

Correspondence

Should the Olympic Programme be cut down?

*Original text from General V. Stoitchev,
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We are all aware that since the revival of the ancient Olympic Games and until the XVIIth Olympiad in Rome, the number of sports figuring on the Olympic programme has considerably increased, and to all probability will increase still further. The same is true of the participants. While the first Games at Athens, in 1896, involved the participation of 13 countries with a total of 285 competitors, by the 1960 Games in Rome the number had risen to 84 nations and 5,396 participants (incl. 537 women). There has likewise been an impressive extension of *sports* — from ten at the first Olympics to 18 at the Games in Rome — and in the number of events.

Every true sportsman should find this progress inspiring, because it is eloquent proof of the increasing world interest in sports, and of the firmer conviction that sports are a powerful and effective medium for promoting the well-being of mankind, and perhaps the best antidote against the toil and hardships of everyday life. It should gladden the heart of all who are working for the promotion of the Olympic ideal in the world, and above all of the

members of the International Olympic Committee itself.

But no matter how plain and clear the facts, during the past few years there have been some even within the International Olympic Committee, who pretend that it has become necessary to cut down the Olympic programme — both the list of sports events, as well as the number of participants. Certain proposals to this effect have in fact been made, and were brought up again during the Rome Session. But the arguments accompanying such proposals have somehow lacked conviction.

One reason given by the partisans of restriction is the claim that the Organizers of the Games nowadays have increasing difficulties to face. Some members of the International Olympic Committee consider these difficulties to be beyond solution. One that is most frequently stressed, is the difficulty of assuring appropriate grounds and installations for staging the events, and providing accommodation and services for the great number of participants and officials. Also, the complications involved in the elaboration of the programme of the Games;

the problem of transport facilities for the participants, equipment and the public.

This anxiety might have been in part explained if there had been a shortage of cities desiring to stage the Olympic Games. But this is in no way the case. On the contrary, the number of cities proposing to stage the Games has been increasing from one Olympiad to another. In fact, in recent years this has been for the International Olympic Committee a case of *embarras du choix*.

We must not overlook the significant fact that the delegations of the various cities proposing their candidatures for the organization of the Olympic Games—headed by their most eminent representatives, such as Governors, Mayors, Presidents of City Councils — have never breathed a word of anxiety regarding any financial, technical and other difficulties, or such relating to the problem of transport, accommodation and food of the participants, officials, and the public at large. These delegations have always shown their goodwill and adequate facilities to meet all International Olympic Committee requirements, to the last detail.

All cities, which have so far proposed their candidatures to stage the Games, have in every case spent considerable sums on oral and printed publicity materials (booklets, pamphlets, prospectuses and fine albums) in order to win the good will of the International Olympic Committee when making its choice.

On its part, the International Olympic Committee has always requested of the Organizing Committees to observe the basic principles embodied in the Olympic Statutes and Regulations — a demand which has always been accepted by the prospective candidates without the least objection. And each one of us can testify that the increasing number of sports and participants has so far never formed the ground of any complaint whatsoever.

As a case in point, shall we quote from the *International Olympic Committee No 72*, which reads:

The Games in Rome have, beyond all question, been the most sumptuous and gorgeous in History. Never before has the press spilt so much ink on the subject, nor has it expressed its appreciation in such glowing terms. The installations were perfect and the technical services operated outstandingly well.

It has been my personal impression that many partisans of a restriction of the Olympic programme can hardly be convinced of the strength of their own arguments. What better proof than the fact that the demands to include new events in the Olympic programme—submitted to the International Olympic Committee at its Sofia Session in 1957 (Volleyball) and at this year's Session in Rome (Judo) —were both adopted by the International Olympic Committee. I noted

in these cases the affirmative vote of several colleagues, who have declared themselves ardent partisans of a reduction of the programme. I can give no other explanation for their seeming wavering than the irresistible spell which sports cast upon us all, and the fact that we — whether favouring a restriction, or not—are all without exception imbued by the resolute will of serving faithfully the Olympic ideal.

Another argument of the partisans of restriction is that it would be difficult and impossible to compress into a fortnight—the period fixed for the duration of the Games—all sports and events figuring on the present programme. But by whom and by what yearstick has this limit been established?

By ancient tradition? No! For we know that, in the past, the Olympic Games were staged over a long period of time: weeks, and even months!

Is it then some impossibility of prolonging their duration? Hardly! Because what is to prevent us from extending them by a mere two or three days? An Olympiad covers a period of four years, which means one thousand four hundred and sixty days. To dedicate a score or so of these days to the well-being of mankind and to the strengthening of the body and spirit of world youth would not be a vain sacrifice! An insignificant extension of the Games by only two or three days would overcome all difficulties that might possibly arise in the adequate elaboration of the programme so as to cover all sports and events.

I am firmly convinced that the International Olympic Committee and all of its members ought to take a resolute stand not for a reduction but, on the contrary, for a more complete Olympic programme, which might also include other sports —particularly those tending to develop the will power and nerve of the participants, as for instance is the case with parachute jumping. The members of the International Olympic Committee should insist on the retention of events which arouse interest in the great mass of the people and develop the love of sports, like the team events in particular. Also, on the reinstatement of sports which have already figured on the Olympic programme, and not so long ago at that, such as polo and tennis.

With this approach; the International Olympic Committee will enable a growing number of men and women of all continents to take part in the Games, and will contribute to the promotion of the Olympic ideal in the world.

Any reduction of the programme—whether affecting the number of sports or the number of participants—would on the contrary deal a grave and perhaps irreparable blow upon the magnitude and prestige of the Olympic Movement.

Sofia, December 1960.