

The Olympic villages

by Herbert F. Schmitt

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This is an article by Herbert F. SCHMITT, which originally appeared in the German newspaper "Giessener Allgemeine".

Article 37 of the Olympic regulations states that the organisers of the Olympic Games should make arrangements "so that competitors and team officials can be housed together and fed at a reasonable price." Henceforth, the Olympic Village was born, an establishment created for the first time in Los Angeles for the Games of the Xth Olympiad and reaching full realisation at the time of the Berlin Games. It was not, however, until 1956 that it became a true custom. In Melbourne, then in Tokyo and Mexico, millions were spent on the Olympic Villages to equip them with every interior comfort demanded by the best athletes of the world today.

In Munich, millions upon millions of marks will be spent on the Olympic Village, in which about 12,000 athletes and accompanying personnel will make themselves at home for two to three weeks. After the Games, the promoters will sell or rent the accommodation. As the proprietor of the region of Oberwiesefeld, the City of Munich owns one of the most modern residential areas.

What has happened to the Olympic Villages of the Summer Games of 1956, 1960, 1964 and 1968? Who lives in these places today, where Betty CUTHBERT, three times gold-medallist, Cassius CLAY, boxing champion, Abebe BIKILI, marathon winner, or Bob BEAMON, the giant long-jumper, were perviously housed? Do they still contain something of the atmosphere of those Olympic Games?

Wladimir Kutz still remains the idol of Melbourne

Even though the Melbourne Games were more than 14 years ago, the inhabitants of the 841 apartments - situated on the outskirts of Heidelberg, the Olympic Village costing about DM 8 million = \$4,954,000 to build - seem to cherish the reminder of that time. All are emigrants from Europe who came to settle in the village taken over by the Government's Accommodation Department.

Neil CARPENTER - 14-year-old son of an English emigrant - proudly shows the room where the Australian Betty CUTHBERT, aged 19, 200 m., 1,000 m. and 4 x 100 m. relay champion, used to live. Neil also practises sport and his dream is one day to become a member of the Australian cricket team.



△ Berlin



Tokyo ▶

A few houses further on lives the HORNER family, also originally from England. The son, John, aged 15, wants to be a cross-country runner. For those who are keen to listen, he still tells them that the Russian, Wladimir KUTZ, world 5,000- and 10,000-metre champion and gold-medallist, stayed in his room. John has stuck two faded photographs above his bed of the Russian champion and on the first page of his autograph book glows the name of Ron CLARK. Next summer, John will join the track and field club in Heidelberg. Until then, the former Olympic Village training track is to undergo restoration. At the moment, the costs amount to more than DM200,000 = \$55,000 and a tartan track is planned.

In Rome the building contractors have gone to prison

The Olympic Village constructed four years later, on the northern outskirts of Rome, monopolised the Italian press up until 1968. It had been built in the centre of a park by

thirteen companies controlled by the public company for the construction of accommodation for Civil Servants. The 1,300 apartments, making a total of 7,683 rooms, had cost 7 million lire (about DM 44 million or \$12,111,000).

During the championships, complaints had been made by the sportsmen against the faulty equipment and cracks in the walls and ceilings. As the tenants moved in, the administration concerned became inundated with strong protests against the INCIS. As a result, on December 7th 1963, the Italian Government ended up by carrying out an official enquiry, after which ensued several months later complaints against 22 building contractors and officials of the INCIS commission of enquiry. 16 building contractors were sentenced in 1968 to 16 months in prison for the fraudulent use of improper building materials; the officials of INCIS were acquitted. Nowadays, it is unusual for the inhabitants to show any interest in the fact that 10 years ago the best athletes of the world were gathered here. Achille RUCCI (56) gymnastics teacher of a college in Rome, explains *"We have had so many problems with our accommodation that we have not really been concerned about knowing who was here before. There are many tenants who think as we do, who live for years in the fear that the walls or the ceilings will collapse and are really scarcely bothered about such considerations."*

The "Little America" in Tokyo has been demolished

There is nothing left to say about the Olympic Village in Tokyo. Of the scores of wooden bungalows and numerous blocks of flats where more than 7,000 participants and accompanying personnel from one hundred and seventeen different countries were lodged, nothing remains now except a few three-storey buildings which serve as youth hostels. The Village had originally been built by the American authorities of the occupation zone and had been christened the *"Little America"*. For 1.1 thousand million yen (almost DM 13 million at that time or \$3,500,000), the Japanese Government allowed these buildings to be transformed for the Games, but after that they seemed overjoyed to have most of them demolished and with them all the memories of the years of occupation.



Mexico

In Mexico, half the buildings are empty

The Olympic Village had been erected for the XIXth Olympic Games in Mexico, in one of the most attractive areas on the outskirts of the capital. It comprised twenty-nine 5/9-storey buildings - a total of 904 apartments - which cost 205 million pesos (about DM 60 million or \$16,500,000) and is still half empty, two years after the Games. The lodgings of four rooms, with two bathrooms, fully-equipped kitchen and telephone installation cost between 215,000 and 255,000 pesos (from DM63-74,600 or \$17-20,000) are obviously difficult to sell. The builders and renovators are continually occupied in the reparation of damage. According to the estate agents, there is no one on the waiting list. However, each residence could be sold quite easily if it was given a general going-over. The 473 families who have since moved in seem to be satisfied with their new homes. However, a car is an absolute necessity. Mexico is 15 kilometres away from this centre and the buses are infrequent. Moreover, there are no shops or supermarkets, the nearest being 10 minutes away by car.

There are only bad memories left of the former inhabitants for the tenants. A Chilean woman, Mrs. Suzanne de RAMIREZ, who was born in Germany, recounts: *"The workmen who have repaired these premises tell some horrifyingly true stories. From these, the sportsmen seem to have taken everything to pieces that was to hand. It appears even that in some homes, they pulled up the floors and carried off laths of wood..."*



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