

Polish youth on the “Olympic Alert”

by Włodzimierz Strzyzewski



The author, Włodzimierz Strzyzewski, a famous fencer, was a member of the Polish team for a long time before becoming a sports journalist. He has always continued to practise his sport and since April holds the title of world champion journalist.

We thank him and the “Polska Agencja Interpress” for giving us permission to publish this article, which deserves the attention of all officials of national sport.

Thanks to telecommunications by satellite, hundreds of millions of people will be able to watch the opening of the Olympic Games and see the lighting of the sacred flame symbolising the Games.

Then the whole of mankind will take its seat in front of the television to admire the athletes, wishing the best ones success in a fair contest. It has always been like this...

Captivated by the example of these superb heroes, children and young people dream of Olympic laurels, try their strength and talent in different sports disciplines, endeavour to improve their performance in the hope that one day... But, as the saying goes, many are called but few are chosen. The same applies to the struggle to obtain the passport for the Olympic Games.

At the XVIIIth Olympic Games at Munich the United States' team was composed of 478

persons, 91 of whom were women, for a population of 208.8 million with 105 women to 100 men. The French Olympic representation numbered 252 persons, 34 of whom were women, for a population of 51.7 million. In Poland just over 3,000 athletes had prepared themselves for these Games and about 800 qualified for the last stage of the preliminaries. As it turned out, the Polish team was composed of 311 persons for a population of 33 million.

With regard to the continued rise of the sporting level, it seems that the Olympic Games are increasingly becoming only Games, not in the Hellenic spirit but in the spirit of Roman hedonism: *“panem et circenses”*.

The most important thing is to take part

Will mankind be able to develop the ideas of Pierre de Coubertin creatively? Will these ideals be able to exert greater influence on the formation of young people's and adults' characters if they are practically only spectators?

What can be done to achieve, not in front of the small screen, not passively but actively, that fundamental truth of the Olympic movement formulated by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, creator of the modern Olympic Games, that the most important thing is to take part?

I think the reply to this question has been found by the officials of the General Council of the Federation of Polish Youth Socialist Unions which, for some years now, has been organising sporting events for the masses, national football, volleyball and tennis competitions and patronising the Polish quilts championships. This sport for all was presented among others at the 10th World Youth and Student Festival at Berlin. The

Federation's greatest success was the organisation of the national table tennis tournament in 1975, at which over 350,000 young people took part.

"1976 is the year of the sporting festival of the youth of the whole world. It is the year of the Winter Games at Innsbruck and the Olympic Games at Montreal. So that the mass participation of youth in the Olympic movement is not limited only to watching the events, but so that each young person may also have the possibility of checking his physical aptitudes and raise them to a higher level, and in order to propagate the Olympic ideals among youth, the Polish youth movement has proclaimed 1976 'Youth's Olympic Alert' ", states the declaration of the General Council of the Federation of Polish Youth Socialist Unions.

Everybody, everywhere

The chief object of this vast campaign is to fill the sports grounds, stadia, skating rinks, ski slopes and swimming pools with a multitude of young people so that they understand better the meaning of sport and the spirit of the Olympic Games. At the same time the "Olympic Alert" gives the youth organisations the task of constructing inexpensive sports installations themselves—natural skating rinks, luge tracks, mini ski jumps, badminton, volleyball and quoits halls, swimming pools, rambling paths, etc.

"The chief object of the Alert", states the appeal, "is to create a system of recreational and sporting events for the masses such that every day all the sports grounds and installations swarm with young people, so that they help to develop physical aptitudes, form characters and rival the best."

Thus all the Polish youth between 10 and 29 years of age—nearly 12.5 million young people—will implement in this Olympic year the keyword of the Games—*citius, altius, fortius...*

Representatives of the youth unions, the central commission and the regional commissions of the Polish Olympic Committee, the trade unions, the sports federations, the Ministry of Education, the Society for the Propagation of Physical Education and other



Young enthusiasts of quoits—a sport, on the Polish schools' programme.

organisations, as well as journalists of the press, radio and television, belong to the general management body of the Olympic Alert and the 49 departmental management bodies.

"Youth's Olympic Alert" concerns both winter and summer sports. The official inauguration of the Alert was held in January in Szczyrk; it will close in September after the Montreal Games.

Already 1980

The programme of the winter sports competitions is composed of cross-country skiing, downhill skiing and ski jumping as well as relay races, luge, ice hockey and skating competitions. The summer programme contains the following sports: football,

volleyball, quoits, swimming, canoeing, yachting, athletics, tennis, badminton, various games and other disciplines selected by each departmental management body. On non-working Saturdays competitions are planned in which representatives of the Polish team at the Olympic Games will take part; the television will organise a tele-tournament with eliminating heats on a national scale for hundreds of thousands of young people. Olympic clubs will be organised in all the departments, in which young people will learn about the Olympic ideals which will also be propagated by different competitions. The young people will participate in the official farewell and welcome ceremonies for the Olympic representatives, and a delegation of young Poles will take part in the international Olympic camp "Montréal 76".

Each participant in the Alert events who takes part in at least six sports disciplines will receive a diploma and a tombola ticket.

The Polish youth organisations are already drawing up the programme of their participation in the preparations for the 1980 Olympic Games and plan establishing the "Moscow 1980" Olympic youth medal which will be awarded to young people having obtained good results in the sports events for the masses organised between 1977 and 1980 on the basis of experience gained at the 1976 Olympic Alert.

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These experiences, as well as the initiative as a whole, should interest militants of the Olympic movement throughout the world.

W. S.

