

Olympism serves the cause of Humanity

by *Frédéric Schlatter*

The wisdom of the International Olympic Committee was clearly shown at the beginning of the year when incidents caused by politics jeopardized the World Skiing Championships organized by the French Winter sports resort of Chamonix, the very place where the first Winter Olympics were held in 1924.

Like all other sports organizations, the International Skiing Federation must obey its statutes. It was faced laterly by a dilemma caused by the fact that the skiers of one of its affiliated federations belonging to the German Democratic Republic were refused their visas for entering France by the Interallied Travelling Office of West Berlin to which incumb this duty; on account of the East German Government having alienated the sympathies of the non-communist countries by erecting in an arbitrary fashion a wall dividing the formed capital of the Reich.

This was not the first thorny problem affecting the participation of players belonging to East Germany in big International sport events. Owing to the fact that their government is not recognized everywhere, there are several countries which entertain no diplomatic nor consular relations with that country. For instance, a similar case happened in connection with the Ice-hockey when, for the same reasons, the East German team were not given visas.

Imprudence of the International Federations

Sport incidents of that kind are most deplorable. On the spiritual plane, they offend the sense of fair-play, on the material ground, they expose the organizers of important International sport manifestations to the risks of incurring serious losses, further, on the moral plane, they have a disastrous repercussion for, in our times, when perpetual causes of angry differences prevail, it is essential that sport should remain a point of contact capable of bringing together countries opposed to each other on the plane of ideology. Thus several International Federations pay for their lack of foresight due, on the first instance, to the fact that although they have meetings constituted on democratic lines, because of this they are liable to the influenced and pliable. These Meetings and their leaders have not paid enough attention to the political factors and occurrences which may cause internal disturbances. By considering the case in hand, namely that of East Germany, they are now aware of all the disturbances and complications which are likely to happen in the future...

The International Olympic Committee is in a better situation to overcome difficulties

One can favour or oppose the system of self-recruiting its members within the organization of the International Olympic Committee but one fact remains, that it is thanks to this system that the supreme authority which controls world sport is definitively more impervious that the sportive federations to be influenced by certain very persistent outside influences. When writing this, I lay special stress on the 'influence coming from the Eastern countries': Before the USSR and her satellites found their places in the sporting world, we saw more than 'one big draw' in the occidental world learn suddenly that his titles or achievements only bore importance on the Olympic plane, in proportion with the services he was in a position to render to international sport. My friend, the Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee, Mr. Otto Mayer, will not contradict me when I recall here the fact that, among the former Presidents of the International Olympic Committee, Mr. Edström had a gift for reminding high ranked princes as well as heads of Governments that Olympism enjoyed its own autonomy and possesses rule and statutes which stand aloof of outside contingencies. I agree that, in his time, it was easier than to-day.

If you want to compete in the Olympics...

It is thanks to this independence of spirit and action that the International Olympic Committee has been able to prevent pitfalls which might have proved fatal to this organization. Thus, where other international sport organizing bodies found it quite normal to open their doors wide to brothers-enemies, the International Olympic Committee, on the contrary, has closed hers. It made it quite clear to the Germans both of the East and the West that, in its eyes, they were just Germans, and told them: 'It is up to you to form one unified combined team if you wish to participate in the Olympic Games.'

The Germans were not long in taking the hint. For once, they grasped the situation swiftly and arranged to send to the Games a combined unified German team composed of 'Brothers-enemies'... who got on very well as soon as they run the race to win medals!

...Have one flag only!

Then, one day, the Germans thought it very clever to bring forward an argument concerning flags. The East Germans demanded the right to hoist their particular emblem on the shield which, as you know, has identical colours to the flag used in West

Germany but without surcharge. The present President of the International Olympic Committee, Mr. Brundage, squared his broad shoulders, set his square chin which is fortunately full of character and replied: 'We will stand for no more differences in your flag than in the appellation of your team, since you set your mind on having an emblem, put five white rings on your flag: the symbol of Olympic peace.'

Here again, the Germans were not slow in understanding the situation, and the big-wigs in Politics with a capital 'P' saw passing in front of them in the field opposite the Stadium, *outside all conventional tradition* a German flag they would never have dared to conceive! This happened in Rome.

*Whatever are the degree of divergences
of opinions and divisions,
Humanity forms a whole responsible
for its actions and liabilities*

The example of the Games in Rome and the memorable 'olympic truce', which allowed several victims of the bloody Hungarian events to avoid death, in 1956, must not be forgotten either.

Nowadays, politics positively poison the existence of sport. This intempestive inter-meddling of politic in the business of sport is greatly resented by sportsmen who live under the impression that sport had managed to free itself of political domination in the last few years. Unfortunately, there are too many people, leaders, politicians who, by putting forward pretexts incompatible with sport, loose sight of the essential merit of sport which, in the present circumstances, of the essential merit of sport which, in the present circumstances, is the very unique and best means of reminding humanity that it still forms part of a whole, placed much above the petty differences of races, fatherlands, religions and opposed ideologies; therefore the quarrels, the tyrannical dominations under all forms will never be able to alter the conclusive fact, made all the more real nowadays because the world has become 'smaller' owing to improved means of communications. Men are more than ever aware of *their interdependency and of their joint responsibility* in this world, it matters very little what form of ideology they do it in. If they are tempted to forget it, the threat of thermo-nuclear folly suffices to remind them of it. Now, if there is a flag

which has the power to express the ineluctable solidarity, it is without a doubt, that of Olympism with its five interlaced rings which depict union, reminding people that the stadium or the racing track are the best places where men, especially young men, realize best of all the feeling that they belong to a whole which is called 'humanity'. A whole truly indivisible, in spite of those who work desperately hard at cutting the world to pieces in view of serving their partial interests on material or ideological motives.

To the service of humanity

Somebody recently recalled the fact that ancient Greece created the Games in order to rebuild in the friendly atmosphere of the stadium, the unity of a country ravaged by wars. Greece is only a small part of the globe but the world too evaluates very slowly and laboriously towards unity. In restoring the Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin bore this in mind. Several examples have since proved that this brotherhood fostered in the stadium is not a mere word: only fanatics and ignorant people dare pretend it is not so. Therefore it can be rightly affirmed that sport, being what it is in the interest of a higher order, should be used to serve humanity independently of the lower level of contingencies which have the power to divide and ruin this humanity. It is therefore essential that sport should be free of all political domination as it only gives people the wrong idea that sport is a form of propaganda or a means of waging war.

To start with, the International Olympic Committee and the International Federations must take great care to attribute the Olympic Games or the World Championships only to towns or countries which give full guarantee to receive *all* the competitors without exception. Then it would be judicious to revert to the idea of *olympic pass* which originated at the time of the Chamonix controversy: doubtlessly, *a priori*, the idea of giving a safe-conduct or pass (as in ancient Greece) to the athlete who went to join the sporting world in some given place, may shock the traditional concepts entertained by politicians or by diplomats. But what of it! the world has often seen things happen, which at first sight, seemed utterly impossible to realize. Nothing is impossible, it is only a matter of patience and doggedness of purpose!