
What caused the flame for Squaw Valley to be lighted in Norway instead of Olympia?

In the course of the last few days of January 1960, the President of the International Olympic Committee sent a cable to the Chancellery of Lausanne, to inform it that the Olympic Committee for Greece refused to light the Sacred Flame at Olympia, and to assure its transport to Athens airport from where it had to be conveyed by special plane to Los Angeles, then to be passed on by a carefully scheduled race of relays of young students to Squaw Valley. On receipt of the cable, the Chancellor immediately contacted the Greek Olympic Committee by telephone in order to know what circumstances brought about this *refusal*. This was not just a flat refusal, it was caused by the fact that the Hellenic Olympic Committee was only informed at the end of January of the intentions of the Squaw Valley Organizing Committee who invited it to assume the responsibility of lighting and transporting the Sacred torch to Athens by relay of runners. To carry this out, 350 torches were required which the American Organizers failed to provide. A special plane had to be chartered in view of the fact that the transport of a flame is not allowed in a plane of an ordinary service line. Above all, according to tradition, the

kindling of this sacred symbolical Flame has to be done by the rays of the sun, which, in these Winter days, does not come out on command! As F. Schlatter observed in a Lausanne newspaper: 'In this case, it is infinitely easier to order the sun to rise in the Walt Disney's films (President of the Pageant Committee of Squaw Valley) than to make the sun shine in Olympia during the Winter!'. 'An helicopter could be chartered to transport the Olympic Flame from Olympia to Athens', remarked maliciously Mr. Prentis C. Hale, President of the Squaw Valley Organizing Committee, to which came the retort: 'We, in Greece, still respect time-honoured traditions (fortunately)'; neither could it be assumed i.e. that the lighting of the Flame could be done by means of a lighter! When one takes into consideration the months required for the organizing in preparation of this procedure, one can readily understand why the Greeks did not want to venture in so hazardous an adventure just a few days before the Opening Ceremony of the Winter Games in Squaw Valley.

Wasting no time, the American Organizers asked Norway (who accepted) to kindle the first torch from the hearth of Sondre

Nordheim's chalet. Sondre Nordheim (1825-1897) who was the Skiing champion of Norway, a country considered the Fatherland of skiing, lived at Morgeval, and his chalet was the starting point where the Olympic Flame was lighted for the Flame Ceremony held in connection with the Oslo Games of 1952.

So much for facts as they really happened.

THE OFFICIAL TEXT OF THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE CONCERNING THE OLYMPIC FLAME, READS AS FOLLOWS

In ancient Greece, during the Olympic Games, a sacred flame burned at the Altar of Zeus, in whose honour the Games were held. As an impressive part of the opening ceremony of the modern Olympic Games, the Olympic Flame is lighted. It burns in a conspicuous place in the main stadium throughout the entire Games. The Organizing Committee for the 1936 Games conceived

the idea of kindling this flame with a torch, lit by the sun at Olympia, Greece, site of the ancient Games, and passed from hand to hand all the way to Berlin by a relay of runners. Starting from Olympia they ran to Athens, Salonika, Sofia, Belgrade, Budapest, Vienna, Prague, Dresden, and carefully scheduled and managed their race so that the last runner arrived at the stadium at the exact instant required. The arrival of this torch, carrying the sacred flame, is a most dramatic feature of the first day of the Games.

In 1948, the flame was brought by a relay of runners from Olympia to London, and, in 1952, from Olympia to Helsinki. In 1956, from Olympia to Melbourne by air and relay.

In 1960 it will be by boat and relay from Olympia to Rome.

(*Ed.*: In this text there is no mention about an Olympic Flame for the Winter Games.)
