

Twenty-five years ago Japan withdrew from the Olympic Games

Japan had been at war with China since 1937. Tokyo had been given the organization of the Olympic Games for 1940.

For the reasons mentioned above, the International Olympic Committee meeting for its 37th session from March 13th to the 18th 1938 in Cairo, decided to raise this problem, for, in the political circumstances existing at that moment, it seemed inconceivable to organize the Games in the Japanese capital in 1940. Let us consider the facts which go back twenty-five years.

At its session in Cairo, the International Olympic Committee received from its Chinese member, Dr. C.T. Wang, a telegram asking that the place chosen for the Games should be changed. Nothing in the Charter permitted the International Olympic Committee to modify its plans, and furthermore, it had no intention of doing so. Professor Jigoro Kano, member of the International Olympic Committee for Japan, was present at this session, which enabled the president to ask if Tokyo was still able to organize the Games. If this were not the case, he was to advise the International Olympic Committee as soon as possible. Professor Kano was urged, in the event of the continuance of hostilities with China, to advise the city of Tokyo to give up the organization of the Games, which would be in their own interest. In spite of this serious warning, Professor Kano declared that there was no reason whatsoever for the Japanese to withdraw from the Games, nor was there any reason for other countries to refrain from participating. Dr. M. Nagai Secretary General for the Tokyo Games, who was present at the meeting, clarified the financial position of the organizers, pointing out that this did not represent a problem, since millions of yens were available.

After the official closing of the session, the International Olympic Committee was to meet in secret session on March 18th 1938 to decide what steps should be taken in the event of the Games not taking place in Tokyo. In the same way, the Winter Games at Sapporo were implicated, because the task of organizing them fell on this Japanese town. Helsingfors and London, for which the spo-

kesmen were Mr. Ernest Krogius and Lord Aberdare respectively, were ready to take over, while Mr. Thomas Fearnley undertook to substitute Oslo for Sapporo if necessary, but Oslo later declined.

On July 12th, 1938, the whole Swedish press announced the sensational item of news that Tokyo and Japan would stand down from the organization of the Games. This premature piece of information was taken up by the Press all over the world, while a formal denial coming from Tokyo spread a feeling of doubt. Mr. Kido, the Minister of Education, had made an appeal to the Japanese Government to give up the organization of the Games to the International Olympic Committee. During this time, the Japanese Olympic Committee had charged its member — who was also a member of the International Olympic Committee — Count Michimasa Soyeshima, to exert his influence with the Government for the purpose of averting the withdrawal of Japan. As he probably lacked conviction — as will be seen elsewhere — he did not obtain the hoped-for result, for, on July 15th, a Cabinet Meeting was called under the august presidency of the Mikado in order to settle the question of the Games once and for all.

Tokyo and Sapporo finally withdrew from the organization. This decision, taken at the request of the Japanese Government, was due to the intervention of Count Soyeshima. Thoroughly imbued with the true Olympic principles, he had finally realized that, in the prevailing circumstances of the moment, the Olympic Games could not be celebrated in the right way, nor could they attain their end. This attitude, a very courageous one on his part, gave rise to grave discontent among Japanese sportsmen. It was later realized that Count Soyeshima, to whose efforts the allocation of the Games to Tokyo was due, rendered a signal service in employing the same energy in showing up the urgency of withdrawing in time, so that the Games could be transferred elsewhere.

The world-wide catastrophe of 1939-1945 followed. Japan withdrew from the Games of 1940 only to celebrate them with vigour and in a much more glorious manner in 1964.