

Realization of an idea of Baron Pierre de Coubertin

Olympic Academy

(from the Zürich newspaper: *Sport*.)

On June 14th 1961, the athletes and students belonging to twenty-five different nationalities happened to foregather in Athens. As delegates of their respective countries, they were bidden to attend the inaugural ceremony of the first Olympic Academy founded in Greece. Thus, the idea conceived by Baron de Coubertin, resumed and developed by Professor Dr. Carl Diem, became a reality.

How did this memorable event originate? Professor Dr. Diem of Cologne gives us the following particulars with regard to this matter; The Olympic Academy, on the one hand, is dedicated to Elis of modern times and on the other, realizes the project conceived by Baron de Coubertin which consisted in setting Olympism on a scientific concrete basis.

It was at Elis that in former days, the intending participants to the Olympic Games foregathered, where they made common cause by training there altogether before the Games. They were submitted to the same rules of living, boarded and fed alike, they all went in for training together under the supervision of the camp leaders. They strove to improve their style by mutual encouraging and stimulating each other to the extent of forming a community serving the same religion when they dedicated themselves to Zeus. Thus, they were instructing each other. The best athlete among them won the olive wreath. Elis was the sport school and centre of the Mediterranean area.

Coubertin was to conceive a passion for this notion. According to him, one ought to create a research centre dedicated to all the sciences on which the technique and the achievement of sport are founded, also where the spiritual value of sport would find its expression in the Olympic Games. He estimated that a common scientific effort was necessary in order to hasten the expansion and progress of the Olympic Movement.

In the circumstances, it fell on the International Olympic Committee to give this institution the initial impetus.

Coubertin, himself, convened the first scientific Congress in Paris, three years after the famous international Congress held at the Sorbonne, when the revival of the Olympic Games of our modern era was decided. Other meetings followed, but one can venture to say that Coubertin, as the sole director of Olympism, truly represented an Olympic Academy in himself, judging by the quality of his writings and the extensive knowledge of his substantial arguments. The International Olympic Committee did not however evince much interest in this kind of scientific Congresses. Consequently, in 1937, Baron de Coubertin appealed to the German Government, asking it to create an International Olympic Institute to which he intended, after his death, to leave all his notes and projects partially carried out, in short, where he could leave the totality of his documentation dealing with the Olympic Movement just awake from its long sleep. The International Olympic Institute was founded in 1938 and in agreement with the Greek Olympic Committee, a project was set afoot for the creation in Greece of an International Research Centre concerned with the formation, the culture and the teachings related to the Olympic Movement. Then, a three months course was organized during the Universities Summer vacations.

A short time before his death, Baron de Coubertin travelled to Athens once more when he expressed openly his anxiety with regard to the future expansion of sport.

One year after Baron de Coubertin's death, the Hellenic Olympic Committee received from the International Olympic Institute in Berlin the proposal of creating an Academy. This project made by the Olympic Institute was submitted by the

Greek Olympic Committee to the International Olympic Committee for the first time in 1947. A memorandum partly elaborated by Professor Dr. Diem was published two years later. It conferred the patronage of the said Academy on the International Olympic Committee and assigned the task of its realization to the Olympic Committee of Greece. To this end, the Greek Ministry of Culture proposed to issue an open invitation to all specialists throughout the world on the history and the technique of sport and also to physical training specialists. All work and contribution would not be remunerated.

The Greek proposal was accepted unanimously by the Olympic International Committee. However, only 4 National Olympic Committees replied to this invitation. More than ten years elapsed before one ventured to put out a new feeler again on the matter. This happened at the 58th Session of the Olympic International Committee at Athens, in June 1961. This coincided with the solemn handing over of the antique stadium of Olympia to the Greek Government. This stadium was brought to light as the result of the excavating work carried out by the German Archaeological Institute of Athens. This is, in brief, the history of the present Olympic Academy'.

AN ECHO OF THE FIRST 1961 SUMMER COURSE

Our camp in Olympia was situated slightly above the antique stadium just excavated, it stood at the foot of Mount Kronos. The colours of 25 participants nations flew on top of our tents and everyone in the camp was steeped in the ambiance of Olympism. The day started invariably by attending a two hours training carried out under the expert supervision of teachers and professors (Prof. Munro, Great-Britain Toni Nett, Germany; Doherty, America, Dr. Misangyi, Switzerland). After this period of training, we walked to the Sacred Precinct where we were given the opportunity of discussing with these experts all the problems

pertaining to sport and Physical Education. Thus the time passed alas far too quickly.

During this international course, various professors lectured to us in a miniature amphitheatre, they were Director Paléologos (Greece), Prof. Dr. Recla (Austria), Prof. Steinhaus (America), Colonel Hirt and Dr. Misangyi (Switzerland) and last but not least the promoter of the Olympic Academy: Prof. Dr. Diem (Germany). Dr. Kunze and Prof. Tschitschmann showed us the Altis, the Museum, Zeus temple the two façades of which are almost entirely rebuilt. We also saw 'Hercules Twelve Labours' and the admirable 'Hermès' by Praxiteles. Numerous other relics of the past, worth admiring, ought also to be mentioned. However, what made the deepest impression on us was the walk leading to the Sacred Enclosure and the fact that we trod under foot the ground of the stadium. To reach this spot, we walked, as they did 2,500 years ago, passed the columns and we crossed the vaulted tunnel leading to the entrance of the stadium. The latter measures 192 metres in length which corresponds approximatively to the modern measure of 200 metres. We have no information concerning the various times record of the foot race and we lack precise information concerning the long jump. The ancient Greeks, fortunately for them, were not yet obsessed by the craze for breaking records! For them only victory mattered.

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The first Olympic Summer course is over. The founding of the Olympic Academy aims at promoting the Olympic idea and to teach its high ideals as well as direct the education of youth in order that, in its turn, youth may impart these high ideals everywhere. To serve this end, the Olympic Academy is to be unconditionally opened to all the leaders of Olympic organizations, to sport specialists and to all young students throughout the world, in order that they may attend the short training course which is to last during the three months Summer vacs. of the Upper Schools and of the Universities.

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