

## **What would have happened had the Olympics of 1908 been held in Rome, to whom they were given?**

During the 1904 Session held in London, the International Olympic Committee attributed the Games of the IVth Olympiad of 1908 to the city of Rome. At a later date, the International Olympic Committee revoked its decision and transferred them to London. It strikes us as a point of topical interest to recall the thoughts and motives which incited de Coubertin to opt in favour of the Eternal City where he hoped fervently the Games would be held.

De Coubertin arrived in Rome in February 1905. The planning of the preparatory work for the organizing of the Games of the IVth Olympiad existed already in a fold scheme. On one hand, the Chief initiative Committee created in 1904 by Count Brunetta d'Usseaux, which had not been dissolved and of which Prince Colonna, Lord Mayor of Rome, had accepted to be president in July 1904. On the otherhand, a Municipal Board which was by way of being formed under the supervision of Count de San Martino. The foundations schemes and basic principles had been established as the result of a visit the latter paid to Baron de Coubertin in the autumn 1904. Acting on Count Brunetta's advice, as soon as he arrived, de Coubertin called for a meeting of the 'Chief Committee' to be convened as well as for the completion of the Municipal Board. His requests remained unanswered. They were ignored under various pretexts and the Meeting of the Chief Committee did not take place. In the course of an interview, de Coubertin was received to an 'At Home' by the King and Queen of Italy, in the course of which they were informed how de Coubertin has set his heart on celebrating the Games in Rome, also how he wished to find in Rome and surrounding district suitable sporting grounds for holding the competitions. To this end, the Renovator explored Rome and surrounding districts. He found there all that was required to be a worthy setting and give the Games all the splendour and stylish beauty he wished for. The Piazza di Sienna, the Caracalla Thermes, the Piazza del Popolo, etc., all

were worthy settings to the Games. The ceremony of awarding the Olympic Medals was to take place at the Capitol. As for the Coliseum, it proved to be most inconvenient beside its use being improper for, in the eyes of de Coubertin, the Coliseum could only be a place of pilgrimage on account of all the blood shed there by the martyrs.

Baron de Coubertin drew up the budget of the Games himself, we publish it herewith expressed in the gold standard of the time: 115,000.- Swiss Frcs. for the technical works, namely: 20,000 Frcs. for the Piazza di Sienna, 8,000 for the Caracalla Thermes, 9,000 for aquatic sports, 42,000 for Tor di Quinto (football, cricket and polo), 30,000 for subsidies to the Milan Automobile Club and to the Yachting Club in Naples; 6,000 Frcs. to be allotted to other sports. In addition to the above there were the following amounts: 40,000 Frcs. for Art competitions, 30,000 Frcs. for decorating the stadia and a supplementary credit of 20,000 for correspondence, printing and postage of programmes, 8,000 Frcs. for the fee of the General Director, 50,000 Frcs. for eventual subsidies to cover expenses of transfer and transport of material. TOTAL ESTIMATE: 303,000 Frcs.

In drawing up this modest budget, de Coubertin never anticipated the gigantic scale assumed later on by the Olympiad which took place in London. He estimated from 4 to 500 at the most the total number of participants (they were more than 2,000 in London in 1908!), and to fifteen to twenty thousand the number of spectators who would witness the various events. Today, one marvels at the Renovator's modest views. He declared: 'No tribunes nor grandstand are to deface the admirable Piazza di Sienna', he foresaw only light structures provided with movable seats and a very simple form of ornamentation adapted to the style of the place. 'With regard to the Caracalla Thermes, he was opposed to all forms of ornaments such as wreaths or oriflammes, he only approved of a few clumps of trees or shrubs placed at the foot of the bare ancient walls, and an antique awning

spread over the contestants.' He fancied, however, a few unaccompanied choirs placed here and there, open-air music from Glück or Palestrina.'

In order to succeed in his Roman enterprise, de Coubertin suggested several initial measures to be taken, among them the launching of a small joint-stock limited company with a capital reserve of Frcs. 500,000 divided in 5,000 issues of 100 frcs. share! We skip over the elaborate calculations made by the Renovateur but we make a point to recall his observations on the subject: 'You will readily subscribe one thousand francs for a work or scheme that interest you, especially when you know that of this sum you will only need to pay 600 Frcs. down with in two years and that you may have the luck never to pay the balance, also that you may receive something back at the end of the third year on the 600 frcs. (you originally paid in!). What marvellous calculations!...

Coubertin did almost everything himself single-handed. 8,000 copies of programmes were issued and there were invitations to be sent through the intermediary of embassies, legations and Italian consular services. We recall the fact that quite recently Mr. Armand Massard very rightly objected to this course of action being used in connection with the Olympics of Rome, in 1960. But, in this respect, wouldn't the Roman organizers follow in 'the footsteps of de Coubertin'?

One year went by since de Coubertin's visit to Rome and his projects were never submitted to the Municipal Board, the chief organizing Committee was never convened,

Prince Colonna resigned his presidency on the 25th of January 1906 and Count San Martino systematically left de Coubertin's letters unanswered. On August 10th 1905, Mr. Brunialti laid the blame of the delay on the political situation and the worry of recent municipal elections. The Italian Government refused all subsidies and the Municipal Board, still without giving sign of life, abandoned its mandate. Professor Mosso, in an article which created a great stir, declared, somewhat late, an open campaign against the project of the Olympiad to be celebrated in Rome. The new Lord Mayor, who was no more Count San Martino, wrote to de Coubertin informing him that the Municipal authorities still maintained their moral patronage and conveyed to the Renovator their best wishes for the finding of a new device which would secure the organizing of the Olympiad in Rome. The new Lord Mayor's letter was dated March 10th 1906 and expressed a real regret lest the International Olympic Committee were to give up definitively Rome as city hostess for the Games.

Eight members of the International Olympic Committee attended a session at Athens in April 1906. Coubertin very rightly did not attend this meeting, which was presided by Count Brunetta d'Usseaux (Italy). Fearing a new series of worries and set-backs, the International Olympic Committee annulled its vote of 1904 and decided to confer the organizing of the Games of the IVth Olympiad to London.

Rome has taken a glorious revenge in 1960...