

PROSPERITY AND IMMENSITY

By Monique BERLIOUX

Whenever anyone speaks of the Olympic Games there is one remark that is always repeated : The immensity of the Games. We would like to weigh up this remark. The immensity assumes two aspects in public opinions:

- The increasing number of athletes
- The increase in events, hence more medals

First let us look at the participants. The number of accepted athletes at Athens was 285, at Stockholm there were 3541 (including 57 women) then 4169 at Berlin (328 women) and at Rome 5337 (537 women), at Tokyo the number reached was 5558 (732 women) We are quoting and we will speak only of the summer Games.

On the one hand, here is the proof that the whole world has become aware of the interest in the Olympic Games, and that, on the other hand, youth has accomplished considerable progress in the field of sports, thanks to the confrontation between the best.

Let us take another example. In the first Olympic Games in 1896, only 10 countries took part. Forty years later in Berlin there were 49, and in Tokyo 117.

However, it is not only in this field, nor in connection with that of the participants, that the immensity is feared. Quite the opposite. To see the Olympic Family increasing and prospering is a cause for rejoicing. The real anxieties are other than these.

Let us consider the sports competitions.

At first sight, the criticism of increase on this side seems to be the most real - nevertheless, not only the numbers of the sports or disciplines (athletics, swimming, gymnastics etc...) must be confronted and examined, but the events figuring in the programme for each sport (for example - athletics/ 100 m. 200 m. 400 m. etc...)

Thus 19 sporting events are figured on the programme for Mexico against 20 at Tokyo. In London in 1908 there were 21 and at Berlin in 1936, 22. Here then is a decrease.

In every discipline practised in the various Games, some events have been successively added to or withdrawn. At

Mexico there will be only 42 of the events that were on the Athens programme out of a total of 168. We repeat that this does not mean that only 42 were contested in Athens. For example take men's athletics. In the future we will have 24 classic events. Since 1896, with the agreement of the Olympiads, 27 events have been left out. Amongst these some like the tug-of-war and putting the weight with both hands would make the 1968 champions smile. Others such as the Pentathlon, which is still contested at national level, could give rise to possible regret. Finally, some new events have been incorporated (for example, in swimming) which in their majority double the classic distances of the preceding Games.

A problem that is even more noticeable than the events is that of the medals.

For example, 72 medals are produced for distribution in gymnastics alone (men and women) which is enormous. At Tokyo, 964 medals (316, gold, 319 silver, and 329 bronze) were bestowed. Up to the present, we have been unable to estimate how many there will be at Mexico.

Why this plethora? Some sports like gymnastics (of which we have already spoken) fencing, equestrian, have not only the right to a champion with an individual title, but also a title as a team, which substantially augments the rewards bestowed on one person only. Let us take equitation this time as an example: If the individual winner on the 3 days in equestrian sports is also a member of the champion Olympic team, which is usually the case because of the points gained in individual events which grade the final classification; he wins two gold medals for only accomplishing one competition. On the other hand sports like wrestling and boxing grade as individual sports only in the Olympic Games.

Moreover, I recall that global classification by nations is not allowed at the Olympic Games by the International Olympic Committee. It is only given by journalists or by those high officials responsible for sports in certain countries. The Organizing Committee has nothing to do with the classification by nation, as the town applying for the honour of receiving the Olympic Games has to abide by the International Olympic Committee directions.

Certainly times have changed since the renaissance of the Olympics in Athens. The stadiums themselves have assumed an imposing aspect. As the urban population in each country increases and exacts a total renewal of classic architecture,

so do the Olympic effectives to today show an unprecedented prosperity and call for appropriate surroundings. It is only left for harmony in the Olympic rules for competitions to bring not only fewer rewards, but above all greater equality between the sports.

* * * *