

## Flags, Politics and Sport

In preceding bulletins, we broached the question of national flags being displayed at sport manifestations. We drew the attention of organizers on dangers incurring by the intempestive display of national flags. Although the ensuing comments have no actual relationship with the Olympic Games, they do happen to illustrate the state of mind entertained by sports leaders in East and West Germany, where alas, politics still has its word to say even in purely sportive manifestations.

We are relating facts which occurred last March in Geneva, at the Ice-Hockey Championships which were held simultaneously in Geneva and Lausanne. Being no judge on this matter, we will be content to quote what the Swiss press had to say on the subject and what was referred to as 'the flag incident of West Germany'. Virulent criticisms were also given a wide publicity in the German press on the subject. It attacked the Organizing Committee of these Championships and more especially that of Geneva. This Committee, however, only enforced the ruling submitted to them by the International Ice Hockey League.

It is pertinent to recall the fact that, at the Rimini Congress which preceded by a few

months the said Championships, the German Federations of the East and the West sat side by side. It was decided that the flags of all the participating nations would be used as outside and inside decoration of the skating-rink, as is the case in the protocol ceremonies, thus hoisting the flag of the victorious nation. All these decisions were adopted *without objection and unreservedly*. Unfortunately, just a few days before the opening of the Championships, the president of the Organizing Committee received a communication from a personality of the German Consulate who was acting on instructions received from the Bonn Government, to the effect that the West Germany team would not compete in the Championships if the flag of East Germany figured in the Skating-Rink. Only the leaders of the International Ice-Hockey League were entitled to reply. The German appeal remained unheeded and the respective flags of both countries were hissed at the masts, both teams taking part in the Championships. Then came the incident which occurred on Sunday March 12th (the last day of the Championships), when both German teams were to play. Half an hour before the match, the leaders of West Germany decided to withdraw their

team as they did not want to run the risk, should the East Germany team win, to have to be present when the latter's flag would be hoisted. Instructions to this effect had been given by Bonn. This incident created a great stir, since in Geneva as well as elsewhere one failed to understand why politics are still allowed to interfere in sport. As for the unfortunate players of both teams, it is said that they were kicking their heels, bored to death in their respective cloak-rooms waiting to be allowed to play. The athletes of both Germanies attend the Olympic Games when they send an unified team.

## Political incident

OCCURRED AT THE  
JUNIORS WORLD FENCING CHAMPIONSHIPS  
HELD AT DUISBURG (GERMANY)

Like Art, Sport ought not to have frontiers said *l'Équipe* of Paris when relating the political ingerence with regard to these Championships last March. On this occasion, the Germans of East Germany this time, withdrew their team alongside with the Russian, Polish and Hungarian teams who sympathized with the former. For what reason did they do that? According to a rule of general order decreed by the Rheinland which was enforced very strictly throughout the West German territory, the players of East Germany were not allowed to wear an arm-badge bearing the communist insignia. Mr. de Capriles, the new president of the International Fencing Federation (U.S.A.), endeavoured to conciliate the opposing parties of the respective governments. On the other hand, the East Germany contacted their leaders by telephon in order to submit the proposals suggested by their technical adviser, they were: 1) suppression of the arm-badge for fencing competitors belonging to both East and West Germany, 2) these two groups could wear the olympic insignia (!) 3) all the fencing competitors were to compete without an arm-badge. None of these proposals were accepted and the Germans of the East declared: 'We have been recognized by the International Fencing Federation. Our swordsmen are licensees, they are entitled to the same rights as those coming from other nations.'

Such incidents, including those with regard to the Ice-Hockey Championships in Geneva,

would never have taken place had the International Federations concerned applied the system adopted by Germany when she sent an unified team to the Olympic Games.

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## Why Politicians interfere

Incidents of the same order and practically identical occurred last March when the juniors International Football Championships took place in Portugal. Visas of entry were refused to the players of the East German team. The result of this were that several teams of the Eastern European countries abstained from competing in these Championships at the last moment and did not sent their teams. We refer again to the newspaper *l'Équipe* from Paris and quote what it had to say after giving an account of the facts relating to this incident:

'It is undoubtedly thanks to the moral authority exercised by the International Olympic Committee that sport has often solved problems when politicians failed. In the past heroical days, Bohemia and the Grand-Duchy of Finland had accepted to compete in the Olympic Games although both these countries were not politically speaking free, Bohemia was under Austro-Hungarian Rule whereas the Grand-Duchy of Finland was under tsarist ruling. In more recent times, Olympism unified Germany and recognized simultaneously both: the Republic of China (Peking) and that of Formosa, (Continental China withdrew from the Olympic Movement of her own accord). International federations do not have the same power or authority as that of the International Olympic Committee, far from it. Were the International Olympic Committee to become *democratized* in the way proposed by the Olympic Committee of the U.S.S.R., one can easily foresee what it would become, caught as it were between the devil and the deep sea! namely: nationalism and sport rivalry. International federations might be asked to exercise great caution when attributing championships to such and such country in view of the fact that certain country may not guarantee the giving of visas to visiting teams or that it may be too involved politically.

'Fortunately, sport is undeniably an exceptional bond between nations, whereas politics are unfortunately too often just the reverse'.