

To relieve the congestion of the Olympic Games

by Gaston Meyer

Gaston MEYER, who was for many years the Chief Editor of the French daily sports paper L'Equipe and who is still a shrewd adviser for the paper, in particular for Olympic matters, has very kindly written this article for the Olympic Review. In it he expresses his thoughts and plans for the alleviating of the Olympic Programme, a subject which is, at the moment, very topical.



The greatest danger facing the Olympic Games is "gigantism" - the growth of the programme, the increase in the number of countries participating and the technical complication, i.e. the tendency of all the International Federations first of all to diminish and then to continually increase the number of events.

For the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, Germany will spend more than \$500 million, which is well above the initial estimate. The capital of Bavaria expects nearly 10,000 participants and 5,000 technical assistants, not counting the officials.

It also seems that certain dangers are already threatening the 1976 Games in Montreal. How can we combat this evolution, which may soon condemn the Olympic Games and restrict the number of candidate cities? They risk being more influenced by politics than by commanding sportsmen.

How can one remedy this situation?

First solution: reduction

The simplest and most logical solution is the reduction of the summer Olympic Programme. This can be achieved in various ways:

a/ Compulsory withdrawal of certain sports, in particular team sports. Most of these in fact have their own big world competitions which are sometimes more important than the Olympic Games, merely because being 'open' they incorporate professionals and amateurs. The compulsory withdrawal of those sports whose practising elite are professionals.

b/ Alleviating the internal programmes of certain individual sports, notably those whose classification is done on a team basis (fencing, gymnastics, equestrian sports etc. ...).

c/ Reducing the number of participants from each country with a maximum of three athletes per discipline, whatever the sport.

d/ Eliminating certain sports whose Olympic standing has become rather dubious (war sports or sports practised by the wealthy).

Experience shows that the I.O.C. does not have the necessary technical authority to impose such solutions on the International Sports Federations. They are obviously competitive but, when one even dares to question their prerogatives, they are strongly united.

Moreover, it may seem arbitrary that a certain sport, "widely practised throughout the world" can be discarded from the Olympic Programme under the pretext that the latter is already overloaded!

I need not emphasise the importance of the development of a sport to belong to Olympism. Whether we like it or not, the vast majority of Governments support the sports which will increase their own prestige every four years. The others are simply ignored, often unjustifiably.

On this same subject, President Avery BRUNDAGE told me: *"The United States collect millions of dollars to participate in the Olympic Games but not a single cent to finance American participation in some other World Championship"*.

Finally, the solution of a compulsory elimination would come up against the veto of all the International Sports Federations. Besides, the future will call for new sports, such as parachuting, sailing, water-skiing, etc. to be introduced.

Second solution: division

The second solution to alleviate the summer Olympic Games would be to separate them into two sections:

1/ Summer Games, including the athletic sports (track and field swimming, rowing, canoe-kayak,



cycling, modern pentathlon, equestrian sports, archery and yachting).

2/ Autumn or Spring Games, with team and indoor sports.

This solution would have the advantage of reducing organisation costs by at least half and of honouring two cities instead of one.

However, some International Sports Federations are strongly against this solution. They fear that the Autumn or Spring Games, without the track and field sports, may not attract as much public interest. They are also of the opinion that fewer cities would put up for candidature for the organisation of these Games, considering them, rightly or not, as secondary.

Some theorists still quote the "Olympic Charter", which defines the quadrennial Olympic Games as "the bringing together of the sporting elite of world youth". This is forgetting that the Winter Games already exist and that, more often than not, there is very little contact between the athletes of different disciplines, even within the Olympic Village.

It can also be mentioned that during the Olympics certain sports results pass almost unnoticed and are even drowned by those of the track and field events. For the press and public alike, the latter represents 50% of the interest in in Games, closely followed by swim ming with 20%.

It may perhaps be remembered that in 1956 Melbourne was not in a position to organise the equestrian section of the Olympic Games; this was transferred to Stockholm.

From this, it was then pointed out that never had riding received such an abundance of reports from the press nor had it drawn so many special reporters! It is unfortunate that this phenomenon has not been better appreciated by the authorities within the International Sports Federations, depending too much on their national committee and not always reflecting the will of their national federations.

Third solution: the continent

If the International Federations insist on maintaining or increasing the programmes, there still remains a third answer. It seems justified by the fact that there are more and more National Olympic Committees and, at the same time, an increasing number of Olympic competitors.

The suggestion would therefore be to organise the Olympic Games in two stages. First stage: selective continental games. We say expressly selective and not eliminatory as an athlete's form is not constant.

The world could be divided into four regions: Africa, America, Asia and Oceania, and Europe (about 30 National Olympic Committees in each region). They

would then organise their own selective Olympic Games.

The competitors in these continental Olympic Games would also have taken part in these Games and would receive proof of this fact. Thus, this makes 25,000 participants at the continental Games against 10,000 at just the one Games.

A maximum of 5,000 hand-picked competitors would therefore take part in the Olympic Games as a result of this selection.

This solution would have at least two advantages. Firstly, of promoting sport and Olympism and secondly, of bringing the honour of organising the Olympic Games to five cities (4 + 1).

This does not mean that new competitive events should be created in addition to those of the International Sports Federations, but to effect something which is already 80% in existence. The Pan-American, Asian and African Games already take place, so it would only remain for the European Selective Games to be established.

Are the technical problems unsurmountable? Certainly not.

The International Sports Federations are quite capable of solving them within a framework set by the I.O.C. Moreover, they have already solved those concerning the team sports by organising eliminatory heats on a general continental basis.

Obviously, the first obstacle which springs to mind is the difference between the technical standards of the various regions of the world. This is a point of fact.

Let us therefore take an example: track and field. If the I.O.C. decided on a maximum of 92 competitors par event (currently 80-100 for the 100 metres), the Continental Games - to be organised in theory six to ten months before the Olympiad - would automatically be able to qualify the first two of each event, i.e. 8 competitors. The remaining 24 would be chosen not only according to the results of these selective games, but also in terms of such considerations as performance statistics, development of the athlete's form and possible substitution, etc. ...

Each sport will pose a particular problem and it would be up to each of the International Sports Federations to solve it. The I.O.C. would purely fix certain general rules, such as the maximum number of athletes per discipline (3 athletes from the same country in any individual event, etc. ...).

For team sports the solutions are even more simple. For example, in football, each winner, i.e. four, would automatically qualify, as is the case at present. The four other countries - since eight seems to be the ideal number - would be chosen according to the current technical standard. Thus, the first four to qualify would be from Africa, Asia-Oceania, Ame-

rica and Europe, two more selections from America and Europe and a final qualifying round between the winners of two matches - the two third-placed teams of Europe and America, and the two second-placed teams of Asia-Oceania and Africa. Nothing could be more fair.

The objections of the International Sports Federations in this respect are more political than technical.

First of all, they are afraid of losing some of their influence to the National Olympic Committees or to the Continental Organising Committees and secondly, of being deprived of certain of their own sources of financial aid, notably television rights.

This apprehension does not seem justified. On the contrary, if they are closely associated with the organisation, the influence of the International Sports Federations would be increased; especially if the Continental Organising Committees were comprised of the members of the International Olympic Committee for the regions concerned as well as five representatives from the regional National Olympic Committees and five from the International Sports Federations.

What is all this aiming at?

On no account should a single opportunity be missed to discuss in detail the three solutions for the alleviation of the Olympic Games, thus ensuring their future and survival.

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