

Flags incidents

(Sequel to our article in the Bulletin N° 69.)

With reference to the article we published on the subject in our last Bulletin, Mr. Jean Weymann, Secy of the Swiss Olympic Committee, reminded us of the incident which took place during the Winter Olympics held at St. Moritz in 1948, when the Olympic flag which was flown from the main mast actually vanished. It had been stolen during the night, and Mr. Weymann, informed of the fact, went to replace it at 2 o'clock in the morning with a temperature of 28 degrees below zero! The stolen flag was never found since.

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Kitzbühel. The contest for the 'Grand Prix of Hahnenkamm' was held at Kitzbühel (Austria) in January 1959. The national flags of the participating nations were flown as usual. During the first night, the Soviet flag vanished and it had to be replaced by the organizers. The same thing happened during the second night when the new flag disappeared too. The Soviets protested and demanded that all the flags be taken down if theirs was not put back and flown. A justified request to which they were fully entitled. Somebody had to be sent hurriedly to Innsbruck to get another one. However, the organizers who were as cautious as thrifty (we owe these particulars to *l'Equipe*) carefully had this overcostly flag removed at night, otherwise they would have had to buy a dozen! The man who committed the offence was a thief, a collector or a supporter of the Soviets nobody can tell which ... as he was never found as for proving which of the three motives prompted him, this is still more difficult.

WE HAVE RECEIVED FOLLOWING LETTER

Arosa, 23rd January 1960.

Otto Mayer Esq.,
Chancelier du Comité International
Olympique,
Mon Repos,
Lausanne

'Dear Mr. Mayer,

'A few days ago I read in a newspaper your idea of abolishing the national flags at the Olympics. I fully agree. (The chancellor never gave that idea to the Press. *Ed.*)

'As you are doubtless aware, after the last war, I introduced, that at international Figure Skating competitions, the European

and World Championships, during the distribution of prizes on the ice and the banquet, no national flags were to be shown nor hoisted, and no national anthems were to be played (instead: the *Ode of Joy* of the *IXth Symphony* of Beethoven). Not even the nationality of the winners was mentioned, only their names, and this worked very well. Everybody was happy about this new style, which the International Skating Union introduced at least in the figure skating section. Boys and girls no longer carry the burden of starting in a competition as ambassadors of their country; the spirit amongst the international young crowd of figure skaters is now friendly and cheerful. Even most of the officials of the I.S.U. started to regard themselves as ambassadors of the I.S.U. in their respective countries and not vice-versa.

'Lately the flag controversies have taken on grotesque forms. Therefore, it cannot be made clear enough that results in international sport events have nothing whatever to do with politics or nationalities. They are individual performances, and I do not see why nations should claim the honours of individual efforts, which they are doing in the majority of cases. There are a few exceptions, for instance, team-matches.

'Therefore, I would like to ventilate the following proposal:

'At all international sporting events, including the Olympics, only the flags of the International Sport Federations should be shown. If they do not possess any, they can be created.

'At the distribution of prizes, during the Olympics, the winners are honoured by the Olympic flag and by the playing of the Olympic hymn.

'At international competitions, European and World Championships, the respective flags of their countries' sport federation are hoisted and the *Ode of Joy* is played. Only the names of the winners are mentioned. (If anybody is interested, he can find the nationality of all participants in the programmes.)

'I believe the outlined idea shows a way out of the present dilemma and would help, in future, to further both friendship and sportsmanship amongst the peoples of the world. I would be happy if these lines could contribute to achieve this aim.'

Very sincerely yours,

G.F.C. Witt,

Hon. member of the I.S.U.