

# The Great Coubertin Week

On the occasion of the centenary of the birth of the Restorer of the Olympic Games of Modern Times, France and with her all the Olympic and sporting world wished to mark the date by organizing ceremonies to take place between June 19th and 24th 1964 in Paris. We owe a debt of gratitude to this historian and teacher who was born on January 1st 1863 and these official ceremonies were organized in his memory. This act of homage took place somewhat late, since it should have taken place last year. On June 18th 1964, the eve of the first ceremony. *L'EQUIPE* of Paris published an editorial" of which we give the essentials : 'France pays an old debt outright. It is, indeed, no secret that no man is a prophet in his own country. (...) Never was a sports' organizer in his own time so bitterly opposed or criticized as was Pierre de Fredey, Baron de Coubertin. The only reason for this was that he acted directly and alone, without the backing of the officially-elected government of that time. Now the electorate is generally inclined to choose the middle way, like a person who does not outstrip — any way at first — the rest of the group behind him. From his own experience, Coubertin drew certain conclusions. When he founded the International Olympic Committee, he had faced up to the danger of a representative assembly of sporting powers, (International Federations), preoccupied with their own problems and national affairs, generally the National Olympic Committees, owing political allegiance to their own countries

and whose delegates were never slow in putting forward their own national problems during the assemblies. All this is more clearly demonstrated today than ever before. The International Olympic Committee is therefore one of those bodies, based on human associations, which has come down the years and even the centuries unscathed, of which the Vatican and the International Red Cross are other examples. So many 'proportional' societies have foundered, an example being the League of Nations. This system of co-optation has its faults, but they are the faults of application. (...) The principle, however, has the merit of assuring the independence of an organization whose record is, without any doubt, most positive. (13 nations at Athens in 1896. 116 in 1964.)'

## The programme of the Great Week

*June 19th.* The placing of a plaque on the house where Pierre de Coubertin was born. at 20, rue Oudinot, Paris, in the presence of Mr. Wilfrid Baumgartner, a former minister, and Mr. Auburtin, President of the Municipal Council of Paris.

*June 20th.* The placing of a plaque at the Château de Mirville (Seine-Maritime), the family home where de Coubertin often stayed. Speech by Mr. Chaussade, Prefect of the Seine -Maritime.

*June 21st.* A tribute to the memory of the Restorer of the Games by the reading of an address in all the places where young people are assembled — see text below. 70 towns in France have consented to give the name Pierre de Coubertin to streets and stadiums.

*June 23rd.* In the rooms of the Youth and Sports secretariat, the presenting of the Grand Prix Pierre de Coubertin following a vote by the jury of the Association of Sports writers, to a writer or an artist who, in an outstanding fashion, has served and glorified the Olympic sportsmanlike ideal as defined by the Restorer.

On this same day at 9 p.m. (the anniversary of the re-establishment of the Olympic Games, which took place at the Sorbonne on June 23rd 1894), the holding of a solemn session in the great amphitheatre of the Sorbonne, honoured by the presence of the President of the French Republic, General de Gaulle or his deputy, Mr. Pompidou the Prime Minister. This ceremony taking place in the presence of Mr. Avery Brundage the President of the International Olympic Committee, the members of the International Olympic Committee and 40 representatives of the National Olympic Committees.

*June 24th.* Reception at the Hotel de Ville de Paris, given by the President of the Municipal Council of Paris.

## **An address given by Mr. Maurice Herzog as a tribute to Coubertin**

*The address which follows was read on Sunday June 21st at all sporting or cultural meetings throughout France. It is the work of Mr. Maurice Herzog, Secretary of State for Youth and Sport.*

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‘All France honours the memory of Pierre de Coubertin, a great Frenchman. I ask the youth of our country, to whom he dedicated the whole of his life, to pause and pay him tribute and consider the great debt of gratitude that is owed to him.

Born on January 1st 1863 in Paris, Pierre de Coubertin was “first of all a historian and a teacher. He decided very young to undertake the reform of French educational methods. This reform, according to his ideas, was to consist of the introduction of sport in educational establishments. This was to be done in order to assure a moral and physical development by a change in the programmes and in the methods of teaching and

to form a sporting and cultural background for those who had left school.

From 1887, he was instrumental in establishing the school sports associations, he organized the first international competitions and in order to give sport a character of nobility and internationalism he laid down the principle of the restoration of the Olympic Games. This was done on June 23rd 1894, at the Sorbonne during the course of an international congress which had been assembled due to his own efforts.

If he re-established the Olympic Games it was, as he himself declared, ‘to ennoble and uplift sport and to assure its independence and long life, and by so doing to enable it to fulfil its educational mission which was so necessary in the modern world. It was also to extol the individual athlete whose existence is essential for collective muscular effort and whose prowess must uphold a spirit of competition.’

As to sport, he defined it as ‘the voluntary and habitual performance of intensive muscular exercise. inspired by the desire to progress without any fear of the risks incurred’. He wished it to be universal, ardent, loyal and disinterested.

For 30 years, as inspirer of the Olympic Games, he also became the instigator of the Far-East Games, the Latin American Games and the African Games.

After 1923, without ever dissociating himself from the Olympic Games which had become, thanks to him, the most important sporting event of modern times, he devoted himself to the second part of his programme. This was the reforms of teaching. The author of many works on Education and History, he published in 1927 his most important work : *L’Histoire Universelle*. Finally he was the instigator of further education and popular universities.

He died in Geneva, in 1937, and his last words expressed his faith in youth and his desire to see it assume responsibility in the continuity of his work.

The legacy he left to youth is summed up in his motto : “Be far-seeing, speak out, act firmly.”

Our country is honoured to have produced so great a man.’ (*And the whole world is the richer. Ed.*)

## **At the rue Oudinot in Paris**

These are the words on the commemorative plaque on the house where Pierre de Coubertin, the restorer of the Olympic Games, was born at 20, rue Oudinot, Paris VII.

Pierre de Coubertin, rénovateur des Jeux Olympiques, a vécu dans cette maison, où il est né, de 1863 à 1909.

**Speech given  
by Mr. Avery Brundage,  
President of the International  
Olympic Committee**

*on June 23rd, 1964, at la Sorbonne in Paris.*

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Rarely has a man's work been at the same time so misunderstood and so successful as that of Pierre de Coubertin. Great ideas are like great men : others take them to reshape them in their own image, to make them say what *they* want, neglecting the deeper message to stress only the superficial elements.

The International Olympic Committee wishes to thank the French nation for its efforts in paying tribute to-day to the memory of Coubertin. I am thinking, in particular, of the efforts of the French Olympic Committee and the effective support it has had from the Ministry of National Education and the Secretariat of State for Youth and Sport.

Through this 70th anniversary of the renewal of the Modern Olympic Games and through the celebration last year of the centenary of the man who renewed it, French Youth now knows Pierre de Coubertin's message.

What is that message ? It goes far beyond the international manifestations of which it is the cause — I mean the Olympic Games — and becomes associated with the perennial values of philosophy. But the mere existence of a message or of a philosophy is not sufficient. The ideal aim is to apply it, to give it a real context — in a word, to see it through. And this is the 'raison d'être' of the International Olympic Committee, which too many people would like to see enter the sporting arena, when its real task is to defend, foster and illustrate principles which occupied the Greeks themselves not on the field but in the meeting-place.

Too often the public believes the International Olympic Committee to be aimed at organizing Winter and Olympic Games every four years and that our task is a sort of higher — and for some, superfluous, control of amateur sport. Others attribute to us strict political conservatism where we are, in fact, beyond all ideologies, having always practised non-discrimination between peoples as to colour, race, religion or system of government .

Pierre de Coubertin did no more than consider sport as a universal philosophy in which all men could communicate, wherever they come from and whatever their circumstances. By his personality and his vision of the great social principles governing the world, he bears the stamp not just of the reformers, but of the creators, the pioneers — those who

foresee the future of a civilization. He might have contented himself with engendering the idea and leaving us the message, but he also gave us the instructions for the implementation of his ideas, for he was a teacher more aware than anyone else of how necessary it was to teach others — and particularly youth — the lessons which inspired him. That is why, 70 years later, his writings still have such validity in the present day that they can be put into practical effect without alteration.

The Olympic Movement, thanks to Pierre de Coubertin has become a philosophy — yes, but a living, clear and dynamic philosophy — a philosophy so close to human life that it is accessible to all.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I that stand before you am a faithful adept of the Olympic Movement and I can assure you that the President of the International Olympic Committee is perfectly aware of the grievances expressed in certain circles with regard to the directors of the Movement. For example we are accused of being obsolete and of preventing athletes from making a quick fortune out of sports. We are also reproached for imposing amateurism on a century where stardom leads everywhere to professionalism. We know all that, and we do not fear such reproaches because they are based on the encouraging assumption that no one is left cold by the Olympic Movement. Nevertheless, as you have been so kind as to honour the representatives of the International Olympic Committee with an invitation to the celebration, I take this opportunity to remind you that the man whose memory we are celebrating today, your compatriot and our master, Pierre de Coubertin, was also faced with the famous dilemma comparable to Shakespeare's 'to be or not to be' — 'submit or resign' — and that he emerged the victor. When one has a mission as important as that of defending the Olympic spirit, one cannot submit to the pressure exerted by others, nor resign the principles which constitute the creed, the novelty and the eternal spark of the Olympic Movement.

Now on this anniversary and Olympic year and here in this place where the past meets the future, I reaffirm that the International Olympic Committee will remain faithful to the universal idea of the great Frenchman, Pierre de Coubertin.

## **Echoes of the Centenary**

It was Mademoiselle Renée de Coubertin, the daughter of the Restorer, who during the ceremony described above, unveiled the plaque placed on the house in the Rue Oudinot where her father was born.

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A hundred Olympic personalities took part in these celebrations, together with 17 members of the International Olympic Committee headed by Mr. Avery Brundage the President. The National Olympic Committees were represented by 40 delegates. A notable presence was that of General José Clark, president of the Organizing Committee of the 1968 Mexico Games.

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At the Château de Mirville a plaque was also placed. Mr. Maurice Herzog made an appropriate speech in which he said : 'All those who are interested in man's training and education should read the literary works of de Coubertin.' Mr. Armand Massard, the president of the French Olympic Committee, was present accompanied by members of the International Olympic Committee, notabilities from the Department and the locality and also the family of the Restorer. Mademoiselle Renée de Coubertin unveiled the commemorative plaque which bore the following inscription beneath the five Olympic rings : *Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937) Restorer of the Olympic Games, historian and teacher, great-grandson of the Marquis de Mirville, lived all his youth in this house.*

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At the same time as the ceremonies celebrating the centenary of de Coubertin's birth, there were also those of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the International Olympic Committee at the Sorbonne on June 23rd (1894-1964).

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During a reception held at the Secretariat of State for Youth and Sport, the Pierre de Coubertin prize was awarded to André Dunoyer de Segonzac, who has devoted many of his works to dancing and to sport, particularly boxing. This was the first award of a prize whose object is to reward an artist or a poet each year. The jury was presided over by Paul Vialar and the laureate was duly congratulated by Mr. Maurice Herzog and Mr. Avery Brundage, President of the International Olympic Committee, who was present at the ceremony. Dunoyer de Segonzac, for his part, much moved at being the recipient of this distinction, made it known that he was giving the prize money of Frs. 5,000 as a gift to charities connected with art and sport.

At the Sorbonne there was a moving ceremony which was also an evening of memories. In the great amphitheatre, many representatives of the National Olympic Committees and representatives of world sport paid vibrant tribute to Pierre de Coubertin and

memories of him were constantly being brought to mind. This same occasion officially celebrated the 70th anniversary — to the very day — of the restoration of the Olympic Games. The ceremony on that day, June 23rd 1894, had taken place in the same amphitheatre. Mr. Maurice Herzog, Secretary of State for Youth and Sport, and Mr. Avery Brundage, President of the International Olympic Committee, paid a sincere tribute to the man who had devoted his life to the defence of noble and just ideals which were often far ahead of his time.

While we print above Mr. Brundage's speech, we would like to mention the conclusion of the speech given by Mr. Maurice Herzog in which he said : 'The heritage which de Coubertin has left us is that of defending man's true vocation of purity and achievement in the midst of snares and delusions.'

On June 24th at 11 o'clock a reception was also held in the Hôtel de Ville in Paris to celebrate the centenary of de Coubertin's birthday.