

OLYMPISM IN THE WORLD TODAY



Below we reproduce large extracts from an article written by Mr. Juan Antonio SAMARANCH, member of the I.O.C. for Spain and President of the Spanish N.O.C., and published in the periodical "Deporte 2 000", which recounts the highlights of Spanish sport in 1969.

I have no intention of giving a picture here of Olympic philosophy as, since COUBERTIN, many eminent supporters of Olympism have already dealt most successfully with this subject. I would rather try to limit myself to a few thoughts of a practical nature on Olympism as a modern movement, on certain social and sports achievements which it has succeeded in bringing about, and on its real possibilities of development as well as on the dangers in which our own inhibitions may involve it.

COUBERTIN'S THOUGHT

Sports competitions were not Baron de COUBERTIN's only aim since, over and above these competitions, he wanted more than anything else to create an educational movement that would ensure for sport its proper place among the activities of the world in general and among those of youth in particular. His movement was inspired not only by Ancient Greece, but also by the chivalry of the Middle Ages and 19th century

ideas on sports education in Great Britain, the cradle of modern sport.

In order to give this educational movement a visible symbol, COUBERTIN thought of crowning it with a multi-sports competition, inspired by the Greek Games at Delphi, Corinth, Nemea and Olympia. In this way Olympia became the symbol of a movement which never ceased to grow, in spite of all the political tensions and the two world wars that split the world asunder. Today a great many countries from all parts of the world take part in the Games. At Melbourne they numbered 67, at Rome 84, at Tokyo 94 and at Mexico 114. Assuredly, at Munich the figure will be even higher.

THE I.O.C. AND ITS PROBLEMS

Progressively absorbed by the success of the Olympic Games, the I.O.C. seems to be limiting its activities more and more to the solution of the problems raised by their organisation and to discussing matters bearing closely on the very concept of Olympism and its philosophy, such as for example the question of amateurism.

Today, the Olympic Games represent the apex of a whole pyramid of international competitions. However, before arriving at this apex, what a host of sports meetings at International Federation level and, at the base of the whole edifice, of national competitions and organisations which, in the final analysis, are the mainspring of sport in the world.

COUBERTIN's call to Olympism undoubtedly roused much enthusiasm in favour of sport and showed the importance of its development in all human communities.

However the I.O.C., which is restricting its activities more and more to the overall organisation of the Games and the problems arising out of it, is becoming more and more remote from the tremendous organisation of sport, which is growing larger and larger in all countries, and is also moving away from the many international organisations that have been formed in order to organise competitions between countries.

THE COMMITTEE'S BIG ERROR

Let us merely compare the twenty-two sports included

in the Olympic Programme with the number that are actually organised at international level and have been in existence for at least fifty years.

The I.O.C., which is responsible for the biggest sports event in the world, i.e. the Games, has - without wishing to - remained on the fringe of sports life in general, from which in the final analysis the Games derive their essence and their meaning. All this occurred gradually, imperceptibly, in spite of all the honours that the I.O.C. has continued to reap from all national and international sports organisations.

Let us remember that the relations between the International Federations and the I.O.C. rest solely on a basis of respect and honour, to such an extent in fact that, apart from the Olympic Games, the International Regional Games and certain qualifying tournaments, these Federations come but little, or not at all, under the jurisdiction of the I.O.C.

Except for these concrete instances, the I.O.C. represents for world sport merely a praiseworthy, venerable but rather remote committee, and the Olympic Movement, which is much more than the Games, remains, in many cases, restricted to these very competitions. This is a big mistake. In fact, on the one hand, the organisations have no wish to be controlled and, on the other, the I.O.C. sets its own limits to its powers.

Naturally, it is not the I.O.C.'s job to supervise the development and organisation of sport in each part of the world. But it is nevertheless up to it to give moral backing and to instil the Olympic ideal into all sports, from the highest level down to the schools, youth movements and the universities.

This is the spirit that Baron de COUBERTIN tried to convey to us; the Olympic Games should in fact be merely the culmination of all these sports. As he said: *"In order for one hundred to do physical training, fifty must go in for sport; in order for fifty to go in for sport, twenty must specialise; and in order for twenty to specialise, five must be capable of exceptional feats."*

In this perpetual struggle to defend the ideological purity of the Movement, great quantities of energy have had to be consumed and structures which might have evolved, have in fact been maintained in their original state.

The I.O.C.'s difficult position today does not depend on the whims of a few but on instinctive loyalty, on ideas capable, today more than ever, of improving society and with it the individual.

History will render justice finally to those who were wise enough and strong enough to maintain this line of conduct true to an ideal.

However, the continued implementation of these ideas in structures that were right fifty years ago is debatable today and may lead to a crisis in the Olympic Movement.

This is the real problem of modern Olympism which must naturally be tackled by the I.O.C.

POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

Political independence is one of the best guarantees for the continuity of the I.O.C. But it is vital for it to look for a solution which combines political independence and real power over bodies, whose national or international authority is as a general rule dependent upon the economic possibilities offered by governments.

This is only one example of the many problems of structural adaptation that the I.O.C. meets in the real running of the Olympic Movement and, in the long run, of sport throughout the world.

The time has come not to revive (this has already been decided) the Olympic Congresses as they were at Le Havre in 1897, Brussels in 1905, Paris in 1906 and Lausanne in 1913, but to adapt the problems of modern sport to the framework of the Olympic Movement.

The next Olympic Congress, which will be held in Sofia in 1971, must be given all the importance demanded in this last quarter of the 20th century, by the wonderful social and human forces represented by modern sport.

SUPERIORITY OF THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

Today, except for the four-yearly Games and a number of sports meetings coming within the competence of the I.O.C., sport at a high level is the responsibility of the International Federations and is organised independently of the Committee.

To illustrate this, it is sufficient to remember what happened with the National Olympic Committees. These, inspired by the example of the I.O.C., were set up in order to transmit the Olympic ideas within their countries and have since multiplied, thus proving the success of Olympism.

In certain countries, these National Olympic Committees have only a purely representative character but in others they are the top body of national sport. Now in our countries, the Olympic Movement has assumed such importance that the National Olympic Committees have felt it necessary to band together parallel with the I.O.C.

I do not want here to pass judgement on the future and on the evolution of the binomial: IOC/NOC. What is important is to mention this historic event, i.e. the appearance of a parallel movement, created by the leaders of national Olympic movements, in order to co-operate with the I.O.C.

Everywhere in the world, the I.O.C. has aroused admiration, esteem and veneration even. But various important sectors of sport may perhaps no longer see in it or believe that they no longer see in it an organisation dynamic enough or powerful enough to cope with the questions raised by the demographic and sporting explosion of our industrialised age, or to solve the problems raised by new demands and needs, such as the harmonious balance of sport and culture in the new developing countries which are acceding in their turn to both cultural and sporting maturity. Now in our day, which feels the need of rules for guidance, modern Olympism has become one of the few ways of achieving a harmonious social development.

EVOLUTION OF THE CRISIS

As a result of all these factors, the leaders of Olympism - the I.O.C. - have been, and are, continually exposed to the constant pressures caused by changing values and habits.

POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATIONS

It is absolutely indispensable for the National Olympic Committees and the International Federations to make themselves heard at this next Olympic Congress and to bring with them that close, daily and intense contact which they alone are able to arouse thanks to their direct relations with the athletes, through the organisation of competitions and by their contacts with the public and the mass media.

In all countries, sport is developing to culminate in Olympism, the supreme consecration, over and above competition, of its spirit, its essence and its soul.

That is why the I.O.C. must make its presence felt in sport throughout the world, not by organising it in detail but by offering advice and laying down the broad outlines.

World sport is trying to organise itself on the international level, not only in International Federations to which I have already alluded, but in various units resting on international, cultural, social, educational or economic organisations.

It is not a question here of vaunting the advantages of one or other of these organisations. What is important for us who belong to the summit organisation of the Olympic Movement is to remember that it is up to us to ensure the continuity of the great work of education that sport has entrusted to us.

The I.O.C. must occupy the position that is its due through its undoubted merits, that is to say it must remain the supreme authority in world sport.

We believe too that it is its duty to do so if it does not want to run the risk of seeing other bodies emerge, which are only waiting to take its place at the head of sport - which is the position that belongs to the I.O.C. by right and by history, and to it alone.