

Study on the future of the Olympic Games

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Issues 50-51 of "Olympic Review" carried an exchange of views between the President of the Republic of Finland, Mr. KEKKONEN and the President of the International Olympic Committee, Mr. Avery BRUNDAGE, regarding the fate of the Olympic Games. The President of the Republic of Finland, formerly a well-known athlete, views with concern the situation in the IOC and is dubious as to whether the IOC, in its present format will be able to continue to conduct the Games. By way of contrast was the decidedly affirmative response of Mr. BRUNDAGE, to the effect that only the International Olympic Committee in its present format would be capable of conducting the Games.

In my opinion, it was as well that these views were aired in a public discussion and published in the booklet, for one cannot doubt that all who prize the idea of the Olympics, will devote much thought and concern to this issue.

With regard to the exchange of views between the two gentlemen, I support Mr. BRUNDAGE's view - the limitations and difficulties of the present format notwithstanding. But the argument as reported does not exonerate us from more profound thought to the question of "*Whither the Olympic Games in the future?*"

In issue no. 46, I touched on the Olympic Games programme and further expressed

the wish to refer to another, no less important question. But I should first like to state that the idea conceived at the end of the nineteenth century of reviving the Olympic Games was, and still is, a great one. But at the same time we must bear in mind that the world is not a static quantity and that during the seventy-five years that have elapsed since the Games of 1896 fundamental changes have taken place in social life and it is natural that these changes should have reflected also on the Olympic Games - for better or for worse.

But if we consider that at the Olympic Games there gather together over ten thousand athletes from over one hundred nations and from all five continents, meeting - in spite of the objective difficulties of language, way of life and so on. in friendship, with a handshake, with a clap on the shoulder and with a good will towards mutual understanding, both before and after the competitions - then we cannot doubt that this is one of the greatest social meetings that we know of. But certain problems hamper the success of these meetings and one of them is that of amateurism. We all know and deeply appreciate the efforts made by the IOC in handling the problem of amateurism, and the achievements of the Committee that handled this problem are by no means lightly to be dismissed, but neither can we ignore the fact that the resolutions taken have yet to solve the problem as a whole.



Athletes assembled in the stadium for the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games in Mexico - 1968.

We know that in some of the meetings between the NOCs and the IOC not a small number of representatives expressed their anxiety and concern for the fate of the Games in the present state of affairs and some were dubious as to whether there was any point in participating in the Olympic Games. In effect, two separate blocs had emerged - one of the 20-25% of states which for various reasons provide the main competition for achievements in the Olympic Games, while the other - the remaining 70-75% being drawn in their wake; and only the latter group can be said to go along with the motto of the Baron de COUBERTIN that *"in the Games, the main thing*

is participation and not victory".

The present state of affairs begins to resemble what happened at the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece. At the beginning, the Games in Ancient Greece were an expression of popular festivities and a social meeting of the people who competed in the various branches of sport. But in the course of years, greater prominence came to attach to victory, and especially to the rewards that went with it, thus encouraging not a few athletes to devote the whole of the four years between one Olympiad and the next exclusively to preparations; so that the mass of

Greek sportsmen who continued their ordinary working lives and could devote only a small part of their leisure time to training, were obviously quite unable to compete at the Games with those who trained intensively for four years, and this was without doubt one of the most direct causes of the decline of the Games in Ancient Greece.

Today, we are witnessing to our regret a similar spectacle. There are a number of countries which in a variety of ways enable their sportsmen to devote the greater part of their time to preparation for the next Games, and this can mean 20-30 hours training per week, whereas in most countries especially in the small ones, sportsmen are quite unable to spend so much time on training and will evidently be unable to compete with their better-trained counterparts. The situation is becoming more and more acute and the question is whether we are entitled to stand aside or whether we should find the golden mean to follow in this difficult situation.

Some small nations came away from the last Games with a feeling of unfair treatment and of an unequal struggle, in terms of the amount of preparation that had gone into the Games, and the effort to participate in the Games under these conditions was felt to be of questionable worth.

This sense of injustice

could have grave results in the future, and in my opinion, it is essential to seek a solution while there is yet time.

I shall therefore permit myself to put forward a suggestion, although knowing it to be so far incomplete and not easily capable of adoption. My suggestion is to examine and study the possibility of dividing the nations participating in the Games into two groups, according to certain criteria, one of which must certainly be the size of population of the nations in question.

Competition within the two groups will take place only in the preliminary rounds and in individual rather than group sports. I am well aware that the suggestion may have a psychological effect. The suggestion relates, as stated, to preliminary competitions only and not to the finals, which will be judged solely by personal achievement, because in the Olympic Games there can obviously be only one victor.

I do not mean to imply by my suggestion that a small nation is incapable of producing great sportsmen, and indeed the experience of many years has proved that it can be done, but it is in the nature of things that a large nation has far greater facilities and that the smaller nations cannot compete with them.

C. W. 