

Speech of the President M. Avery Brundage

*at the opening ceremony of the 49th session of the Inter-national Olympic Committee
in Athens, Greece, May 10th, 1954*

Your Majesty,

The International Olympic Committee is happy to be able to celebrate its 60th Anniversary here in Greece. We thank your Majesty for honoring us with your patronage and for your continued interest in our work, which we noted in 1938 when we came to bury the heart of our founder, the Baron de Coubertin, at Olympia. We thank the Olympic Committee Hellene, and particularly our two Greek members, Angelo Bolanaki and Jean Ketseas, for making the necessary arrangements for our session. It was only three score years ago that the Baron de Coubertin finally succeeded in gathering a group of the sport leaders of the world in Paris, where he convinced them of the desirability of reviving the Olympic Games, which, after their beginning in 776 B. C., had continued for almost twelve centuries. Search all of history and you will find few if any man-made institutions which lasted longer. Not only did de Coubertin's inspiration come from ancient Hellas, but also the first tangible

support. For it was Greece that, despite skepticism and apathy in other quarters, agreed to organize the first Olympic Games of the modern cycle, and his Royal Highness, afterward King Constantine, who headed the committee which staged them.

Now that the Olympic Movement has reached maturity, has spread to all quarters of the globe, and that more than eighty countries eagerly participate, it is not easy to imagine the difficulties faced by the Baron de Coubertin sixty years ago. At that time there was little interest in sport in most countries, there were no organizations to handle the Games, no National Olympic Committees, few International Federations, there were no accepted rules and regulations, there was no money, there was only an idea. It is difficult therefore to overestimate the importance of this enthusiastic support which came, not from any of the larger and richer countries, but from tiny Greece, at this crucial time.

Of course, de Coubertin's idea was a most virile and dynamic one with its roots extend-

ing back 2500 years, to the days when the foundations of modern civilization were being laid in ancient Hellas. Let us specify for the record, however, lest the Greeks be blamed for some of the things that have happened since and for the gloomy conditions under which we now live. that it is only because we have strayed widely from the wise teachings of the gifted Greek philosophers that we are in trouble today.

And only if the Olympic Movement strays from the basic ideals of those early Games will it be in trouble.

In that ancient era, so aptly called the Golden Age, culture was both physical and mental. It was a harmonious, balanced, well rounded, development of both mind and body that was sought. In the contests, beauty and grace, intangible thing, were esteemed as well as strength, speed and agility. Honor was held above all. The events were staged in a beautiful natural park. The charm of the Greek landscape was enhanced by the creations of the most accomplished architects. The finest sculpture in the world adorned the grounds. Music and poetry greeted the ears of the athletes ; elegance and good taste surrounded them.

It was in this enlightened atmosphere that the Games developed. They were organized on an idealistic, semi-religious basis, and they were strictly amateur. Just as in the days of Pericles knowledge was sought for its own sake and there was a wholesome contempt for mere money, so sport was practiced for pleasure and enjoyment and the only prize was a wreath or crown of wild olive.

It is also important to remember that, when the ancient Greeks lost their ideals and became so materialistic they could not even play for fun (cause or effect, who knows), they lost too, their strength and power, and the Greek hegemony collapsed.

While our visit here is a pilgrimage to the land where the Olympic idea was born, it is also a homecoming, for after all, in one sense, we are all Hellenes, since it was here that modern civilization was born twenty-five centuries ago. We are what we are today because of the original and revolutionary ideas and the inspired efforts of those great and learned men who lived here on this small peninsula in that Golden Age. It was they who first declared the dignity of man. The State for the first time became the servant of the people instead of the people slaves of the State. Present generations seduced by false promises of so-called social security would better cultivate the fiery independence of the ancient Greeks. They were the first to escape from tyranny, which until then had prevailed in most of the known world.

It was they who first opened and stirred the minds of men, taught them to think along new and ethical lines, and paved the way for the later coming of Christianity. It is sad

that so much of the world has never learned or has forgotten the principles of truth and justice first proclaimed in ancient Hellas.

A list of the brilliant and talented scholars of Greece, men whose initiative and enterprise left the impress of Greek genius on all succeeding ages, would fill many pages. Their precepts and maxims are equally valid today after more than two thousand years. Three familiar ones are :

Gnothi s'afton - Know thyself
Mithen Aghan - Nothing in excess
Kalokagathia - Unite the good and the beautiful

General science, ethics, physics, mathematics, astronomy, history, philology, logic, and geography all had their beginnings or early development here on this fertile soil. Greek architecture has been copied ever since and the Parthenon is said to be the most beautiful of all buildings. The Greek language has been called "the most perfect vehicle of human expression the world has ever known." Certainly literature, drama and poetry reached heights with Homer, Euripides, Sophocles, Eschylus, Sappho and Pindar that have never been excelled. Greek art and Greek sculpture are preeminent and fill the museums of the world. Even today an education is not complete without a knowledge of the works of the erudite Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

Of all the significant ideas which were evolved in this most momentous period of the world's history, however, none is more important that the Olympic idea which we of the International Olympic Committee are pledged to guard and cherish. Before the Greeks, under the Pharaohs and the Asiatic Emperors who ruled the ancient world, there was no organized sport as we know it today. In the struggle for existence there was no time left for play. Sport; which must be spontaneous and without restraint, could be practiced only by free and independent men, so the ancient Olympic Games were confined to Greeks. Only civilized men who appreciated and respected the high ideals of sport could take part. The barbarians who inhabited the rest of the world were ineligible to participate.

Despite the bounties of nature, despite all the marvelous developments of science and all the modern improvements that have been devised to make life more easy and comfortable, despite all the teachings of philosophy and religion, we still have not learned how to live together in peace. After thousands of years politics has not succeeded in establishing a peaceful world. The Egyptians, the Persians, the Romans, and many others have attempted to establish peace by force. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, scores of others, have tried. All have failed. No one has ever really won a war. Even atomic bombs, powerful as they are, do not convince. Religion has also failed, and some of the

most vicious wars have had a religious motive behind them.

Sport teaches respect for the rules and regulations (the law). The rules and regulations, of course, must be fair and just.

Sportsmen make them so. Notwithstanding that we live in a materialistic world where money and power seem to be the only things that count, the Olympic Movement has now been accepted in all quarters of the globe and youth of all countries have learned the Olympic lesson and heed the admonition pronounced at the closing ceremony of the Games : "May they display cheerfulness and concord so that the Olympic Torch may be carried on with ever greater eagerness, courage and honour for the good of humanity throughout the ages."

One must be amazed that such an idealistic enterprise has grown and prospered in the commercial atmosphere which prevails today. It is a testimonial to the innate good in man and to his desire for a world ruled by honesty, fairplay and good sportsmanship, a world where all have an equal opportunity, a world where victory depends on ability and hard work, on personal skill and efficiency, and where the reward is based on merit.

The Olympic truce covering the ancient Games was respected and enforced throughout the Hellenic world. We have extended the Games to the entire world. Perhaps we

can also extend the truce. Perhaps sport, the Twentieth Century religion, with its message of fair play and good sportsmanship will succeed where other agencies have failed. In these days when the good world is filled with suspicion and hatred, when some of the secrets of the universe have been discovered before mankind has acquired the judgment needed to utilize them properly, something is seriously lacking. Perhaps the answer can be found on the athletic field. The Olympic Movement, ladies and gentlemen, has a future pregnant with possibilities for great good for bewildered mankind. We have no guns, we have no large funds or endowments, but we do have the strength of high moral principles, the high ideals first promulgated here in Greece that underlie all truth and justice. There is no more powerful force.

We anticipate a successful meeting on this hallowed ground. While there are many weighty problems that require solution, we think it will be easier to find the answers in this sympathetic environment. Before closing I must thank our Greek friends for their warm hospitality. We are sure we will take with us when we leave for home, a pleasant memory of happy days and many remembrances of the classical treasures, the blue skies, and the sparkling seas of sunny Greece. I thank you.

