

President Brundage visits the U. S. S. R.

Last summer, pursuant to an invitation from the Olympic Committee of the U. S. S. R. I had the pleasure of attending the great annual Sport Parade of the Soviet Union in Moscow. Afterward I was invited to make a trip through the U. S. S. R. to inspect the Sport developments in that country. I traveled several thousand kilometers, saw the installations in cities, towns, villages, collective farms, and adjoining the large factories, and obtained an excellent idea of their program. I was received in an open, friendly manner. Since I had been in Russia twice before, in 1912 and in 1934, I could appreciate the progress that has been made.

The Sport Parade I was invited to see was fantastic — it wasn't really a parade at all, it was a huge demonstration of Physical culture and gymnastics. I have seen many such things in various parts of the world, but never anything that would even approach this one either in magnitude or in beauty. The participants were brought from all over the Soviet Union, there were Usbeks, Tajiks, Kazakhs, Armenians, Georgians, Kirghis. They came from Karelia, Moldavia, Azerbaijan and other remote places. There were representatives of the trade union sport societies and from the schools and colleges of Moscow. Each delegation included from 400 to 3,000 boys and girls. They told me there were altogether 34,000 participants. First they paraded around the stadium, then the field was turned over to the delegations one at a time and they gave mass demonstrations with wands, large balls, ribbons or hoops, followed by a special performance of some kind. One delegation brought collapsible gymnastic apparatus and erected 70 or 80 horizontal bars on which in a jiffy were 70 or 80 gymnasts doing giant swings together to classical music. Another erected a framework 30 or 40 feet high and the participants draped themselves on it with different colored costumes like a huge living

bouquet of beautiful flowers. Interspersed between the demonstrations they had wrestling events, weight lifting, gymnastic performances, a marathon race and other track and field events by their champion athletes. It went on for five hours like clock work. How they organized this event with such mechanical precision, with delegations coming from the Ural Mountains, the deserts of central Asia, the Arctic Provinces, the Caucasus, and the remote interior of Siberia, I do not know. It was amazing.

To provide background for some of the tableaux they had filled the opposite side of the stadium with 10 or 15 thousand men in costume with large cards such as are sometimes used at football games and when they wanted a blue background, they all held up blue cards or green or yellow ones as the case might be. They also piped the length of the stadium and constructed a series of fountains, so that some of the tableaux were staged against a solid wall of water 25 feet high. I thought the turf in the center of the stadium was extra fine, but when I looked a second time, I saw it was an immense carpet, which covered the entire field.

Altogether it was like something out of the Arabian Nights. The costumes were characteristic of the different regions and much of the music was classical from Tchaikovsky, Borodin and other Russian composers. Each delegation had not only a physical director, but also an artist director to control the costumes and the color schemes and a music director who arranged the musical scores. Not only was it a fabulous gymnastic demonstration ; but a colorful artistic success as well.

In reviving the Olympic Games in 1896, the Baron de Coubertin, who had seen the beneficial physical effects of competitive sports programs on the youth of England and the United States, hoped to spread these benefits throughout the rest of the world

for the good of humanity. For 50 years we have been preaching the values of a physical education and competitive sport program and trying to convince all countries that sport makes better citizens and, if necessary, better soldiers too. The U.S.S.R. has adopted such a program on a national scale never before attempted except by the Germans in the 30's with their « Kraft durch Freude » and placed behind it all the power of the state.

When I visited Russia in 1934, I first heard about this plan to train every man, woman and child in the U. S. S. R. They proposed to build playing fields, stadia, and swimming pools in every city, town, and village at every large factory, and on every collective farm. They have gone far with this program and the 34,000 tough and healthy boys and girls, I saw in the parade in Moscow, gave evidence of the results. In my travels to other parts of the Soviet Union, I saw that their activities were not confined to Moscow. In a small town on the other side of the Caucasus, I attended a district volley ball tournament in which 900 teams had taken part. They told me they have 800,000 trained gymnasts. They said there were 60,000 football teams in the Ukraine alone with 5,000 of good quality. They are beginning to reap the rewards of this intensive program, as the numerous Olympic, world and European Championships they have won in recent years will testify. The world can look forward to intense, aggressive competition from Soviet athletes in the future.

While in Russia I had two long conferences with Nicolai Romanov, head of the Department of Physical Culture, and President Andrianov and other officials of the Olympic Committee. Mr. Romanov stated that the first and principal objective of their national program is the health and well being of the people of the U. S. S. R., and that competitive sport is incidental thereto. He said: « We know, believe in, and respect Olympic Rules.

» We have, and want, no professional athletes in the U. S. S. R.

» We operate no special training camps for the athletes in the U. S. S. R.

» We give no special inducements, cash prizes, or other material rewards to our athletes.

» We believe champion athletes have moral and social responsibilities as well, that they should keep up with their work and studies first, and that they should set a good example for the youth of the country.

» We do not believe in mixing sport and international politics. »

All of this is, of course, in accordance with Olympic principles. In my long trip through the Soviet Union I saw nothing that would make me question the statements of Mr. Romanov.

At these conferences, I explained the reasons why the I. O. C. objects strenuously to any commercial or political interference in



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Mr. Avery Brundage, President of the I. O. C., visits Moscow. On the right (with hat) Mr. Aleksei Romanov member of the I. O. C. for U. S. S. R.

the Olympic Movement. I gave to Mr. Romanov copies of newspaper clippings reporting conditions in the U. S. S. R. that violated Olympic rules. He stated they were not true. I informed him that the U. S. S. R. representatives have been quite correct so far in their relations with the Olympic Organization but that we had one complaint about the political rally in which athletes participated immediately after the Games in Helsinki. I told him we did not believe it proper for athletes to make political speeches in connection with international events. The Olympic Games belong to the athletes and not to the nations. Sport must not be misused for national aggrandizement. That is why there is no official scoring in the Olympic Games.

Avery BRUNDAGE.



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Mr. Avery Brundage in Moscow.
On the right Mr. Aleksei Romanov
member of the I. O. C. for U. S. S. R.