

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC ACADEMY AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE COACHES

The Vth Congress of track and field coaches was held in Greece at the beginning of January; 120 members of the association from 43 countries attended. Before leaving they paid a visit to the International Olympic Academy. We reproduce below the speech made by Prince GEORGE OF HANOVER, President of the International Olympic Academy and member of the International Olympic Committee, on this occasion.

It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to welcome you here to Ancient Olympia. You have come here at the end of your annual meeting and my friends of the Ephoria of the International Olympic Academy and I, appreciate having the opportunity of meeting you and making you acquainted with our International Olympic Academy.

You represent one of the most interesting, valuable and at the same time, complicated professions. You have the honourable task of educating young people. You train them to be able to compete with the best athletes in the world and you have to be pedagogue-physiologist-psychologist all in one with a knowledge of the latest research in sports medicine and techniques.

If you have walked through the sites of Olympia I think you will feel at home and later I shall explain why. Although the ancient sites are in ruins now, you will be able to feel the vibrations of the atmosphere here, where for more than 1200 - 1500 years Olympia has been the spiritual centre of these Games that have ennobled so many generations of athletes.

This is not the moment to give you a complete historical outline of the Olympic Games, but a few hints may be useful.

We assume, from the first mythological remains, that during the *Mycenae period* (2000 B.C.) the Games were held in the form of chariot races. Pelops defeated King Oenomaos of Pisa and won his daughter and Elis. Another theory maintains that Heracles founded the Games as a funeral festival in honour of Pelops with six competitions: running, wrestling, boxing, chariot-racing, javelin and putting the shot.

During the *Protogeometrical period* (11th and 10th Century B.C.), Olympia became the holy place where Zeus was worshipped. The *Geometrical period* (9th and 8th Century B.C.) provides us with the first historical proof of the Olympic Games, as since 776 B.C. the names of the victors were handed down. During the *Archaic period* (7th and 6th Century B.C.) the first stadium was built.

The *Classical and late Classical period* (5th and 4th Century B.C.) brought many famous artists to Olympia: poets like Pindar and Bacchylides and the sculptors Polyclitus, Praxiteles and Lysippos.

The *Hellenistic period* (3rd - 1st Centuries B.C.) was the time when the Games were consolidated at Olympia, where the facilities for competitions were increased: the Gymnasium and the Palestra were built.

During the *time of the Roman Empire* (1st - 3rd Centuries A.D.) the influence of Roman culture and luxury became evident. Nero took part and is said to have bribed the judges. Hadrian re-introduced the traditional ethical background and atmosphere to the Olympic Games. In 384 A.D. Theodosius I prohibited the Games and in 420 A.D. Theodosius II destroyed the holy spot.

Although they have changed their character at times and were wiped out for centuries the Olympic Games rose anew and proved not to have lost their power over mankind.

The founder of the Modern Games - Pierre de COUBERTIN - inspired by the ancient sites of Olympia, that had been excavated during the last century, gave new life to the old Olympic Spirit and started the modern era of Olympic Games in Athens in 1896.

These first Games were organised inspite of great difficulties, thanks to the wholehearted support by the Greek monarch, George I and his son, Crown Prince Constantine, later King Constantine I. It was another Crown Prince Constantine, who as gold medallist, inaugurated the first session of the International Olympic Academy, in 1961.

As you will know, COUBERTIN was not only interested in athletic competitions as such, but he was convinced that the ethical background of the Games would have a strong influence on the character of the young athletes as well as on the morale of the nations, who would come to understand each other better. The spirit of Olympia was for him the healing cell that would slowly cure mankind.

Now, if you read the books and letters of COUBERTIN you will see that, inspite of the great success in general, he was very worried about the development of the Olympic Movement. Amateur-status and commercialism is not only a problem of our days and the expansion of the organisation made it no easier to guide the Movement.

He founded the International Olympic Committee to help him and he gave it a status independent from politics by electing personalities not dependent on governments and therefore able to solve Olympic problems following their conscience alone. He once said, he did not want the various nations to send their lawyers who could fight for the private interests of their governments. Although this Committee proved to be a very effective instrument, there were problems that could not be solved by conferences alone.

The psychological background of the Olympic Spirit had to be preserved, explained and spread. Difficult problems had to be studied carefully and the younger generation had to be interested in them. For that purpose COUBERTIN always had intended to establish an institute where this work could be done. He did not succeed.

Only in 1961, under the Presidency of Mr. Avery BRUNDAGE, did KETSEAS and his friend Carl DIEM start the first Session of an Academy in Olympia. From an improvised stage the Academy has developed into an acknowledged insitution with a

settled surrounding in permanent buildings instead of tents, with playing fields and a swimming pool; a place where theory and practise can be taught together.

The responsibility of the Academy

The most important task is to be the guardian of the Olympic Spirit and to spread it throughout the world of sport - to explain the rules of the Games - and the statutes of the International Olympic Committee - to study problems that are related with competitive sport and Olympic Games.

Subjects of interest are :

- History of the Games
- Archaeology
- Education
- Physiology
- Medecine
- Psychology
- Results of sportmedecine research
and others

We do not hesitate to discuss also problems that are not too pleasant and easy but have to be tackled seriously. The ideals will have to be examined to discover whether they are still understood and whether they correspond with reality.

Those who have experienced the organisation of the Olympic Games should be heard in case anything could be improved or ought to be changed.

The International Olympic Committee cannot renounce this constant contact with the active athletes and their coaches if their guidance is to have authority and is to be met with confidence.

The Academy's work is done by listening to lectures by experts and seminar work, where the younger generation may contribute their own ideas. Dialogue is a very important factor of our educational system, when lecturers and participants try to find a solution to a problem. Professors, trainers, doctors, artists and members of the International Olympic Committee together have the opportunity - and take it - to hear the opinions of the younger generation without being hampered by political pressure or considerations. The advantage being that as no decisions are taken, it is possible to come to reasonable conclusions that may serve the

International Olympic Committee with an interesting aspect for their planning.

Now you may ask : What is the Olympic Spirit ?

As an answer one could easily write a book. I shall try to explain it as concisely as possible.

The *Olympic Spirit* cannot be compressed in a set of rules. I should like to say, it is the "Unwritten Laws" of decency, fairness and chivalry. It is, following COUBERTIN's definition, an attitude of mind, a philosophy, not a system.

There is a book that I have read which tells of a young Greek wrestler whose burning desire was to take part in the Olympic Games. He is unbeatable in his district but he lives far away in the mountains. In spite of great difficulties he travels to Olympia and finds a promoter who takes the keen boy to Elis.

Elis was the place where all athletes who applied for participation in the Olympic Games were assembled for three to six weeks before the Games, under the supervision of so called "Gymnasiarchos" or "Panigyriarchos". They received strict instructions about the rules of the various competitions, and what was still more important, they were prepared morally for the solemn atmosphere of the Games. They were made acquainted with the unwritten laws, in short the Olympic Spirit. Only those, who after the preparation time were found worthy, were permitted to compete in the Olympic Games.

Here in Elis our young friend is told, that his method of wrestling although successful, is neither correct nor of a good style. Step by step he learns reluctantly but steadily the rules and also the unwritten laws of fair play.

When the time of preparation is over, he is accepted as a participant in the Olympic Games. During the competition he wins all his heats and in the final match he has to fight the winner of the last Games, whom he looked up to as a hero. After a tough and equal match he finally succeeds against his opponent with a decisive throw. But when the trumpets announce his victory, he lifts his hand in a rejection gesture. "I touched the ground with my left knee ". The judge had not seen it.

Although this behaviour may seem to be exaggerated in our day, I know several examples of modern Games, where similar reactions of the athletes took place.

COUBERTIN explains the Olympic Idea as joy to take part in the festival of brotherhood. In fact I believe that we should concentrate much more on the element of human relationship amongst athletes which can be furthered through the Olympic Games.

In ancient Hellas the victor is the favourite of the Gods, the one who has reached the goal in his life.

Nowadays as well, victory is something heroic, but we should educate our athletes so that they feel it is also an honour to be defeated by a better opponent. We know ourselves how difficult this attitude is made today by questions of prestige and other influences. In any case victory or defeat should not be the only goal in life, the athletes must realise that competitive sport is an important and satisfying period in his life, but not the final aim. The athletes have to be prepared for the fact before the Games that life goes on afterwards, and they must take the experience of the Olympic Games as an exciting adventure that should help them to tackle all problems in life. But they should carry with them in their hearts the knowledge of a new friendship based on the hardest but also noblest competition in the world.

Now I return to my remark about your feeling at home in ancient Olympia. The coach of this period in ancient Hellas the Paidotribe, or Gymnast, had an academic education, and Plato gave him the rank directly below that of a statesman, insisting that he be selected carefully without regard of expense.

He expected him, however, to have an all round knowledge and experience about for instance: physiology, science of nutrition, anatomy and the precept of fitness.

On the other hand the coach was responsible for the good spirit and behaviour of the athletes. The most important qualities of character to be achieved were: abstinence, courage, toughness and modesty.

A motto from the 7th Century B.C. says:

"If you win, do not boast, should you be defeated do not cast yourself on the ground lamenting loudly"

I think this motto has its importance still today.

You see, the coach played a very important role in the education of the younger generation and therefore could expect esteem and confidence. There are even examples that when an Olympic winner was given the favour, at the ceremony with his own name, the name of his coach was also announced in public.

This development was only possible because the Greek educational idea was formed with the knowledge and experience that physical education and competition were just as important as education of the mind.

In our day we read and hear the same opinions very often but unfortunately usually by politicians before elections. In Hellas the philosophers knew about the necessity of this balance and therefore advocated it with conviction. Many representatives of the sciences in our countries still feel that physical education and sport have very little to do with science and treat this important element of education, in spite of all promises, with reluctance.

I think it needs our mutual endeavours to convince and persuade those responsible in our countries, that physical education and competitive sport have not lost their pedagogical influence on the young, if they are given a domain in general education and are guided by experienced men, who by their example will demonstrate the

" Olympic Spirit "

George of Hanover

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