

Bestowal of Preolympic Medals in France for the year 1955

The French Olympic Committee has again bestowed this year preolympic Medals, distinctions of a purely national character, on her best athletes who are going to compete in the Olympic Games of Melbourne. This ceremony took place at the seat of the French Olympic Committee on April 13th 1956. We think it may interest our readers to read a few extracts from the speech delivered on this occasion by its President, Mr. Armand Massard who said:

“I need not tell you that this ceremony assumes an exceptional meaning for us all this year. In

1954, we happened to find ourselves on the morrow of the Helsinki Games. In 1955, we had two years to prepare ourselves in, today we find ourselves in the crucial year. In a few month's time, a team of our best athletes will set on a long journey which will carry them to the other side of the world, far away from their native land, when they will be put to the test when competing against the greatest champions of the world selected from more than sixty nations.

“Among these nations, there are countries which have unlimited means of every kind at their disposal which they devote entirely to the preparation of athletes who are to participate in this unique international gathering embodied by the Olympic Games.

“Public opinion, perhaps, does not fully realize the keenly contestive nature of these international competitions, nor does it grasp the difficulties encountered by the competitors with regard to their correct classification among a selection of exceptionally high standard.

“On the other hand, people who have a certain knowledge on the Games, and are aware of the conditions in which these Games are being held, realize the perseverance and the strain of efforts, superhuman sometimes, which are demanded of competitors who aspire to the top ranks. Class is the foremost quality required in a champion, as well as naturel aptitude, unflinching courage, a will

of iron and an unflinching determination to outdo himself at the crucial moment. Obviously, it also calls for the best training facilities and conditions of preparation during the actual participation.

“In such a programme of international events, the top places are few and far between. You know this and we are fully aware of it too. Only very few among you can hope or pretend to win the supreme title of champion. But all of you can concentrate on going all out during the preliminary heats in order to be able to say: “I have done the best I can”. In this lies the genuine spirit of sportsmanship as was conceived by our great compatriot Pierre de Coubertin.”