on the platform supported the general belief that the Olympic ideal was a sham, the amateurbackground outdated, and the win at all costs attitude associated with international sport the very antithesis of the famous assertion of Baron de Coubertin.

The fact that these views were based on ignorance of the true history and purpose of the Olympic movement is unimportant. A great part of our sporting press shared these views, and were zealous in propagating this anti Olympic feeling.

I wonder it was appreciated that the XIVth Olympiad was organised against this background of hostility, or at best apathy. Unless we have recognised the fact, we cannot possibly assess the real value of the London Games, nor of the success which these celebrations achieved.

We have short memories, often a merciful failing, but we ought to realise that so far as Great Britain, the British Commonwealth of Nations and a big part of the United States of America are concerned, the Olympic movement was most definitely on trial for its very existence in 1948. Nothing but complete success could have stilled the growing hostility and unveiled cynicism with which the Olympic Games were being regarded by a big section of the sport-following public of the world, the public who constitute the voice of the public opinion, which in the

final analysis decides on the continuance or cessation of international sport.

When the Games were allotted to a London not yet recovered from the war, with its shortages of food, accommodation and suitable amenities, the voices of the decriers of the Olympic Games were raised in triumph. When the Winter Games brought its difficulties over ice-hockey and the interpretation of the amateur rule, fuel was heaped on the fire of Olympic opposition.

When too, after an amazingly successful and very moving Opening Ceremony the Games got off to a bad start by a thirty minute hold up of time-table at: Wembley stadium we could all have felt discouraged. And recalling also that the bad weather made things difficult for the athletes, that decisions in the boxing section of the Games led to frayed tempers, to surprising results and to the removal of officials, we ought to admit to ourselves that the future of the Games depended on the slenderest thread possible.

Compare all this with the present situation. The voice of the declaimers has been stilled; the pen of the press opponent has been stopped. Public and active performers have accepted beyond question that the Olympic Games, and above all the Olympic ideal, are essential and must continue. Not only have the Games been allocated for 1952 and 1956 but many cities have made it know that they will be strong bidders for the distinction of being hosts for the Games of 1960!

I am not disposed in this short article to explain this remarkable change in public opinion, nor even to allocate the credit for having brought it about. What I am anxious to point out is that the true result of the XIVth Olympiad should be assessed not in the number of athletes or countries participating, nor in the number of new Olympic records established, but in this re-establishment of the popularity of the Olympic Games and rebirth in confidence that the Olympic Ideal can and should be the basis of international sport. It can now be asserted that from opposition and disinterestedness world feeling has been changed to keen support and unqualified approval of the Olympic movement.

And there is a further tribute which I must pay to the value of the Olympic Games in the effect it has had on my own particular branch of sport, track and field athletics in my own country, and doubtless in other lands too.

Never have we had so many people keenly interested in track and field athletics as at the present. Never have we had so many

youngsters, boys and girls, anxious to take part in them. Never before have we had so many « older people » prepared to help in the management of athletic clubs, nor more old athletes prepared to give their time to coaching the rising generation into the skills of Athletics.

The reason I ascribe mainly to the influence of the 1948 Olympic Games, which thrilled literally millions by reason of broadcasting, television and press reports, and persuaded the people, some against their will perhaps, that the Olympics are essential, if goodwill through sport is to sweeten international relations.

I said I would not attempt to allocate the credit for this magnificent return to public affection of the Olympics, but could I, on behalf of Britain's track and field athletes, express gratitude to the members of the International Olympic Committee for the great service they have rendered to our sport by their selfless devotion to the Olympic ideal in which they had unflinching faith when all seemed lost or very nearly so? Not only sport but the world at large is deeply in the debt of those who have maintained, revived and even increased the Olympic Movement during a long period of difficulty.

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