



CANOE SLALOM AND WILD-WATER RACING

During the 67th Session of the IOC, Canoe Slalom and Wild-Water Racing asked to be included into the Olympic Programme. If this proposition is accepted at the Session in June 1969 these two events will be part of the canoeing events that will make up one of the 21 sports of the Olympic Programme in 1972.

Origin of Canoeing

It would be impossible to determine when, during the first ages of man, the canoe was invented as an instrument of work but we may venture the opinion that its use as a means of transport constitutes one of the first great achievements of human civilisation. In the beginning the canoe was probably a drifting log, pushed along by the current. Thus with no other additions, logs must have been used by man for many thousands of years before he gave form, weight and dimensions that would provide them with manoeuvrability.

The history of the canoe as a means of pleasure or sport dates back to 1855 when John McGregor of England made his canoe trips through all Europe and Palestine. The Royal Canoe Club of Britain owes its founding to this famous sportsman.

Towards the end of the 19th Century, canoeing as a sport began to spread and with its new national associations, mainly in Great Britain, the United States and Canada. At the turn of the century national Federations were organized in Germany and Czechoslovakia.

The International Canoeing Federation, whose initials at that time were I.R.K., was founded in Copenhagen on 20th January, 1924.

As canoeing spread to many different countries, the Congress of the International Olympic Committee held in Athens in 1934, decided to include this sport in the programme of the Olympic Games and so it was for the first time in the Games, at the XIth Olympiad in Berlin in 1936. Since then canoeing has been an official sport of the Olympic Games

After the Second World War, the I.R.K. was reorganized and renamed the International Canoeing Federation (I.C.F.) at present presided over by Mr. Charles de Coqueraumont and with 37 affiliated countries.

Until the last Olympic Games only 7 races on straight courses in calm water were run (500m for women and 1000m for men).

The first canoe slalom competition was held in Rapperswil on the Aare in Switzerland, on 9th September 1934, organized by the Kayak Club of Mittelland, in Austria and in Zwickau in Germany. In 1936 the Congress of the International Canoe Federation (I.R.K.) decided on the formation of the first international committee of slalom in kayak when the first international competition of slalom was going to be held in 1937 on the Mulde near Zwickau.

The first world championships in Canoe Slalom took place in Geneva in 1949.

This year (1969) the XIth World Championships will be held at Bourg St. Maurice, in France, from 31st July to 6th August.

Canoe Slalom

Canoe Slalom can be described as the highest school for wild-water canoeing. A slalom course shall be up to 800m long on fast flowing water with a current of at least 2m/sec. The course is marked by natural and artificial obstacles and a competitor has to pass 20-25 checkpoints, so-called gates, which are marked by hanging poles. By touching these poles or missing a gate he is penalized by varying penalty points. These points are added to the time it has taken the competitor to cover the whole course in order to achieve the final result.

To make the course more difficult some of the gates are reverse gates which must be taken with the stern of the boat first. There are also upward gates which must be tackled against the current and in team competition there are gates that have to be passed by the three boats in the team within 15 seconds.

Competitions in canoe slalom are held in single kayaks for men and women, single and double Canadian canoes for men and in mixed Canadians (1 man, 1 woman). The team events as already indicated comprise three boats per team which are on the course simultaneously.

Wild-Water Racing

Wild-water racing comprises the same classes as canoe slalom but with the difference that the course has a length of 3-8 kilometres. The obstacles are the natural ones of the river and only the time taken by a competitor from the start to the finishing line is counted. For women there is a shorter course. Safety measures are obligatory so that hardly any accidents are likely to happen. It is compulsory to wear life-jackets and protective headgear.

It has often been said that canoeists are among the true amateurs in sport. This is particularly true for the canoe slalomists and wild-water competitors who often have to find their venues on the wild-water rivers away from artificial civilisation. Their attitude to sport follows very closely to the ideas of Baron Pierre de Coubertin. The finest and highest recognition for these sportsmen is that their sport has been accepted into the Olympic Programme.

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