

The art of collecting stamps, as conceived by our fathers and grandfathers, which consisted in leisurely collecting the stamps issued in all countries, has recently evolved towards thematic philately, owing to the truly prohibitive size and number of contemporary commemorative issues. The daily increased proliferation of stamps dedicated to different events has led to specialisation, that is to say to a subdivision of philately in accordance with the tastes, way of life and possibilities of each collector. This led, a few decades ago, to what is known as thematic philately, i. e. collections of stamps based on the picture or motif and grouping the different issues according to concrete or related themes ; this

Olympic Movement and philately

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Athens. 1896.

Los Angeles, 1932.

not only simplifies the collector's task, but it also arouses greater interest by opening boundless horizons.

The commonest selections are : sport, religion, flora, zoology, art, history, medicine, astronautics, etc. But among all these, the theme of sport appears as one of the most outstanding and perhaps, in fact, the leading theme both for its own value and the way it has grown. Within the general theme of sport, the olympic stamp constitutes a new and interesting specialization which is not unconnected with the tremendous popularity of Olympism, especially since the 1952 Games in Helsinki.

The first postage stamp in the world was issued in England in 1840, and fifty years went by be-



Paris, 1924.

fore the appearance of the first sports stamps which were, in fact, those of the Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. Looking at this very fine series — which was very successful from the technical point of view, considering the means of printing at the time — one can but applaud the decision of the organizers, especially as we know that they counted on the stamps to increase receipts for their fabulous olympic budget. In doing so, they gave us an astonishing issue, considered today as a veritable classic, not only in the field of issues devoted to sport, but of philately in general.

Since 1896, issues of postage stamps commemorating the Olympic Games have followed one another not only in the countries organizing the Games but in many others too. The olympic collection now far exceeds the thousand mark and forms a very complete and vivid history of the ancient and modern Olympic Movements, a thrilling story for both philatelists and sportsmen. With the continually growing importance of philately, during recent Games a section has been created, within the organizing committee, devoted exclusively to philatelic problems : choice of designs, technical matters, printing and number, then distribution to the general public through philatelic agencies, distribution agencies and stamp dealers. Undoubtedly each Olympiad gains new enthusiasts to stamp collecting thanks to the fine issues launched on the market. It has been said, and rightly, that no world event takes place today without being celebrated by an issue of stamps, and this is certainly true of the Olympic Games. At the International Congress of Philately in Barcelona (1960), philately was defined as being an auxiliary science of history, which is equally true in the case of the Olympic Games.

As for most selections, there exist on the philatelic market catalogues of the sports stamps



Innsbruck, 1964.

issued in each country but these catalogues are limited to presenting them in alphabetical or chronological order with little additional information. They are in fact lists of prices for dealers, which can create a certain confusion and even errors regarding certain stamps. With respect to the olympic field, sometimes ignorance, other times simply decorative considerations have fed to the use of the olympic rings as symbols for important competitions without the slightest connection with the real Olympic Games. This state of affairs has led the Spanish Olympic Committee to undertake the preparation of an interesting report on stamps commemorating the Olympic Games since Athens in 1896 until Tokyo in 1964. This is a twofold

report on Olympism and philately which undoubtedly constitutes an original work to a certain extent unique of its kind.

Sports philately being, as we have just said, one of the themes that attract the most collectors, the Spanish Olympic Committee has not hesitated to undertake the completion of this work which will be published in three languages : Spanish, French and English. Brought in this way within the reach of thousands of readers, this work will help tighten the links between the different countries around an ideal that can be qualified as common, since the message of sport, like the postage stamp, knows no frontiers or discrimination of any kind.

This report on the olympic stamp has been printed with the greatest care and its publication has been timed to coincide with the International Exhibition of Sports Stamps presented on the occasion of the 5th International Nautical Salon in Barcelona in February and March, 1967. This exhibition was also sponsored by the Spanish Olympic Committee in the framework of its programme of sports and olympic popularization.

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