

# 1894-1964

## — The Seventy years of the Olympic Movement

### 1892 - The beginning

It was on November 25, 1892, at a meeting arranged by the Union of French Athletic Sport Associations to commemorate the fifth anniversary of its foundation and to report the rapid progress achieved by the Union in so short a period, that Baron Pierre de Coubertin first stated that he proposed to devote himself to the revival of the Olympic Games. A large audience had assembled in the amphitheatre of the ancient Sorbonne to hear a series of lectures dealing with athletic sports in Ancient Times, in the Middle Ages, and in the Modern Era. Baron de Coubertin gave one of these lectures, at the end of which he made this historic announcement.

Subsequently he asked the Union to summon an international congress of all the important sport associations in the world to discuss rules and regulations, amateurism, and the revival of the Olympic Games. The preparatory work was entrusted to a commission consisting of Professor W. M. Sloan, United States of America, M.C. Herbert, Great Britain, and the Baron de Coubertin. Two preliminary meetings took place, one at the University Club of New York, on November 27, 1893 and the other at the Sports Club in London, on February 7, 1894. The congress met for a session of eight days in Paris on June 16, 1894.

### 1894

Its meetings were held in the large amphitheatre of the Sorbonne before an audience of 2,000 persons. Senator Baron de Courcel presided. On June 23, 1894, Baron de Coubertin's plan to revive the Games was unanimously accepted by the representatives of the twelve European and American countries in attendance. The congress nominated the International Olympic Committee, which remains in charge of the development and promotion of the Olympic Movement. The first duty of this Committee was to organize the Games of the First Olympiad of the Modern Era, which were held in Athens in 1896. The members returned to their countries and, in the course of time, helped to organize National Federations where they did not already exist. Eventually National Olympic Committees were created in all countries which desired to participate in the Olympic Games (there are now over hundred). The formation of International Federations was encouraged. Thus were laid the foundations for the huge structure of international sport which exists today.

### International Olympic Committee

The one thing, perhaps, that has contributed most to the success of the Olympic Movement is the manner in which the International Olympic Committee, which is in charge of the Movement, was constituted by its farsighted founder, Baron de Coubertin. The members of the Original Committee were chosen personally by him. They were selected for their devotion to the Olympic Movement, and they were considered ambassadors *from* the Committee to their countries. They were independent financially and without active political connections. They were chosen because their viewpoint was an international one, and because they were free from economic and political pressure. They could be counted on to support whatever was for the interest of the Olympic Movement even against their own country or the particular sport or sports in which they had a personal interest. The Committee was made self-perpetuating. No system could have been devised that would better insure the success of the Olympic Movement. At the beginning, in many cases, these members then organized the National Olympic Committees in their countries, thus establishing loyalty to Olympic principles.

It is the man and not the country he comes from that counts. The important thing is the character of the individual and not the land of his birth. It is difficult to explain the necessity for this method of organization as interest in the Olympic Movement grows and spreads around the world. Countries new to the Movement want to know why they are not 'represented'. Nations have insisted that they should name a 'representative' on the Committee. But the Olympic Games would soon lose all their purpose if they were controlled by a committee composed of members striving to advance the interest of their own country instead of the Olympic Movement. Recognition of a National Olympic Committee implies no obligation on the part of the International Olympic Committee to elect a member from that country.

This is the great strength of the International Olympic Committee. To allow countries to select their own representatives on the Committee would be fatal. Political considerations would soon prevail and all the good work accomplished since the Olympic Games were revived in 1896 would soon be destroyed. Great care is exercised in choosing members who are leaders in their own country, with a considerable knowledge

of and experience in amateur sport, men of strong character, national prestige, international understanding, and an independent spirit. More than fifty countries have had at one time or another a member of the International Olympic Committee.

### **Objectives of the Olympic Movement**

The Olympic Games were not revived by the Baron de Coubertin merely to give contestants a chance to win medals and to break records, nor to entertain the public, nor to provide for the participants a stepping-stone to a career in professional sport, nor certainly to demonstrate the superiority of one political system over another.

His idea was that they would :

1. Bring to the attention of the world the fact that a national programme of physical training and competitive sport will not only develop stronger and healthier

boys and girls but also and perhaps more important will make better and happier citizens through the character building that follows participation in properly administered amateur sport.

Demonstrate the principles of fair play and good sportsmanship, which could be adopted with great advantage in many other spheres of activity.

Stimulate interest in the fine arts through exhibitions and demonstrations, and thus contribute to a broader and more well rounded life.

Teach that sport is play for fun and enjoyment and not to make money, and, that with devotion to the task at hand, the reward will take care of itself — the philosophy of the amateur as contrasted to that of materialism.

Create international amity and good will, thus leading to a happier and more peaceful world.