

The effects of the altitude in Mexico



The fanciest opinions have been expressed by the general public and in the press concerning the effects that the altitude of Mexico (7400 ft.) is likely to have on athletes taking part in the 1968 Games. We do not intend to start an argument here on this subject but merely to inform our readers of the conclusions reached by the doctors who accompanied a number of the teams taking part in the Mexico Sports Week in 1965. Below are the remarks of the French Delegation, as reported to the Organizing Committee of the Mexican Games:

“A certain number of conclusions may be drawn from the different medical reports:

— Altitude is a form of acclimatisation and must be treated as such. It would be ridiculous to arrive at Mexico City directly from sea level and hope to take part right away in contests as exacting as those of the Games. Our athletes will have to grow accustomed to an altitude of 8000 ft. in France, for at least three weeks prior to their departure. It is also advisable to make frequent short stays in semi-mountainous regions so that the organism has a chance to get used to settling its own problem with regard to the effects of hypoxia.

— The time difference between Mexico and France is also a very important problem. We reckon that every hour of time difference requires roughly one day for the organism to grow accus-

tomized to the change. In fact, the troubles caused by this disruption of the nycthemeral cycle (the rhythmic succession of periods of waking and sleeping ordered by day and night — *Ed.*) are as serious as those caused by the altitude and must be taken into consideration in the planning of the training.

— All efforts of less than a minute are practically identical to or just slightly higher than similar ones made at sea level. On the other hand, for efforts lasting longer than a minute hypoxia comes into play, and the increased need for oxygen lowers the efficiency of the organism.

— Sudden and repeated efforts lead to fatigue which comes slightly more quickly than at sea level, although for athletes already accustomed to the altitude, the only real difference occurs in the period of recovery between efforts, which grows longer with their repetition.

— All athletes experience a period of slight falling off in form well known in medical circles by the name of “climatic crisis”, occurring between the 6th and the 10th day; we must obviously take this into consideration in the planning of our training programmes.

— The dryness of the air and the comparative pollution of the atmosphere in Mexico (a phenomenon unfortunately experienced by every modern town) obviously represents a by no means

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negligible factor for our doctors. Therefore, they ask that living quarters and rest rooms should be equipped at least with air humidifiers, the ideal of course being an air-conditioner which filters, purifies and humidifies in a single operation.

— We entirely agree with the Mexican nutrition specialist who considers that each delegation should stick as far as possible to its own food habits, a sudden change being likely to result in a loss of efficiency for our athletes.

It will be noticed that our mission has been able to draw numerous invaluable lessons from its trip, that altitude is only one aspect of the question, an important one of course but not dangerous in the present state of our knowledge.”