

European Games. When? How?

by Mr. Gaston Meyer



Mr. Gaston Meyer has asked us to publish this article which appeared in L'Equipe, the French sports newspaper. Mr. Meyer, holder of the Olympic Diploma and a famous journalist, is an ardent upholder of Olympism, but here he only expresses his personal opinion. We would draw your attention to the passage on this subject contained in the speech delivered by Lord Killanin, President of the IOC, at the assembly of European NOCs in Monaco.

European Games? These two words excite some and irritate others. Yet these "some" and "others" are strictly the same! The International Federations (opposed to the very idea of European Games) are made up of national federations who in turn constitute the National Olympic Committees, and the NOCs are for the most part in favour of such Games! European Games? One generally imagines that it means creating a new multi-sport competition on the lines of the Olympic Games, therefore having the same faults, the same financial imperatives, the same weight, even reduced to fifty per cent.

Yet it doesn't mean this. The European Games – and planned continental games in general – are pointless unless they help to ease the Olympic organisation.

At Munich nearly 10,000 athletes and officials, locked in a concrete citadel for three weeks, isolated according to nations, were bored stiff. Tomorrow there will be 15,000 of them, the day after 20,000. The remedies studied by the IOC all aim to curb the desirable expansion. It intends in fact to reduce the number of sports and events, and to limit the number of participants. Is this reasonable?

All the experts feel that, sooner or later, eliminating rounds will be just as necessary for individual sports as for collective sports. For the sake of convenience, and also for the benefit of the athlete, it seems natural for these eliminating rounds to be held on a continental basis.

Although the grand principle of unity of time and place is justifiable for the final phase, it is not necessary however to

apply it to continental eliminating rounds. Especially since very few countries would be able to meet it. On the other hand, any nation would be able to take charge of a certain sport or a certain group of comparable sports.

It would mean in fact opening the Games, for the first phase, to three or four times as many athletes, but only keeping 5,000 for the grand final. The International Federations' hostility would ipso facto die down as soon as they were assured of preserving, with their prerogatives, technical control and any profits of an enterprise for which the IOC would only have to outline the basic frame.

Mr. Raoul Mollet, the dynamic President of the Belgian Olympic Committee, suggested announcing leap years as "Olympic years". The Games would no longer be limited to two short weeks, but to three months, perhaps five months, at the discretion of the International Federations and their continental committees, who would be responsible for nominating their qualifying athletes 30 full days before the Grand Finale, for example, in athletics or swimming, a maximum of 32 finalists.

People will object that it may be difficult for an athlete to maintain his form for two or three months, but isn't this the normal fate of the Americans every four years?

Philosophically, the search for qualification seems just as important as final participation. An approach of this kind—which remains to be seriously studied—would favour the extension of the Olympic idea by increasing the number of countries directly interested, and also by mobilising the press towards sports which

it necessarily neglects when it is monopolised at the Olympic Games by the event of the day.

I do not need to repeat that in 1956, after Australia had to abandon the organisation of the equestrian Games (which were then transferred to Stockholm), they received a tremendous audience; yet this is never the case at the Olympic Games, drowned as they are in the hotchpotch of numerous daily events.

P.S. I was interested to read the article published in No. 62-63 of the Olympic Review, under the signature of Messrs. P. Jordan and S. Wilson, and take the liberty of making the following comments:

1. *The plan to divide the Games into four parts, set up over four years, seems to me contrary to the very nature of Olympism which is based on the meeting in one place and at one time of the physical elite of all disciplines that too often oppose and compete with each other.*
2. *This procedure tends to dilute the interest of the Games, could have a large impact on opinion, and could "discourage" the efforts undertaken by governments on account of the Games' enormous prestige.*
3. *Although several cities will gladly apply to organise the Games comprising athletics and swimming, it will be much more difficult to find candidates for the three other groups.*

G.M.