

# OPERATION OLYMPIC GAMES

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What can you believe about the Olympic Games? You may be told that the Games are a breeding ground of ill-will; they bring on political repercussions which will take the four years between them to correct. Quite likely the claim will be made that the dollars 700 000 the U. S. A. Olympic Committee is spending to send a team to Finland would be better allocated for aid to needy foreign nations.

Still others will assert that the Olympic concept of pure amateurism is outdated. « It won't work any longer, » this plaint goes. « This world has become too materialistic. » What is the truth?

The truth, as I have found it in circling the globe many times in the Olympic cause the past 40 years, was stated by a Hungarian youth who competed in the weight events at the London Games in 1948. Contrast his words to those of the pessimists who preach that amity and understanding among countries are an empty dream.

## WHERE FAIR PLAY RULES

« If every person could have such an experience as this, how wonderful it would be, » this young man told me with deep sincerity. « Then there would be no hard feelings and few walls between peoples, let alone wars. »

The truth about the Olympic Games is many things. It is a dead-game Czech distance runner collapsing near the finish line and being helped up and given first aid by a Norwegian, an American and a Korean. It is a tiny Japanese, outclassed in the 10 000 meters, moving to the outside of the track so that a Pole and a Finn might have a chance to break the Olympic record. It is the universal desire to *play fair* in the most hotly competitive of contests by men of every ideology and race.

The truth is what U. S. Consul Cecil Cross, speaking from Capetown, said after we sent a team of picked Olympic stars to South Africa not long ago. « In the years I have been stationed here, I can't recall anything so beneficial in removing misapprehension and antagonism toward the United States as this tour », wrote Cross.

If years of travel throughout the world have taught me nothing else, they have taught me this: the American way of life needs every bit of support it can get. « Many visitors from your country leave a bad impression », the head of a European state told me bluntly. « But we have only respect for your amazing athletes ».

Again, the truth is something I witnessed deep in a Siamese jungle. Traveling from Bangkok to Singapore on an Olympic mis-

sion, I bounced along for hours through a steaming tropical wilderness. Midway through this dank nowhere, I glanced out the train window — and saw carved from the forest a sport stadium which appeared as modern and welltended as many you'll find in the great cities!

## IT'S 2700 YEARS OLD

The explanation? It was clearly visible on an archway above the gate — the five interlaced Olympic rings, proud symbol of an event held since 776 B. C. and which still has the power to stir men to friendly strife anywhere on earth.

*In any language, the truth is that the Olympic Games are imperishable. They have defied dictators, outlasted wars and pestilence, risen above all political struggles.* The ancient Greek contests ran for nearly 300 Olympiads, close to 1 200 years. This year approximately 70 nations — a record field — ave vied for the most prized championships in sport. The rules are still the same as in the time of Plato and Socrates: an equal opportunity for men of every calling and creed and sport for sport's sake only.

Of all the institutions created by man, including the great religions, which have survived longer?

Yet attacking the Olympics is a familiar heme of the cynics, especially in the United States. On investigation, I have found that most of them never have seen the Games. In one recent (and typical) nationally circulated article, I counted 14 untruths on the first page alone. Confronting the author, I demanded, « Where did you get this information? Did you see these things happen? »

« No », he replied uncomfortably, « they came from reports ».

Some of the « reports » are the result of gross ignorance. Others come from those who would stir up bad feeling. Back in 1912, I say my first Games as a competitor in the pentathlon at Stockholm. When Jim Thorpe won both the decathlon and pentathlon, he was dubbed « the greatest athlete in the world » by the King of Sweden and returned to the U.S. a jero. The denouement was sad. Thorpe was found to have played professional baseball earlier in his career, violating Amateur Athletic Union rules. His victories were expunged from the books, his trophies given to those who placed second to him.

To this day Thorpe is said to have been the victim of the worst swindle in sport history. Dozens of campaigns have been launched to get back his medals. Yet what does Glenn S. Warner, who coached Jim

Thorpe in 1912, have to say ? « He made an innocent mistake, but innocence never has been part of the definition of an Olympic amateur. What's fair for one is fair for all. »

#### TROPHIES WEREN'T THORPE'S

And the two major Olympic trophies which, the myth goes, were « stolen » from Thorpe ? The fact is that they were never his permanent property. In many thousands of words written about the case, I have never before seen it printed that these were perpetual trophies, belonging to the International Olympic Committee, to be awarded in each successive Games to the decathlon and pentathlon champions. Subsequently withdrawn from competition, they are today in the Olympic museum at Lausanne, Switzerland — where they will remain.

No man, no matter how gifted, is a « special » case in the Olympic Games. To reinstate Thorpe now would be to break faith with the more than 30 000 athletes who have kept the code since the modern revival of the Games in 1896.

In 1932 at Los Angeles, evidence was presented to the Council of the International Amateur Athletic Federation that Paavo Nurmi, Finland's idol and a six-time Olympic victor, had been paid for racing. This proof of violation of the amateur rule came like a bombshell on the eve of the Games. With more than 100 000 fans waiting to see the fabulous Nurmi run, it would not have been difficult to temporize, to postpone action or to compromise.

Nurmi did not run. He was dropped from the Games as summarily as if he had been totally unknown.

#### SPORTS' MEANEST MAN ?

Every gathering of the nations brings an « incident ». In the vast scheme of the Olympics these are minor matters, but press hysteria blows them into lurid headlines. Since 1929 I have been on the receiving end of a great many of these brickbats. « Meanest man in sport », « the last living amateur » and « apostle of hypocrisy » are a few of the things I've been called.

A typical case in point was that of Barbara Ann Scott in the 1948 Winter Games. If you believed what you read, this threatened to rupture American - Canadian relations. Miss Scott, representing Canada, had won the world figure-skating title prior to the Games. Admirers presented her with an automobile. The Olympic rule is clear : « An amateur is one who competes solely for pleasure... without material gain of any kind, direct or indirect. » It is strictly enforced for obvious reasons. *One glance at the pathetic state of American college games — bribe-ridden basketball and black-marketeering football — will suffice to explain.*

« Return the car or be ruled out of the Olympic Games as a professional », Canada's

heroine was told. Actually Canadian Olympic authorities did the telling. But as the ranking Olympic official in the Western hemisphere, I immediately became a tyrant. I was burned in effigy in Toronto, denounced in the Canadian parliament and accused of trying to eliminate Miss Scott so that U. S. A. girls would have clear skating in the Games.

No one pursued the thought to its logical conclusion: If American officials were hatching a dark plot to remove Miss Scott from competition, why tip her off ? If she kept the vehicle, then automatically she would be out of the Games.

I'm happy to say that the best girl won in Switzerland in 1948, as an amateur. After her victory Miss Scott and her mother looked me up at Saint-Moritz to thank me for the warning.

#### THE JESSE OWENS FUROR

Kings, princes, Oriental potentates and plain citizens have told me that in their opinion nothing does more to combat racial prejudice than the Games. Still, stories persist to the contrary. Vast lip service, for example, has been given to the fable that Hitler snubbed our greatest Olympic athlete, Jesse Owens, a Negro, at the 1936 event. The furor over this threatened to overshadow everything accomplished at Berlin. Olympic heads were even accused of being pro-Nazi.

In reality, we of the International Committee suspected long before 1936 that the Nazis might attempt to use the Games for national aggrandizement. Politicians have tried it many times before. None have succeeded. Count Baillet-Latour of Belgium, then president of the International Olympic Committee, put a quick quietus on any ideas of this kind by informing Hitler, at a special conference, that he had nothing whatever to say about the conduct of the Games.

« You are a spectator », the count told the dictator. « When the five-circled flag is raised over the stadium, it becomes sacred Olympian territory. For all practical purposes, the Games are held in ancient Olympia. There we are the masters. »

Hitler backed water fast. Had he not, the Games would have been withdrawn from Berlin, and it is estimated that visitors spend many millions of dollars during these modern festivals.

Young Owens, of Ohio, performed like a superman. He won three events and set two world records. And when Hitler failed to congratulate him, as on opening day he had a victorious German shot-putter (the first German ever to win a Games track-and-field championship), headlines flared all over the world.

Why didn't Hitler shake Owens' hand ? For the good reason that he couldn't. Two days before Jesse ran, the Committee moved in and quashed any further such displays.

Der Fuehrer, at the moment that the Buckeye Bullet blazed over the finish line, was a dictator without standing in his own stadium.

#### HITLER HAD TO WATCH

That is the great meaning of the Olympic Games. They are beyond the most powerful political manipulation. Our Committee was the only organization, not barring the League of Nations, which laid down the law to the Nazis before World War II — and made it stick. The real story of the Berlin Games is this: four Negro youths, John Woodruff, Archie Williams, Cornelius Johnson and Owens, won six world championships in a land where racial intolerance reached its most vicious peak.

*And Hitler, along with his « master race » cohorts, had to watch them do it.*

On all trips to the Games, the U. S. Olympic Committee accepts responsibility for the welfare of the athletes; on the other hand, the athletes agree in writing to maintain strict training, which includes abstention from use of tobacco and intoxicating liquors.

There have been very few serious violations through the years — less than a dozen I can recall — but when a contestant does fail to meet training requirements and is dropped from the team, a vast amount of publicity usually ensues. In 1936, for example, it became necessary to withdraw the entry of Eleanor Holm, one of the girls swimmers, for repeated violations of training rules. Most informed people understood the reasons behind the unanimous action of the Committee, even though the latter said nothing more about the case and did not release the testimony of the team physicians.

#### THE FINNS' TRIUMPH

I have seen many instances where the Olympic ideal has triumphed over staggering odds. In one instance, Finland, then a Grand Duchy of Russia, was told that it must march in the opening ceremonies under the Russian flag. The Finns rebelled. Either they carried in their own colors, or they would not compete. The situation was tense. Technically, the Russians were within the rules. *When the smoke cleared, the Finns marched with their flag flying high.*

A scene that could never be enacted at the Olympic Games took place recently in Latin America. At a regional Games involving a score of countries, I watched a gaudily uniformed candidate for re-election stride to the podium, seize the microphone and deliver a half-hour political harangue. Officials shrugged. « We are helpless », they said.

But at the Bolivar Games at Caracas, Venezuela, last December, I was given a better demonstration of the Olympic spirit. In a section of the world where government subsidies are required for events of this kind

and where, consequently, political control is expected, the conduct of the Games was left entirely to sport leaders. Everything was carried out according to the best amateur sport traditions. Later, at a palace reception, I congratulated the President of Venezuela on the freedom of the Games from political interference.

« Ah », he said, smiling, « but that is the best politics. »

Many a larger country might well copy that enlightened attitude.

Still another fallacy spread by Olympic critics is that the United States creates ill will through its near-monopoly of victories. Our superior man power, technique and equipment are popularly supposed to aggravate many small but politically important countries which are outclassed. Quite the opposite is true.

#### FOREIGNERS STAR

In 1948 Peru, Egypt, South Africa, Turkey, Switzerland, India, Mexico, Denmark, the Netherlands and Argentina had winners in everything from track-and-field to boxing to field hockey to wrestling and equestrian events. The Turks, in fact, won more than one third of the wrestling titles; Danish and Dutch girls dominated swimming; fez-wearing Egyptians were the sensation of weightlifting. *In the Winter Games earlier this year, the U. S. finished well behind little Norway, with less than 4 000 000 inhabitants.*

To scotch another report: we are not even the foremost track-and-field nation. In terms of population, that distinction belongs to Finland. The Finns have less than three per cent of our population, yet they have developed 27 individual Olympic winners to our 50 since 1920. On a man-for-man basis, the edge goes to Finland by more than 20 to 1.

One of the greatest broad jumpers in Olympic history was Silvio Castor, of tiny Haiti. Percy Williams, of Canada, a rank outsider, was a double sprint winner at the 1928 Amsterdam Games. Ireland boasted the hammer throwing champion (Dr. Patrick O'Callaghan) in 1928 and 1932. Four years ago, long-striding Arthur Wint, of Jamaica, ran away from the field in the 400-meter dash, and this year the Jamaicans had new successes.

The result is a growing surge of Olympic interest wherever one goes in the world. There are committees in such places as Afghanistan, Burma, Korea and Paraguay. *In La Paz, Bolivia, workmen hauled tons of material almost straight up the Andes to build the world's highest athletic plant.* It's two and one-half miles above sea level.

In Pakistan, crowds of 30 000 turn out to cheer Olympic contenders. Guatemala, with less population than the city of Chicago, has spent over dollars 12 000 000 on a sports center that would shame nations several times its size. Mexico City is spending many millions more for an athletic plant of amazing

size, accommodating 6 000 athletes at a time. Iceland is running an Olympic fever as hot as the climate is cold.

The world's largest sports arena ? It isn't Chicago's Soldier's Field or the Los Angeles Coliseum. In Rio de Janeiro there's a stadium holding 210 000 spectators !

Domestically, with each Olympic Games comes the problem of selecting the U. S. team. Other countries can hand-pick their squad from a few stars, but we have so many candidates that the only fair approach is a series of exhausting qualifying tests. Only three men can be named in each event, and any committee which arbitrarily selected three out of the eligible thousands would be howled out of the country. More than once, potential Olympic victors have had to be left behind.

#### RUSSIA'S SIGNED UP

It is vital that they performed especially well at Helsinki. Russia came out from

behind the Iron Curtain, the first display of Russian sport strength in the Games since 1912.

True, both spectators and sports officials have objected strenuously to dictator-nation participation. Delagates from various sections of the world have spoken out with heat against meeting any oppressors in friendly competition.

In all cases, they were voted down. We — the rest of the world — *can* meet on the field of sport, where fair play must prevail, with men of any political philosophy. Perhaps the results will reach even inside the walls of the Kremlin. For by taking part, the U. S. S. R., with the other nations, have accepted the Olympian creed, the very core of which is expressed in these words :

*May we display cheerfulness and concord that the Olympic torch may be carried on with ever greater eagerness, courage and honor for the good of humanity through the ages.*

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