

The Olympic Programme

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Basically the Olympic Games consist of sports having obtained the right to be included in the Olympic programme. This is quite evident. The attention of the sporting public, of spectators and of international public opinion is strongly attracted by the different sports and athletes appearing in the different events, and thus everything connected with the programme, competitions and competitors must necessarily stand in their service. By this, of course, no diminution or depreciation of the value, necessity and importance of the other aims and tasks of the Olympic Movement is meant, nor of the work connected with the development and organization of the Games. The author certainly does not want to appear in the role of a one-sided programme-centred apostle, but considers it important to stress that without a sports programme, competitions and competitors, there would be no Olympic Games.

To become included in the Olympic programme has meant at all times a question of prestige for the particular sport and its respective International Federation. During the last decades, both within the different sports and also in the sports life of the different nations, a strengthening of Olympic-centred ideas is to be observed, in spite of the fact that in the majority of the different sports important international competitions (world championships, continental championships) have been organized more frequently than before. The natural consequence of this is that the different competitions have come to occupy a certain rank of order in public opinion and, parallel to the development of international sports life, more and more sports want to be included in the Olympic programme. Such tendencies can be observed even today: International Federations of several sports make every effort for their sport to appear on the programme of the Olympic Games. The participation or even success in the Games means much more to the public and sportsmen than victories won in world or continental championships,—with the

exception perhaps of one or two sports, e.g. soccer. From Athens up to Munich the programme of the Olympic Games has shown uninterrupted and, at some stages, even very rapid progress. In Athens, in 1896, the Olympic programme contained merely 9 sports while at Munich, the Olympic Games were organized in 21 sports. The same increasing—in some sports very rapidly increasing—proportions are also to be observed in the number of events within the various sports. In Athens only 43 events were organized, but they rose to 136 at the 1948 London Olympic Games in 18 sports, and 195 at Munich in 21 sports.

Development—with contradictions

When considering the above development without regard to certain circumstances the picture may appear as a positive one. However, when undertaking an analysis of those circumstances, critical remarks will necessarily emerge.

An analysis of the development of the Olympic programme clearly shows that within the IOC, being the only competent organ for taking decisions regarding the programme, no general, principal “programme policy” has been developed up to this day, that could have served as a guiding principle for the IOC when taking its decisions concerning a particular sport as to its acceptance into, or refusal from, the Olympic programme. The unavoidable consequence of this was that members of the IOC, the greater number of whom could not and cannot be at the same time experts in questions of sports technics, were guided in their decisions by subjective opinions and influences.

Part of this unbalanced development of the Olympic programme can be attributed also to the fact that the IOC itself was sometimes

influenced by personal views expressed by persons of international standing. May I refer; for example, to the historical fact that the problem of cancelling team games, which is a topic for discussion even in our days in certain circles, was raised as early as 1924. This was later combined with efforts to cancel all team events from the Olympic programme by leaving in only individual competitions. Subjective circumstances were also the determining factors when the programme of certain sports was nearly doubled from one Games to the next. Another sign of that lack of balance in the development of the Olympic programme is that the participation of women in the Games lags behind the general international development of women's sports.

If simplifying the question, the responsibility for all these contradictions must be taken by the IOC itself since it is stipulated in the Olympic Rules that the IOC is the only competent body for establishing the Olympic programme. Nevertheless it must not be forgotten that at certain periods some International Federations, too, played their part in upsetting the stability of the Olympic programme that could not be restored until the present time. I mean here the frequent variation of the events within a given sport, not even mentioning the sports with weight categories where new categories have been frequently introduced that have not been in accordance with requirements of the respective stage of that sport's development. The Olympic Games were considered by several International Federations as a possible field for experiments with some new event: this is certainly most objectionable.

With regard to the stability of the competition programme of the different sports, a very interesting and most elucidating fact is that while in athletics 16 events (out of 38 men's and women's events) have figured in the programme since the beginning of athletics and, with the exception of one event, all the others have appeared in 50% of the past Games, the programme of other sports, such as swimming, shows a remarkable fluctuation, although this sport, too, has always been included in the Olympic programme since the beginning of the Games. It is noteworthy also that men's rowing events have not been changed since 1920. A certain degree of stability is to be observed also in cycling and fencing*, but at the same time it must not be left unnoticed that in the

light of statistics and at the present stage of development, even stability is not an absolutely decisive factor since there are some events which are not very popular and which have been kept, quite unmotivatedly, in the programme of certain sports.

We have now arrived at the stage where in certain circles arguments are carried on about alleged "gigantism" or "elephantism" of the Olympic programme.

Although these terms were eliminated from the Olympic vocabulary by the 1973 Varna Congress (at least in their relation to the programme) a certain analysis must nevertheless be undertaken because inaccurate distinctions might give rise to misunderstandings. To my mind, the Olympic programme is in no way gigantic: this was corroborated by Mr. Willi Daume in Varna, according to whom the programme of the 1972 Games was still realisable. But a different question is that the unbalanced state of the Olympic programme, its unsatisfactory co-ordination with the requirements of development, the disproportions and, in general, the lack of an overall general policy having been the cause of many difficulties even in the past, all these may also be the source of grave difficulties in the future, should the IOC prove unable to introduce changes in this important field.

Efforts made by the IOC

In the light of the experience of the last Games and on the basis of views put forward in different circles, even within the IOC, it has been decided by the Executive Board of the IOC to start investigations on the programme from an impartial and general aspect, by developing also a long-range programme policy. Thus a joint Commission was created, functioning since 1968 and consisting of members of the IOC and NOCs who are at the same time experts in technical details of sports programmes. According to its terms of reference this Commission has the task of checking the present programme and gradually submitting proposals to the IOC concerning the modernization of the Olympic programme. Although this Com-

* See more details in Nadejda Lekarska's «Essays and Studies on Olympic Problems», Sofia 1973, pages 39-62.

mission has not obtained any permanent official standing, in contradiction to other Commissions it has been active since 1968 and submitted, after profound analysis, proposals and studies to the IOC concerning problems, but elaborating also some guiding principles. The Commission did not consider as its aim to carry out a "l'art pour l'art" reduction of the Olympic Games programme as had been expected by many people, but rather to try to change the unbalanced state of the present programme, to fix standards and demands that may throw light on the problem as regards which sports should figure on the Olympic programme and which ones have a hope to be included after having fulfilled the respective requirements.

This question was approached from different angles. Apart from the interests of the IOC, those of the International Federations, participating National Olympic Committees and organizers have also been taken into consideration. As basic principles the following were proposed to the IOC: to include only generally accepted popular sports (both individual and team sports) in the Olympic programme; the modification of the programme must not involve any additional organizational or financial burdens for the organizers; in accordance with general international development, women's sports have to claim more rights and possibilities of participation.

In conformity with the above principles, since 1968, the Commission has submitted both general and detailed proposals to the IOC. Accordingly, the standards of participation, as stipulated by Rule 30, were strengthened by the IOC in 1970.

It has been accepted by the IOC that modifications of the programme must be carried out on the basis of data concerning the popularity of the respective sports events.

The IOC was in agreement also with the Olympic participation of women in some new sports. In certain sports even modifications of the competition programme have been undertaken, mainly where the popularity of the respective event proved to be insufficient (e.g. cycling tandem) or where the organization of the events would have imposed unjustifiable burdens on the organizers or participants (e.g. kayak-canoe slalom, shooting 300 m, etc.). Proposals have also been submitted by the Commis-

sion concerning existing irregularities in the number of eligible competitors. A proposal has been made on the reduction of the number of teams participating in the finals of team games from the traditional 16 to 12, with the exception of soccer. In sports where women participate, the maximum number of men's and women's teams has been fixed at 18, by stipulating that the number of women's teams cannot be less than 6. Detailed proposals have also been submitted to the IOC concerning the number of substitutes. Nearly all of these proposals have been adopted by the IOC.

The work of the Programme Commission and the relative decisions of the IOC have met with general agreement, with the exception of some sports branches. At the same time it has been stressed that these proposals are only partial ones and further work and investigations are needed. The establishment of new standards and criteria is necessary in order to build up a long-range programme of the Olympic Games in order to avoid extreme fluctuations. A great help in this work was provided by the Congress in Varna where discussions were arranged on the present status of the organization and programme of the Olympic Games and on problems put forward by the IOC, NOCs and International Federations concerning the organization and programme of the Olympic Games.

May I quote in this connection a part of the speech made by Lord Killanin at the Vienna Session of the IOC in 1974:

"Following eligibility, the next consideration must be the policy regarding the long-term Olympic programme. I am not referring to the minuscule reduction of the number of sports or events in particular, but the principle as to whether all sports currently on the programme should remain and whether new sports should be added to the programme in view of their increasing popularity. It will be necessary for the International Olympic Committee to consider criteria for an Olympic sport. There are those who believe that team sports should be eliminated and that none should be added.

There are others who believe that team sports, especially those which can be played with the same facilities as other sports in a covered gymnasium, are viable and because of their increasing popularity should be included. There is a fairly general agreement

that any additional sports that might either receive the overall approval of the International Olympic Committee or be added as compulsory or optional sports to the programme, should be those which are judged by the clock, by the stop-watch, the tape or by the scoring of points such as goals, but not by the individual opinion of judges or by demanding expensive equipment. There are also proposals regarding the spread of the Olympic Games beyond a city's limits. These points were raised at Varna and are being studied."

In the above text one finds an indication from the President of the IOC that after an all-round analysis the question of the programme of the Olympic Games must be solved on a long-term basis. It becomes clear that, as verified and corroborated by the Varna Congress, the amendment and modification of the Olympic programme cannot be reduced to a mere amendment or modification of programme technical rules.

As to the future, it remains also as a question of discussion whether partial modifications should be carried out concerning the present system of organizing the Games, which was one of the sources of their popularity, without basically infringing the principle of "one place, one time".

It seems to me that at the present stage it would be most untimely to give a description of future Olympic programmes since that could be done only after having entered into overall discussions with the IFs and NOCs.

These negotiations and the establishment of a new programme does not seem to be an easy task since it is obvious that the interests differ widely. The aim of most of the International Federations is an enlargement of their competition programme. In these efforts they are aided by the Organizing Committee since an enlargement of the programme may increase the income of the Games. But this problem is by no means so unequivocal for the National Olympic Committees. An enlargement of the programme requires increased financial means, an enlarged organization and a deconcentration of forces. At the same time new sports appear not only with the demand to be acknowledged by the IOC, but also to be included in the Olympic programme. All these demands have to be brought into some rational synthesis on the basis of which one

may hope for the survival and continuance of the Olympic Games, for the strengthening of their leading principles and ideas. The method of the work of the Programme Commission according to which the proposals are separately discussed with the NOCs and the International Federations, must be followed also in the future. In this respect a change has been made: the International Federations have a right to send a delegate to this joint Programme Commission whose composition has been changed since 1974. When forming a judgment concerning the different sports and their programmes the Commission will employ the present standards, the newly elaborated criteria, and also detailed statistical data. However, all these will be applied only to Olympic Games to be organized after 1980.

We are of course fully aware of the fact that this work will be difficult, as it has been also in the past. It is also most unlikely that it will contribute to the IOC's or the Commission's popularity. But the theme is a most up-to-date one. A body such as the IOC has the obligation to take, after due consultations, the responsibility for a decision that seems to it likely to bring more advantage than disadvantage to the Olympic Movement and to the Games. There are principles that can be stated even in our days, such as the following: the Games are not world championships but competitions organized in the different Olympic sports; the Games must not be utilized for experimental purposes; only the best athletes should participate in the Games; possibly equal or at least similar conditions are to be assured for all participants, both in their preparation and participation; the Games must not be devalued by a "dumping" of sports events and medals, and—which is also of importance—a certain relative stability of the programme is to be attained in spite of the development of international sports. If these principles come to application in the elaboration of our definite proposals we will perhaps be entitled to hope that our programme policy, missing for some decades within the IOC, will contribute to its work and to the prestige of the Olympic Games.

A. C.

