

Speech of Avery Brundage

at the Solemn Opening Ceremony of the International Olympic Committee

Session, Melbourne, November 19, 1956

Your Excellency, Your Royal Highnesses, The Right Honourable the Prime Minister, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen :

About to open the Games which celebrate the 16th Olympiad of the modern cycle, we are here in Melbourne, Australia, almost as far as possible away from Olympia, the site of the Original Games. We are in another hemisphere and on another continent. That in itself is a most significant thing, indicating as it does how far the Olympic Movement has travelled in the last sixty years. We are indebted to the late Sir Raymond Connelly, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, to our colleague Sir Harold Luxton, and the others on the small committee that conceived this idea of staging the Games in the Antipodes and travelled half-way around the world seven years ago to convince the International Olympic Committee, which was meeting in Rome, that it could be done.

We are indebted also to those who made this dream, which many in those days thought it was, a reality — the authorities of the City of Melbourne, the State of Victoria, and the Federal Government of Australia, who provided the funds ; the Organizing Committee headed by the Honourable W. S. Kent Hughes ; the Australian Olympic Federation ; and last but not least, the two Australian members of the International Olympic Committee, Messrs. Hugh Weir and Lewis Luxton, who have furnished able support at all times and especially when it was needed most. It was a huge task to organize this vast and complicated enterprise and it required the concerted efforts of all for all for success. It is not to be denied that we were worried and had our doubts at times, until we discovered that Australians are different — that while they do insist on doing things their own peculiar way, when they say a thing will be done they mean it. When I was here eighteen months ago, the last man I talked with was the Prime Minister the Right

Honourable R. G. Menzies, who assured me that this was the case. After that, I stopped worrying, since the Prime Minister is a man who inspires confidence. The proof is here today and the Games, I am sure, will create new records not only on the track and on the field but also in international friendship and understanding.

Fifteen Olympiads have passed since the Baron de Coubertin, almost single-handed at times, as a result of strenuous personal efforts, finally overcame the doubts and hesitancy of a skeptical world and succeeded in reviving the Olympic Games after a lapse of 1500 years. No other enterprise created by man had ever lasted so long. It was only after Greece was conquered by the Romans, in a new and different era, that the Games were abolished. The Olympic Movement is now three score years of age and has reached maturity. Let us review the amazing accomplishments in these last sixty years.

The ancient Games were confined to Greeks, one kind of people who thought and acted more or less alike. Others were said to be barbarians and not competent to participate. De Coubertin's idea was not to confine the modern Games to any one country or even to any one race. They were to be open to the youth of the world regardless of colour, creed, or political convictions. Owing to differences in language, in economic status, and in social development, many considered this an impossible program, but the Olympic Movement has now been embraced by all civilized nations. In those first Games of the Modern Cycle there were but a handful of participants, mostly European. Aside from the United States, which sent a small team, hastily assembled, there were no non-Europeans except Australians... no South Americans, no Africans, no Asiatics. Today we have representatives here from all continents and from every important country, all respecting and observing

the same rules and regulations. No code, religious or civil, has ever had such universal acceptance.

Why is it that the Olympic Movement has been adopted by all the world? It is because its principles are so sound and so fundamental that they appeal to everyone, and this is the hope of the world today, when it is so seriously divided in other fields, that people of more than eighty different countries do believe in fair play and good sportsmanship and do support enthusiastically such an idealistic enterprise.

It is true there has been criticism because, while in the 'Golden Age' there was an Olympic truce and all warfare stopped during the period of the Games, after two thousand years of civilization, we stop the Games and continue our wars. One of the objectives of the Games is to develop international good will. Alas, the Olympic Movement has no soldiers and no money. It, therefore, cannot stop Warfare, but it can and does set a good example, and only when the politicians of the world adopt those principles of fair play and good sportsmanship which prevail on the fields of amateur sport will there no longer be necessity for wars.

Lest one consider this a futile gesture because there are no guns and no dollars, one should remember that right here in Melbourne are the representatives of countries that have no diplomatic connection, mingling on the fields of sport, where Olympic rules are followed and respected by all. And further to demonstrate the great power of this wonderful Olympic idea, remember that at Cortina d'Ampezzo during the VIIth Olympic Winter Games, there was one German team composed of competitors from both East and West Germany, all with the same uniform, the same leaders, and the same flag. This will also be the case here in Melbourne, thanks to Dr. Karl von Halt, President of the West German Olympic Committee, and to President Heinz Schöbel, of the East German Olympic Committee, who handled the delicate negotiations. Here is a most conspicuous example of Olympic power; the answer to a problem that has baffled the Chancelleries of the world.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure, at the invitation of Prince Gholam Reza Pahlavi, International Olympic Committee member for Iran, to visit that country during their annual celebration of Olympic Week. At that time I visited Isfahan and saw the impressive old Persian polo field which is now the main square in that city. When that fields was used, sport was only for kings, princes and the nobility. For the rest of humanity, the struggle for existence was a full-time job. Today, conditions have changed and sport is for everyone. For one who participates in the Olympic Games, thousands try. It is most important, therefore, that there is a clear understanding that sport must be amateur or it is not sport at all, it is a business — a branch of the entertainment business. There is nothing wrong with that, of course, it can be as honourable as any business, but if sport is to develop all its social, moral, ethical, and educational values, it must be practiced for its own sake as a vocation and not as a career. There are things more valuable than money — things impossible to purchase and one such thing is an Olympic medal.

It was not just to establish champions and to break records that de Coubertin revived the Games.

He had in mind, it's true, both the physical benefits and the good health that follow programs of physical training and competitive sport. His idea, however, was far broader, because it encompassed all the other values, social, ethical, æsthetic, moral, and educational, that are perhaps even more important. These values, it is true, have sometimes been overlooked. Originally, in the ancient Games, there was but one athletic event. The Games were primarily a religious festival to pay homage to the gods. It was the fine arts that were emphasized; there were odes to be composed, epics to be recited, dramas to be performed, sculpture to be viewed, music to be heard. Last of all, there was the single race in the stadium, in which grace and beauty were as much esteemed as speed and strength. All the participants were eager to do their very best to show their gods that they appreciated their blessings, not for any material reward, but for the joy of achievement, for the praise and applause of their peers, and for the satisfaction of accomplishment. There were no prizes, no awards, save a crown of wild olive — the glory of victory was enough.

This amateur conception was something new — it belonged, to the so-called 'Golden Age' when civilization blossomed and flowered as never before. Alas, the Games became commercialized, excesses appeared, denounced by the scholars and philosophers of that day and age who cried out against the subsidization and proselyting of competitors, the over-emphasis and the other abuses; the 'Golden Age' came to an end and the glory of Greece faded.

Baron de Coubertin had before him the history of the ancient Games, and when they were revived, he sought to surround them with safeguards to prevent the same fate. "I did not revive the Games for the cinema, or the counting house," he said. He wanted them to be like the original Games of the Golden Age, an offering of their best efforts by contestants, officials and organizers, dedicated to the Olympic Movement, without thought of reward. No one is permitted to make a profit from the Olympic Games. They require sacrifice on the part of all, and it is an amazing thing that they have grown and prospered in these materialistic times. As a matter of fact, the Olympic Games could never exist as a commercial enterprise — the costs are far too great. They must remain amateur with all participants, both athletes and officials, contributing their services, or they are finished, for there is not enough return to pay them. The public has supported the Games because they are a hallowed event, an idealistic enterprise devoted to the betterment of humanity and a more peaceful world. The prestige of the Olympic Movement and the respect in which it is held are due to universal approval of its basic philosophy.

The International Olympic Committee has striven to keep the Games dignified, pure, clean and honest, as designed by their wise and farseeing renovator. They must not become a battleground for national ascendancy, a money-making apparatus for participants and officials, or a circus or carnival to groom participants for a professional career to line the pockets of promoters.

We are happy to be here in Australia to witness the demonstration of Olympic ideas on another

continent. Australia, one of the few countries that heeded the call of Baron de Coubertin in 1896, has participated in every Games since. This early devotion to the cause, and continued loyalty, despite the huge cost in both time and money,

was one of the reasons for accepting Melbourne's invitation to stage the Games. We are now assured that they will be a great success. We have received a warm welcome and we thank you again for all you have done.