

# Women and Olympic Sport

*Next year, women will be able to participate in shooting events. In these same Games, eight women's teams (two more than in Tokyo, in opposition to ten men's teams) will take part in the volleyball tournament.*

*Thus, from olympiad to olympiad, women nibble away the still numerous obstacles which, in the domain of sport as much, or more than in any other, prevent them from having complete freedom of action.*

*In a lecture given at Olympia during the fourth session of the International Olympic Academy in 1964, and of which we are now publishing long extracts, Liselott Diem pointed out that in 1912 fifty-seven women took part in the Olympic Games (fifteen in tennis and forty-two in swimming) while five hundred and thirty-seven women athletes met in the Rome Games in 1960 (four years later in Tokyo there were seven hundred and thirty-two female competitors).*

*While the number of male competitors at the Olympic Games doubled, the number of female competitors increased tenfold.*

*This is a fact — concrete, historical and social — which shakes long established social structures and which the mind is still reluctant to accept. One of the most important moral principles for the world in general and especially for the Olympic Movement, is non-discrimination on grounds of race, religion and political affiliations. It would be good to see non-discrimination on grounds of sex added to this.*

*In the first instance, two points are surprising, symbolizing at the same time the subordinate position still held by women of the twentieth century and that in a field which more than any other is one of emancipation. The first is that the decision to exclude or, in better cases, to include female athletes in certain sports competitions be taken by an assembly made up entirely of men and this decision be based on a report, when there is one, drawn up by men.*

*The second aspect is that these decisions are justified, if at all, by reasons which are contradicted by feminine physiology and psychology. And yet it is a known fact that modern biology and physical medicine recognize the fact that women belong to the "strong" sex and one would benefit from reading what the eminent biologist Jean Rostand has written on the subject. As to certain peoples fears of the risks of an inaesthetic spectacle one can reply that women, more than men, instinctively know what suits them and what does not, apart from a few*

*rare exceptions which seem to be just human rather than belonging to a definite sex.*

*It would be tempting as well as idle to start comparing and establishing parallels, for our task here is simply to introduce Liselott Diem's text. We shall therefore just paraphrase Mrs. Thibert, an important member of the International Labour Office, who pointed out that "the world though made by and for men, is not going so well" and question us and our readers on the "state of health" of masculine amateurism and international sports matters in general !*

*In a world where dialogue between nations, communities and even enemies has at last been recognized as an increasing necessity, where the right of free expression even for the least experienced is now recognized, it has become imperative that the I.O.C. listen to problems of those millions of sportswomen who participate, according to the principles of the Olympic Movement, that it recognize them as being full partners and that it elect not only one but several women as members. If this is not done, not being content to deprive itself of the help and support of those who are well placed to give advice drawn from true experience of life on certain problems, the I.O.C. runs the risk of remaining the last depositary of, apart from the principles and high ideals for which it is responsible, a tradition of exclusion which today is denounced by the rights of Man, and tomorrow by History.*

M. M.



The female olympic champions and competitors are the only ones who can measure the importance that olympic competition holds for them. Their statements are the only ones which are valid and which can help us to determine to what extent such difficult trials contribute towards a more profound awakening and a greater social development for women.

"Should women be admitted to the Olympic Games?" "Are competition sports harmful to women?" It is wrong to ask these questions in this way. The question must be put to the individual, to the character of that individual with all its particularities, its distinctive qualities, its love of competition and the pleasure it takes in

trial. Why do these "armour-plated" girls shoot down steep slopes? Are the Goitschel sisters forced to do it? Is not Barbi Henneberger an "accomplished" sportswoman? Has free will (that is to say, in this case, free acceptance of sport), the same value today? Or should one believe the article published in an English newspaper under the title *Planned inhumanity*? The writer criticizes the methods used to train the Japanese women's volleyball team: as a matter of form, the girls had worked in a factory; they quite simply became "sports machines"; their coach had to give up all outside activity so as not to break the rhythm of the team.

All olympic competitors are agreed that they like to take their chance, practice sport for the love of games and for the love of adventure.

It is in that lonely effort and at the crucial moment of the competition that they gain perfect control of themselves.

Christl Cranz \*, for example, speaks of her hardest run during the 1936 Olympiad as being the most wonderful and interesting one, for "the task to regain lost time in slalom, held a most strange attraction for me — since then I have never spent all my strength so entirely and I have never felt the necessity for it... which I honestly regret". For her, sport is a real game which contains the attractive element of uncertainty and which compels one to overcome difficult problems. "I greatly regret that not more women compete seriously with me for then I would be forced to exert myself more to remain at the top and to improve my performance." She has remained faithful to pedagogic principles for she is head of a ski school.

Ursula Happe \*\* describes the event even more dramatically. "Am I expected to take third place in this run? I am hardly aware of what is going on around me. I must force myself to relax, to breathe deeply and steadily. I am scarcely able to control my feelings. Emotion and suspense seem to stifle me. Breathe calmly! Each part of me is concentrating on the next few decisive minutes. I have spent so much time training for this moment. Each day, inspite of the rain or the storms and even in icy water!..." After the victory: "I am overflowing with joy and happiness. I have succeeded!"

Everyone has experienced solitude: "Alone at the start, alone during the run, alone for each tenth of a second during the two or three minutes of competition. Alone when we have to assert ourselves and show what we have learned,

\* Gold medallist in 1936; German champion seven times and world champion three times in combined alpine events.

\*\* Gold medallist in 1956 in 200 m. breast-stroke and German champion ten times.

that of which we are capable and how well prepared we are..." These are the words of Heidi Biebl \* who remains both naive and impulsive in her enthusiasms and her indignations. During her run in Squaw Valley, she felt so excited that she forgot the importance of the competition and it is probably for that reason that she won. "My goodness ! Faster than that ! It is an olympic competition !" She is typical of the competitor for whom sport is a game and she is often filled with joy after a great achievement or with anger after failure : "My skis were

her second child she had an attack of poliomyelitis. She was helped into the saddle and won the silver medal for dressage in Stockholm in 1956. We have another example in Lena Stumpf \*, the German pentathlon athlete, who, after serious paralysis, took part in an important competition and came first.

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The programme need not be increased to be adapted.

In modern times, it is not only the olympic champions who throw themselves into sports competition, but also thousands of unknown women who, through these competitions, try to become aware of their possibilities and of their limitations. They like competition because it represents a kind of challenge to their capacities. During the last few decades the frontiers of women's competition sport have been broken down. In his *Study of human limitations in matters of sports performances*, Frucht writes : "For the moment one notes a stronger tendency towards improvement in feminine sports than in the corresponding masculine sports." According to him the rapid development of feminine sport is due to the fact that it started relatively late. *Die Welt* reports on the story of a Scot who was the first woman to take part in a marathon. The time achieved by Dale Greig, twenty-seven years old, was better than that of many masculine competitors, although the organizers had taken the precaution of having her followed by an ambulance ! "In all types of swimming, feminine results have equaled those obtained by men in previous olympiads." The Australian swimmer, Dawn Fraser, was the first woman to swim 100 meters in under a minute (59'8 seconds on 27th October 1962). The performance was as good as that of John Weismuller which had earned him the reputation of being a phenomenon during the 1924 Olympics. (He won the 100 meters crawl in 59 seconds.) Audacity, tenacity and endurance can equally well be considered as being feminine characteristics as can devotion, intuition and tact. One should no longer try to distinguish between feminine and masculine achievements ; what is important is the development that competition sport brings to the individual, be he a man or a woman. Certain sportsmen and women deliberately ignore this development, others on the contrary look to it for complete happiness and satisfaction.

not to blame, nor the course. The fault was entirely mine for I did not ski well enough. I did not make the necessary effort and I let myself go."

One and a half or two seconds are the determining factor in success or failure for Ingrid Kramer who won two gold medals in Rome in 1960 : the short moment of flight in diving which separates the momentum drawn from the spring-board and the contact with water ! Those who set out to achieve success accept the fact that such an achievement demands much preparation, regular practice and hard training. According to Wiltrud Urselmann \*\* : "Success depends on daily training which is as laborious and monotonous as the tasks of every day life. Achievements in the field of sport implies a true vocation, diligence and certainly a kind of madness."

The most impressive examples are those of women who suffered from a physical handicap and who, inspite of these difficulties, or perhaps because of these difficulties, try to draw satisfaction from sport. This is the case for example of the Dane Liesel Hartel \*\*\*. After the birth of

\* Gold medallist in 1960 in downhill ; German champion for combined alpine events eleven times.

\*\* Silver medal in 1960 for 200 m. breast-stroke ; German champion twelve times.

\*\*\* Two silver medals for dressage (1952-1956).

\*German champion six times for pentathlon and long jump.

Equality does not necessarily mean  
Identity  
(Photo E. L. Bach, Berlin.)



A world rendered more human through  
new cultural values.



Not far from Olympia stood the temple of Hera which was older than the temple of Zeus. The historian Mehl wrote in his essay on *Matriarchal influences on the olympic programme* that the Olympic Games of Antiquity were “the result of a pre-hellenic world governed by woman. This world was, from several points of view, ‘more human’ than the ‘world of men’ which followed it.”

“The political law and order of this matriarchal society” still survive in the very essence of the Olympic Games. The latter are indeed not of a recent origin, on the contrary they have inherited the noble traditions of the ancient matriarchal games.

Woman’s growing self-confidence and her greater capacity for improvement should be considered at the same time as her altruistic maturity, and as her collaboration in the creation of new cultural values. Olympic sport also mirrors this new culture. It could be that, more than ever, feminine participation will contribute to the excitement of this festival and will help to safeguard its beauty and its solemnity. According to Bachofen each culture has its origins in matriarchy. Paracelse (1494-1541) also stated that “Woman is closer to the world than Man.”

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