

A walk in the village

The olympic village of Yoyogi was an oasis in Tokyo during the Games — a sort of holiday camp where the youth of the world came together. In the stadiums, swimming-pools and sports halls the athletes, while performing, were young gods who passed all too soon out of sight. In the village, at last, they could be seen living as mortals.

Closer acquaintance with heroes is not disappointing. It fills in a silhouette, completes a picture. Pierre Jonquères is no longer a sort of centaur, but a man who also rides a bicycle ; Don Schollander is not only a fantastic blond porpoise but a gay, laughing teenager whose demonstrations of the twist enliven the evenings ; Brumel, the soviet grasshopper, can also take an interest in the performances of Japanese dances put on every evening at the village's theatre. The athlete retires for a few moments behind the man and, as the village offers the whole range of human activities, one can discover, in one day, a world in miniature.

On the training ground the trainer Daniel leaves his long-jumpers to give some advice to Idriss of Chad, who is after a place in the finals of the high jump ; Kono of the Ivory Coast practises starts with the American Hayes ; Jazy does lap after lap with the German Valentin, while Dallas Long puts his shot into a puddle left by the rain more than twenty metres away, to be returned by the Hungarian Varju.

Meanwhile, in the walks leading to the bungalows of the various delegations, the souvenir hunters are at work ; the camera and cine-camera are for ever busy. The American shot-putter, old Parry O'Brien, said to be so reserved and shy, poses for visitors from some Stockport or Bradford-on-Avon... Some Argentinians are being filmed with charming Japanese girls in front of a display of dwarf chrysanthemums. Here is Boston, the tireless jumper, wandering with his eternal childlike smile ; the enigmatic Abebe Bikila ; the overpowering Vlassov. Friendships ; growing complicity ; perhaps lasting love-matches, too.

To reach their respective pavilions, tiny Turkish or Iranian wrestlers wait at the entrance to the village for the bicycles left by enormous giants of basketball players. Language is no barrier for those determined to make themselves

understood. A smile, a friendly gesture are an excellent esperanto.

Much mixing goes on in the restaurants, where the Europeans soon realize that the world is fed more on rice than on steak and chips or spaghetti. In some dining-rooms the fork is unknown and the waiters automatically lay chopsticks. It is the moment to learn much and broaden one's outlook. The older ones are there to tell the new generations of all the wealth that can be derived from the Games.

For the Games leave their mark on those who have given much to them and who have received much in return. That is perhaps the great lesson. The sight of the happy faces of a few former champions is enough to persuade one. As the lover returns again and again to the place where his love was born, so the old olympic candidate keeps returning to the Games. In Yoyogi there were several former champions to the square metre, and their names were passed from mouth to mouth with admiration and respect : Marcel Hansenne discussing Jazy's chances with Roger Moens ; Zatopek talking marathon with Alain Mimoun ; Hary walking without recognizing him in front of Harold Abrahams, like himself olympic 100-metres champion, but in 1924. He stopped, however, to greet Jesse Owens who was talking to Rafer Johnson. Further on the clan of Australians — Devitt, Murray Rose, Konrads — were bombarding Alex Jany with questions ; Christian d'Oriola went into the barber's shop at the same moment that Pirie was leaving it.

They come to each olympic contest, keeping watch, as it were, between whites. Living one year out of every four is an excellent way to stay young. Those well-to-do gentlemen, whose slimmness is tempered by the absence of competitive sport, are for the most part journalists. They are travellers. They scour the world, trail from one country to another, perpetual wanderers. But every four years, at some mysterious signal like that which calls the swallows to the South, they meet again at the Games. They settle for a few days, and tell each other what they have been doing during their long separation.

The olympic village, for them, is home.

Michel Villeneuve.

The article above as well as the photographs in pages 36, 37, 40 and 59 to 62 are extracts of the book « The Games of the XVIIIth Olympiad - Tokyo 1964 », published by the Olympic Institute in Lausanne under the patronage of the International Olympic Committee. Both French and English standard works will be out of press in March 1965.

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