

Tokyo - Signpost to Africa's sporting Future

The greatly improved standards of performance by African athletes at the recent Olympic Games gave a clear warning to the rest of the world of the tremendous threat this vast continent will become in the Olympics ahead.

So much natural talent, hitherto given little opportunity to enter the limelight of international sport, is now being groomed on a national basis for successes in track athletics, football and boxing.

Doubtless the range of this development will spread to other Olympic events as the momentum for national training programmes increase throughout Africa.

Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria each won a bronze medal in Tokyo, not to speak of Ethiopian Abebe Bikila's second golden triumph. Only Ghana captured an award — a silver for boxing — at the previous Olympics in Rome.



Africa's new approach to international sport was impressed on me in an interview in Tokyo with Edward Nyako, the national coach for athletics in Ghana. He said : "One of my first jobs when I get back to Ghana will be to impress upon everybody the need for athletes to go out and train in all weathers. It has been a common practice for our athletes to wait for rain to stop before going out to run. We have got to get ourselves accustomed to doing top-class performances in all conditions. This is the big lesson I have learned in Tokyo.

"Rain fell on the days our sprinters were in competition and it seemed to effect their attitude of mind. They were not used to competing in rain so did not give of their best. It was a big disappointment to me."

Nyako was also disappointed that his 80-metres hurdler, Rose Hart, failed to survive her semi-final in Tokyo. But with a time of 11.1 seconds she at least had the satisfaction of racing $\frac{1}{10}$ second faster than when the great Fanny Blankers-Koen, of Holland, won the Olympic title in London in 1948. Blankers-Koen's time then was a world record.

So note how the pace of women's hurdling in Africa is hotting up. The 22-year-old Rose, from Sekondi, has a best mark of 10.9 seconds for the event.

Note, too, how the standards of sprinting and 400 metres running are improving in Senegal. The sprint four in Tokyo twice broke their national record for 4 x 100 metres, first by running 40.5 seconds in finishing fourth to the United States in the opening heats, and then improving this to 40.2 seconds in the second round.

Senegal's previous national record for this distance was 41.2 seconds — approximately ten yards slower.

In the 4 x 400 metres relay, Senegal also produced a new national best of 3 minutes 12.5 seconds to give yet further proof of Africa's athletic advance.

The greatest discovery of the African continent at the Games was probably Wilson Kiprugut, the 24-year-old Kenyan soldier, who took the bronze medal in the 800 metres won by New Zealand's Peter Snell in Olympic record time of 1 minute 45.1 seconds. Kiprugut was only $\frac{8}{10}$ second slower and surpassed anything ever achieved by his countrymen.

The march of progress will continue throughout Africa — more especially with some international federations organizing coaching schemes to assist national organizations of the smaller countries.

Typical of the modern African outlook to international sport was the visit to Tokyo of an Olympic delegation from Libya. Their national Olympic association was formed little over a year earlier, with Megniddin Coobar as secretary-general. Instead of taking a team of competitors to Tokyo, Coobar took three delegates, all specialists in sports administration.

Interviewed in Tokyo Coobar said : "We thought that bringing a team with little experience would do more harm than good. Instead the money available to us has been used to learn from these Olympics so that we can return with knowledge to help Libya build a team for Mexico City in 1968. Money is available now at home to enable us to take sport seriously."

With this availability of cash for sports development and their natural talent the African nations will soon become rich in Olympic experience and... medals.