

* Olympics must be saved

by Payton Jordan
with Stanley Wilson

Payton Jordan, athletics trainer at the University of Stamford, California, has sent us the following article which he wrote in collaboration with Stanley I. Wilson, editor of The Letterman, a review circulated to all the educational institutions in the United States.

We have received many suggestions concerning the future of the Olympic Games, but we cannot print them all here as they are very often similar. The following text unites several proposals which we feel are worthy of attention.

It all started over 2,000 years ago as a national festival of the Greeks, probably connected with rites paid to a deity. After being discontinued for a considerable period, they were re-established in the Ninth Century, B.C. by Iphitus, king of Elis, and Lycurgus, who were commanded by the Delphic oracle to revive the festival as a remedy for pestilence with which Greece was then affected. At first the festival was confined to a single day, and consisted of a simple match of runners in the stadium, which was about 200 meters long.

As the celebration grew, they were open to persons of all ranks and occupations. The only conditions were that the contestants should prove a pure Hellenic descent and of good moral character. Of highest importance, the participants took a solemn oath to contend fairly. Thus the Olympics were born.

After the Seventh Olympiad, Daicles the Messenian received for his victory in the stadium a wreath from the sacred olive tree at Olympia. This simple reward, with the honor of being proclaimed victor, was considered sufficient for everlasting glory. A few years ago, I stood at the confluence of the Cladius and Ruphia rivers, the site of the ruins of the ancient Olympia. It was a spiritual, ethereal moment during which I fully understood the evolution of man,

his role in athletics, and his relationship to all of mankind.

Through years of being a participant and a coach, I have been a small part of that evolution—I shared a piece of this world with my fellows. We shared the emotions of losses, pitfalls, embarrassment, and anguish. But through it all, we learned a treasured lesson: a great loss makes a better winner, and it is a brave man who can accept the emotional wrenching of losing. But it didn't stop there. Rather than casting fault and striking out at everything and everyone around us, we prepared for another, a better day.

Now, however, the Olympic tradition and heritage face a crisis that transcends the original intent. Blood, not glory, stains the grounds of Munich. It is blood that has become a universal nightmare. It is blood that has cast a grotesque and ominous shadow around the world.

For the first time in Olympic history, the victory stand was draped in black and the flags of 122 competing countries flew at half mast mourning the 11 Israeli dead.

The immediate responses heard around the world were not to prepare for another, a better day. They cried out against the complexities of nationalism, fanaticism, intrigue, and bureaucratic ineptness.

But the cries against the Black September terrorists overshadowed controversies



that began virtually from the moment the first of the 10,000 athletes, coaches, trainers, and officials arrived for the Games. Ironically, Germany's object was designed to demonstrate the changes that had occurred between the Nazi Germany of 1936 and the gracious host of 1972.

Munich Lord Mayor Dr Hans Jochen Vogel expressed the German's labor of love on the opening day:

"Our intention is not only to build modern installations in a pleasant, parklike setting and provide faultless organization... Munich's actual goal is to hold a festival of peace in the spirit of the Olympic idea, characterized by understanding, reconciliation, and brotherhood among all peoples..."

But it wasn't to be.

From the beginning there was strife. A number of American blacks, operating as a nameless-leaderless group, and eighteen African nations hinted they would walk out over the entry of Rhodesia. Political bickering, the imposition of gags on athletes, and charges of human rights permeated the pleasant Alpine community of Kempten.

It was claimed that the quality of some of the officiating denied competitors an honest chance; political prejudice overcame impartiality in judging; the loss by the United States basketball team to the Russians came under severe attack; Rick DeMont, 16-year-old American swimmer, was deprived of his gold medal in the 400 m free-style after failing a drugs test, a medication he said was necessary to combat asthma; brilliant Mark Spitz explained home to America before the Games concluded because he is a Jew and was in fear of his life.

A feeling emerged that some countries are willing to drop out of the nationalistic race which they claim the Olympic Games

have become, with political systems, rather than athletes competing.

Dr Roger Bannister, Chairman of the Sports Council of Great Britain, was succinct in his analysis of the tending change in the role of the Olympics: "This is inconsistent with human dignity and the concept of freedom and enjoyment which first gave rise to sport..."

Avery Brundage, the 84-year-old retiring president of the International Olympic Committee, declared after the Israeli massacre: "The Games must go on."

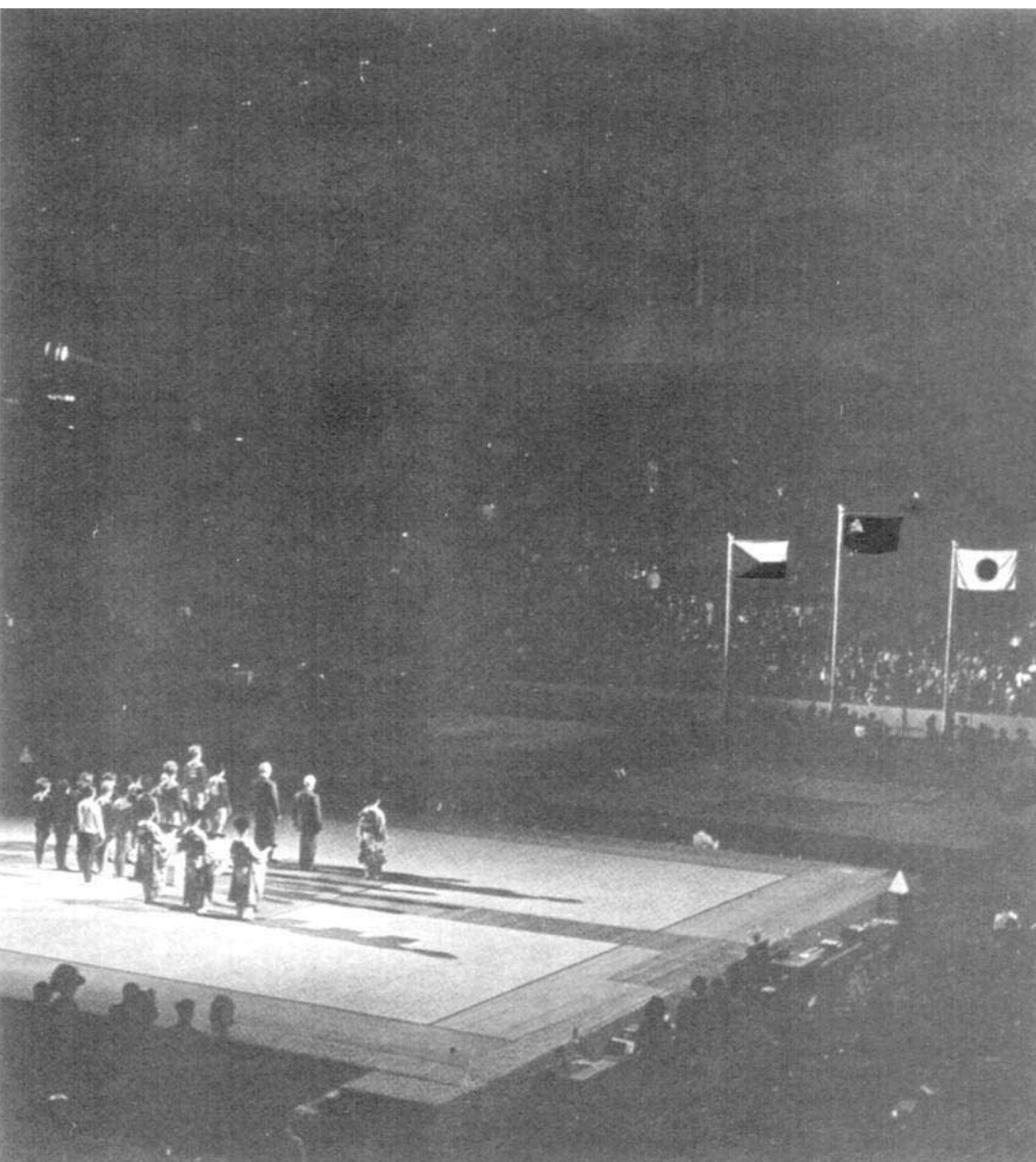
A multitude of athletes and coaches agrees that the Games must continue, but the disparity in procedures is wide.

"Medals aren't everything", said Clifford Buck, president of the US Olympic Committee, "but I confess that I thought we'd do better. When we get home, we will have a meeting to evaluate our performance."

An Olympic participant after the games was heard to remark, "We were a big bust. We must go to Congress and have the entire US Olympic Committee reconstructed."

Others in the sports field have suggested the ultimate, that the Games be dissolved. We feel, however, that there are other answers that will return the Games to their intended purpose, will provide dignity and honor for individual athletes, will eliminate nationalistic polarization, and will furnish a once-in-a-lifetime experience for spectators.

The conclusions were arrived at because for the first time it was my privilege to view the Games as a spectator and evaluator, not as a critic or a participant. Rather, it was the view of one who sees the values of the Olympic movement. These values are not isolated, but encompass all nations, their participants, and



their citizens. For the world community, the Olympics must be saved.

In the first instance, we view with abhorrence the violence that occurred at the Games. However, it is the madness of society, not the madness of this particular Olympics. It was the act of a maverick fringe that would turn the wholesome people of the world against each other.

In just sixteen days, we saw the good and the bad mirrored before the eyes of the world. But we do not necessarily believe that imperfections should prevent forward progress. Rather, now is the time to stand back in the meadow and look at the forest rather than the trees. Learning, rather than rhetoric, must come from unwholesome and despicable experiences.

The Olympics still have so much more to offer humanity than anything yet devised by man. This is separate from religious beliefs, but the two have a kinship. We would be guilty of a grave error if we lost sight of our Maker, who guards us and gives us strength. The ancient Greeks paid tribute to their deity as they competed. We believe that today's Olympic competitor cannot participate without paying similar homage.

With this interrelationship of the spiritual and the physical, combined with common endeavor, this should be a moment in history when we not only can save the spirit of the Olympics but improve upon them and make them of even greater importance and significance for the participants and the citizens of the world.

What are the steps that would lead to this rejuvenation of the true Olympian purpose? In the first instance, nationalism must be minimized. We concede that certain athletes always will represent certain countries. However, resentment often occurs when a particular country dominates and its national anthem is repeated

until its notes become an irritant rather than a tribute. We would suggest that an official Olympic fanfare be played as the appropriate medals are placed over the victor's heads. This would represent the ultimate moment of honoring a champion who has competed against his peers rather than against a representative of a specific nation. It would represent the glory of man against man instead of glorifying nationalistic interests. If nations wished to honor individual efforts within the context of nationalism, appropriate ceremonies could take place within the specific nations' Olympic compounds or when the team members return to their respective homelands.

This method of honoring man against man would point up the basic tenet of sports: responsibility of an athlete to himself, to his team-mates, and to his country. Failing to recognize and shoulder responsibility too long has been a failure of society. Man and athlete must be given the opportunity to achieve according to his own genius. Man and athlete each faces one or more moments of responsibility; however, that moment must be preceded by training, respect for authority, guidance, and self or imposed discipline. When applied to an athlete, discipline provides a reinforcement that permits the competitor to reach heights that once were foreign to him.

The elimination of scoring points and listing medals won by nations would enhance appreciably this head-to-head competition and reward. This element most probably would be extremely difficult to control. However, an appeal must be made to all who are represented at the Olympics—athletes, coaches, spectators, and especially the press. It is a large order, we concede; however, in the interest of fairness there is simplistic logic. For exam-

ple, Finland has a population of approximately five million persons, only a handful more than the largest cities in the world. Should athletes from Finland be required to compete in every event and be expected to compile points comparable to the United States or Russia? We would rather the Finns, and others similar to them, be honored for their participation and excellence, however small in numbers they might be. We feel strongly that individual honor would do much toward eliminating the political implications of the games. We must recognize that winning is that pinnacle for which we strive as individuals and nations; however, we must educate ourselves and others that striving is as important as winning, and participation has equal meaning and value. This would require a rebirth of the symbol of oneness of athletic purpose rather than a fragmentation of people, ideals, an opening of old wounds, or creation of new hurts and misunderstandings.

We have seen clearly that officiating suffers from a basic ineffectiveness. It is our considered judgment that the host nation should assume the entire responsibility of judging events. We believe that it would aid in avoiding sectional evaluation for national or political reasons. The responsibility to be fair and detached would be of greater magnitude if it were placed squarely on the shoulders of the host nation. We submit that this suggestion is open to argument; however, we are reaching for solutions that will place competition on a positive, objective footing.

The foregoing are individual considerations that could be expanded to other appropriate areas. But what are the answers to those who cry that the Games have burgeoned to the point that they no

longer are able to accomplish their original intent?

Our studied recommendation is that the time is ripe for a change in the basic format of the Olympic organization. The present size and numbers of participants are much too large and cumbersome for feasible, efficient operation. The preparation and presentation of the Games as they now are conducted are exorbitantly expensive and either discourage or prevent some countries from sending participants to the Games. If nothing else, the smaller, less affluent nations cannot afford to fund and sponsor the Games and enjoy the privilege of hosting the event.

To make it possible that all peoples of the world can share in the thrills, drama, sporting excellence, and ideals of the Olympiad, we propose that the present form be discarded and restructured into four major blocks:

1. Track and field, swimming, and aquatics;
2. Boating, sailing, canoeing, rough water boating, shell boat racing;
3. Combative and skill events, including gymnastics, boxing, wrestling, fencing, marksmanship, weight lifting, equestrian, and other related sports;
4. Team events such as soccer, basketball, field hockey, and volleyball.

There may be more compatible groupings; this is merely a sample.

We also recommend that each block be held in a specific year with four year cycles, thus preserving the historic four year interval. Therefore, if track and field events were held in the first year, they would be conducted again in the fifth year of the cycle.

It would be advantageous in many respects. Each block of activities could be held in a different country. Thus, virtually any country in the world should have the

opportunity and funds to sponsor an Olympic Spectacle. A yearly, block-type Games would permit spectators on opportunity to view the contests of their choice. It would telescope the Games into a focal point and all spectators could enjoy each event. As it is now conducted, it is physically impossible for a spectator to view more than a limited number of events.

Additionally, this procedure would eliminate massive numbers of administrative officials, athletes, coaches, press coverage, and growing lists of dignitaries. This abundance of participants has tended to create congestion and ill will that frequently has placed a damper on the true spirit of the Olympics. Conversely, it would enhance the true Olympian spirit and the leadership that is needed by the International Olympic Committee.

Further, it would provide greater autonomy and leadership for the individual blocks or event units. With few exceptions, the Games have been conducted in large, financially-powerful nations that had the resources to construct multi-million dollar stadia and complexes. All too often these athletic facilities have become white elephants, seldom used in their entirety once the Games were concluded.

Restructuring the Games in cycles of smaller scale would allow citizens of less affluency to share with the world family their culture, their heritage, and point to their progress and contribution to mankind.

This is our proposal because the Games *must be saved*. Perhaps it is just an ideal, but without ideals and dreams, what do we have left?

S.W. et P.J.