

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF MODERN OLYMPICS

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In June 1969 the world will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the modern Olympic Games. On that occasion people throughout the world will gratefully remember the far-sighted imagination and untiring perseverance of a truly universal man whose indomitable optimism triumphed,

after a long and embittered struggle, in the revival of the ancient Olympics as an international sports festival, in the resumption of a tradition that had been interrupted for 1,500 years.

It was Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the great French humanist, educator and historian, whose persuasive ardour brought about the resolution of the famous 1894 congress at the Sorbonne, Paris, which called on the youth of all nations and races to meet every four years for a peaceful competition to be held on the basis of full equality and mutual respect. This resolution marked the beginning of the revival of the Olympic Movement. The 15 years following that resolution were in fact a constant battle against formidable obstacles, but the overwhelming success of the 1912 Olympics helped the Olympic idea to its final breakthrough. Sponsored and supported and developed by more than 125 National Olympic Committees, recognized by the International Olympic Committee, backed by the interna-

tional sports federations, the modern Olympic Games are now universally recognized as the most important international sports festival, which fascinates the peoples of all countries and continents.

Naturally, we cannot describe *here* the stages of this development, nor can we demonstrate how the ideas of Pierre de Coubertin have asserted themselves in the world and what different results they have led to. What we should like to emphasize here is the necessity for the international Olympic family to clearly recognize that their activities should be guided by the basic principles of absolute equality and mutual respect as they were first set forth and consistently defended by Coubertin. For only the observance of these fundamental rules can guarantee the continuance of the international meeting of young sportsmen and, thus, the peaceful mission of the Olympic Games, as the heart of the Olympic Movement.

It can be said without reservation that Coubertin never regarded the Olympic Games as an end in itself but attributed to them an important mission in promoting understanding among the nations. From the beginning he linked the Olympic idea to the ideas of peace, democracy, understanding among the nations and mutual respect and, thus, gave the Olympic Games their deep social content which accounts for their inexhaustible vitality. For this reason, the youth of all nations should constantly be reminded of Coubertin's appeal "*to serve peace and to respect life*", which he first made at the turn of the century.

In evaluating Coubertin's lasting achievement, the foundation of the modern Olympic Games, the fact should be borne in mind that Coubertin wanted more than just a peaceful international sports competition between young people every four years. A brilliant educator himself, he demanded that everybody should be able to exercise what he regarded as an unquestionable right - the right to physical and mental education. He demanded that public education should see to it that everybody is given the chance to develop all his dormant human qualities. At the 1926 Lausanne conference on questions of education, Coubertin explained his humanistic educational ideals. He said :

"The adult who, for want of spare time or financial means, was not able to take part in higher intellectual

life may expect the community to assure his link with general, unselfish education," With regard to sports he said : *"We believe that every individual has the right to sports and that it is for the community to procure for every adult citizen the means to acquire and preserve a good sports condition without his being obliged to join any association. This should be gratuitous as far as possible."* And it was Pierre de COUBERTIN who, at the same conference, demanded gymnasiums and sports grounds accessible to everybody and declared that the unquestionable right of every citizen to physical and mental education could only be implemented if this demand was fulfilled.

When Mr. Avery BRUNDAGE, the present President of the International Olympic Committee, opened the IOC Congress in April 1966 he said: *"Where do we stand at this time ? Have the visions of COUBERTIN been realised ? Should we, who have inherited his ambitious plans, be satisfied ? The answer is no. Despite the tremendous progress and the extensive accomplishments of the last seventy years the Olympic Movement stands only on the threshold. It has a long way to go to occupy the exalted position which it merits in world society. In only a few countries is it recognised in intellectual, in business or in political circles as an important part of the cultural life."*

This should be considered as a reminder by all National Olympic Committees to examine COUBERTIN's ideas and plans and have them realised in their own spheres of activity.

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