

Women's sports in the Olympic Games

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It was decided in Amsterdam, in 1928, to incorporate women in the Olympics for the first time, and it is not irrelevant to recall the fact that Baron de Coubertin openly expressed his disapproval of this new measure. In the following statement, I am not prepared to form a judgement, as I am not qualified to do so, as to women's sport being encouraged or condemned from the biological, moral or social aspects, but I only intend to examine whether the introduction of competitions *between women* on a Games's Programme which is already overcrowded offers any real interest.

NOTA-BENE : *In the following statement, the actual technical side of the question is based on the results obtained at Helsinki in 1952. Despite the fact that some of the scores have been improved in Melbourne in 1956, the general line of my argument is not changed in anyway, considering that similar progressive results, if not better ones, have been recorded by men *athletes in Melbourne. The reader will easily transpose the argument, but in order to facilitate the task for him, we propose to indicate the results obtained at Melbourne in the case of each event as a reminder.*

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For some time past, the International Olympic Committee has rightly shown concern with regard to reducing the programme of the Games which has the greatest difficulty to keep within the schedule of a fortnight, showing even a tendency to overflow.

For a number of reasons which we consider irrelevant to the subject, it is quite out of the question to extent the duration of the Games, yet if we do not take steps to stop the ascending rhythm of the Games, we shall see an increased number of participating nations and of the contingents of inscribed competitors.

Several proposals have been put forward, some of them have been rejected and others have been accepted with reluctance.

One suggestion envisaged the elimination of team events, but these competitions are most attractive' and to do away with them would seriously affect the receipts of the organizing bodies. — To limit the number of athletes likely to be selected in each country, but this suggestion curtails the scope of the olympic manifestation and turns it into an ordinary Championship for champions, thus depriving some 'future hopeful' of the possibility of getting a

place in order to try their luck in the Games. — Holding preliminary heats before the Games was also suggested but here again, one encounters the same disadvantages as before,

and so on.

Apart from suggestions which have been purely incidental and verbal up to the present time, nobody has taken on himself to propose the only solution likely to gain two or three days of the programme of events, a solution which would not affect or be adverse to the Olympic principles, nor take away from the glamour of the Games, nor be prejudicial to the receipts of the Stadium : I mean the elimination of women's events.

Let us be quite clear on this point : there is no question of excluding women from the Games, but, on the contrary, to incorporate them more closely by doing away with them standing in a class apart and allowing them to compete with the men, even if it entails placing them in a separate class while competing in the same event with the men.

Please do not think that I act under the impulse of a misogynist ! far from it, as I am convinced that most people who agree with me on this matter but fail to say so, do it out of a mistaken feeling of chivalry. Indeed, in which way is it condemning women's sports when one put forward the following argument ? : There is no more need for women to hold competitions among themselves in special events in the Olympics than for athletes from the Universities, the youth associations, the veterans, the deaf and dumbs, etc... Let the Federations use their own discretion in organizing Women's Championships as they do in the case of the Universities. Let a National Olympic Committee which considers a woman a worthy representative in certain events, select her as its representative and send her to the Games in order to compete *with the men...* Nothing is more logical, but what fails to be logical is to go on overcrowding the Games which occur every four years with women's events, these, let us be frank about it, fail to rise a genuine interest, from the point of view of sport and fail to find favour with the general public.

On two occasions, at the Vienna Session but especially at Helsinki, I ventured to put forward this proposal, but I must admit that it did not seem to appeal to the majority of my Colleagues owing either to a vague notion of chivalry or on the assumption that the Amateur Athletics and the Swimming

Federations would not look upon this suggestion in a favourable way.

Let us hope, however, that the International Olympic Committee will realize that the matter I am submitting to the readers of the Olympic Bulletin, represents a concise examination of a proposal which is likely to convince its members as much as I am myself, on the soundness of the following opinion :

1. When it is agreed to shorten the Games' Programme, the elimination of women's events ought to be much more acceptable and logical than the elimination of team events or that of certain optional sports as mentioned in some reports ;

2. These events hold little interest for the general public and their elimination will not affect the success of the Games ;

3. Considering that the essential task of the International Olympic Committee is to uphold the tradition of real sport, and this is the most important point ; the competitions exclusively for women, from the sport point of view, fail to rise anything but a very mild interest.

I would like to elaborate this last point, as, in my opinion, I consider it as the outstanding feature prevailing in this discussion.

I based my argument on two facts : the official listing of the results obtained at Helsinki and from the previous World records, from these I came to the logical conclusion that there is such definite superiority in the quality between men's sport and women's that one marvels why women's performances are still being forced on an olympic public. These contests are a waste of time and offer no real value to the onlookers who fail to learn anything from them.

Let us revise the various sports contested in the respective women's events :

a) ATHLETICS

1. 100 metres

World : 11,2 (H : 10,1)
Helsinki : 11,5
Melbourne : 11,5

Marjory Jackson (Australia), was first with a record of 11,5. Out of the 71 men who competed in the preliminary heats of the same event, two equalled the score listed above and two were actually under.

Had Jackson therefore competed in the same race with men she would have been outrun by 67 competitors.

I wish to add further that in the men's finals, the *last* competitor was placed 6th at 10,5, he would thus have beaten Jackson by more than 10 metres.

Another fact worth mentioning : the average standard of preliminary heats is rated at about 11 while the same average is about 13 for women. In other words, the average standard runner in the 100 m. outrun the average woman racer by 25 m. this figure represents a *quarter of the total length of the track*, the average woman racer:

2. 200 metres

World record : 23,2 (H : 20)
Helsinki : 23,4
Melbourne : 23,4

In this race similar facts are to be observed. The same winner, Miss Jackson set a fresh women's record at Helsinki when she ran at 23,4 over the same distance.

Out of the 72 men who competed in the men's event, only 2 competitors representing Thailand ran slightly under this score.

The last competitor in the men's finals was placed 6th at 21,3 ; thus Jackson, who deserves to be looked upon as a super champion among women athletes would have been outrun by 30 metres by the worst competitor in the men's finals.

3. Relay 100 metres

World : 44,5 (H : 39,5)
Helsinki : 45,9
Melbourne : 44,5

Race ran at Helsinki by the U.S.A. women's team at 45,9.

The men (U.S.A.) team did it in 40,1.

In the preliminary heats with the exception of the Thailand team which made 44,5, the worst time for relay (men) has been 42,9. This means that the world record women's team would have been beaten by 20 men teams out of 21 teams.

4. 80 metres Hurdles

This event cannot be compared exactly with the equivalent in men's as this race is run over a distance of 110 m. by men. But we can draw more or less the same conclusion with regard to this event than to the one quoted above, though actually worse in this case, when one considers that the maximum distance for the women's hurdles event is 80 metres.

5. Long Jump

World record : 6,35 (H : 8,13)
Helsinki : 6,24
Melbourne : 6,35

Williams (New-Zealand) new O. R. 6,24.

As against Biffle (U.S.A.) 7,57 in the men's event, a performance rather mediocre, the record being 8,13.

Can you imagine what this difference represents ? It amounts to almost 2 metres (thus 25 % between the two World records : men and women.)

To revert to the statistics of Helsinki, out of 27 men competing in the long jump event. 26 have made more than 6,40 m. only the man of Thailand would have been beaten by Williams with the unheard of score of (5,317 which seems to have been caused by a glaring lack of technical knowledge).

6. High Jump

World record : 1,76 (H : 2,15)
Helsinki : 1,67
Melbourne : 1,76

In this event the difference is not so great in view of the fact that Brand (South Africa) made 1,67 at Helsinki while Davis (U.S.A.) made 2,4 in the men's event.

Nevertheless, out of 37 men who competed in this men's event, the worse three have still scored 1,70 and would have thus beaten Brand or equalled by a few centimetres the performance of the recordwoman.

7. *Javelin*

World record : 55,48 (H : 85,71)
Helsinki : 50,47
Melbourne : 53,40

Zatopeka (Czecho-Slovakia) was placed first with a score of 50,47, but the weakest of the men in the men's event made 58,28 thus about 10 metres more.

And what about the better man Young (U.S.A.) who scored 73,78 or of the World Champion (Danielsen, Norway) who scored 85,71 thus achieving a performance outrunning Zatopeka by 36 metres and 30 metres more than the woman world champion...

8. and 9. *Shot Put and Discus*

World : 16,76 and 57,04
Helsinki : 15,28 and 51,42
Melbourne : 16,59 and 53,69

Comparisons in these events are difficult to make in view of the fact that the implement used by women competitors is much lighter than the one used by men. Let us note however, that in the men's finals of the Shot Put, 9 competitors used a weight of 7 kgs 500, throwing it further than the woman champion Galina Zybina (U.S.S.R.) who achieved a performance of 15,28 with a weight of 6 kgs 500 ; as for the Shot Put man champion (P. O'Brien, 1955), U.S.A., he reached a distance of 19,75. The difference is therefore enormous. The same observations are to be made about the Discus event, the woman champion at Helsinki (Ramaskova), U.S.S.R. scored 51,42 but the difference is less blatant when one considers that :

1. Inness (U.S.A.) with the heavy discus made 55,3 at Helsinki, while Gordien, world record in 1949, made 59,28.

2. Some men with the heavy discus did not score more than 38 and 39 at Helsinki.

The discus is therefore the only athletic event where some women competitors using the heavy discus would not have been ludicrous, although it is more than probable that not one of them would have reached the men' semi-finals.

b) SWIMMING

1. *100 m. Free style*

World record : 1,2 (H : 55,4)
Helsinki : 1,6,8
Melbourne : 1,2
Stoke (Hungary) scored 1,6,8.

Out of the 61 men who competed in the preliminary heats, the worst swimmer (India)

scored 1,10,8 and another from (Switzerland) 1,7,2. Stoke would thus have been beaten by 59 competitors. As for the World woman champion, she could have beaten the Viet-Nam (1,5), Israël (1,5,6) as well as five or six others.

But of course the difference between women and men champions is enormous : Scholes (U.S.A.) scored 57,1 and the world's record being 55,4, both these competitors would have left the women champions *half-way through* the race.

2. *400 metres Free Style.*

World : 4,54,6 (H : 4,27,3)
Helsinki : 5,12,1
Melbourne : 4,54,6

In this event the women's performances are better, and have more merit.

Thus Syenge (Hungary) scored 5,12,1 while Boiteux (France) scored 4,30 and the world record is 4,27,3.

Out of the 51 men competing, 9 only were outpaced by the women champions. Nevertheless, the women could not have passed the preliminary heats except perhaps the World woman Champion.

3. *100 metres Back Stroke*

World : 1,10,9 (H : 1,2,2)
Helsinki : 1,14,3
Melbourne : 1,12,9

Harrison (South Africa) scored 1,14,3 (World Record : Kint (Holland) in 1939 : 1,10,9).

Out of the 38 men competing at Helsinki only four were slightly worse than Harrison. The World Championship Record for men being 1,2,2, it means that they were about 15 metres ahead of the woman Champion. Even she could not have passed the preliminary tests, for men.

4. *200 metres Breast Stroke*

World : 2,48,5 (H : 2,34,4)
Helsinki : 2,51,7
Melbourne : 2,53,1.
Same scales of comparison.

Skekely (Hungary) new O. R. 2,51,7 and the World woman Champion 1950.

Novak (Hungary) scored 2,48,5.

Out of the 40 men competing only five scored less than Skekely and eight less than Novak, while the man champion : Davies (Australia) scored 2,34,4.

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From the scores quoted above, it is obvious that the women champions of Helsinki and even the World women Champions could not have passed the *preliminary heats in any athletic events or Swimming*, with the eventual exception of the only event where the women Champions might have managed to win a

place, and this with difficulty namely discus and the 400 metres Free Style Swimming.

According to a very apt remark made by the author of a recently published book on sport, Mr. Jean Paulhan in *Half a century of women's sport* says : "No woman has ever been found capable to beat the performance of an average man athlete." With regard to speed contest, adds Mr. Paulhan, "it would be a very easy thing to find 2000 men athletes to equal the Women's World records."

Under these circumstances, we sincerely questioned the wisdom of maintaining these women's contests which are of no interest to anybody and tend to prove the abyss which exists between the athletic results compared in both sexes, all these only overload a programme which one tries to lighten by all sort of devices.

Is it therefore a matter of abolishing women's sport on account of this ? of course not... The federations are free to organize their yearly Womens Championships as a means to encourage the taste for sports among women. Our only object here is to point out that, for imperative reasons of saving time and reducing the time table, the Olympic Programme should be reserved solely for men's events or better still for

mixed events open to men and women competitors.

The National Olympic Committees can be authorized to proceed to the selection of a woman competing in the Olympic events. The day might come, as it has already happened in the case of equestrian events, when women athletes of outstanding abilities might fight their way and reach the quarter finals or the semi-finals.

In a case like this, one could contemplate the *separate listing* of women, thus classifying women who compete with men according to the standard of their performances when they will be entitled to become Women Olympic Champions or be the holder of an award or medal.

At any rate we would thus be spared the boring performances consisting in 50 or 60 women competing among themselves in order to obtain insignificant scores!...

In the last Games at Helsinki, had this system been in force, a Jackson or a Zatopek would have been permitted to cut an honourable figure in the jointly held preliminary heats or the mixed competitions and vindicate their titles of women champions without having to measure their strength against a large number of women who, one often wonders why they ever came to the Games.

