

Orienteering

The new fascinating sport in the Olympic family

*by Lasse Heidemann,
President of the IOF*

The recognition by the IOC Session, of orienteering as being in conformity with Olympic requirements, was an appreciated international acknowledgement of the high standards and value of this sport.

Orienteering can be defined as a sport in which participants (equipped with a map and compass) complete a course containing a number of control points. The control points, or controls, are indicated in the terrain by markers and on the map by small circles. The route taken between controls is left to the choice of each participant but the controls must be passed in a fixed sequence. The fastest competitor is the winner. Orienteering may be practised on foot in summer as well as on skis in winter, on an individual basis or as a relay race. Furthermore, competitions may take place in the dark—"night-orienteering".

The sport of orienteering is relatively new internationally, but has been practised in Scandinavia for more than fifty years. The first orienteering competitions were held in Sweden and Norway in the late 1890's and early 1900's.



The IOF yesterday and today

The International Orienteering Federation was founded by ten countries in May 1961 in Copenhagen. Today the federation has twenty-three members (17 in Europe, 2 in Asia, 2 in North America and 2 in Oceania). In addition, there are twenty countries around the world where orienteering is practised and which are in contact with the International Federation.

The first task of the federation was to establish championships, the first of which were held at the European level in Norway in 1962. These European championships were abandoned in 1966 in favour of world cham-

pionships to be held every other year. World championships in ski-orienteering were also initiated in 1975, and from 1980 are to be held biennially.

The creation of rules for international competitions and of specifications for map drawing has been undertaken by two special committees, and three other committees are responsible for education and propaganda, ski-orienteering and publications. The federation's official languages are German and English, and it publishes a bulletin "IOF-Report" twice yearly.

During the past twenty years, orienteering has enjoyed considerable growth. Today's

skilled orienteer is an excellent long distance runner, and is equally adept at reading maps and applying them to a given terrain. Course planners try to maintain a balance between these two elements.

Orienteering - a mass sport

Orienteering has equal appeal for young and old, and competitions are organised for participants ranging in age from ten to seventy years of age and older. In the context of the growing world-wide movement for physical exercise, orienteering is an important form of relaxing recreation, as hundreds of thousands of enthusiasts will testify. The heightened interest in the sport is borne out by some impressive figures.

Many competitions of several days' duration boasted several thousand competitors, as in the Swedish competition with 15,000. At present, international competitions are dominated by Scandinavian participants, as the experience in the sport is deeply rooted in those countries and the federations are well organised. It is to be expected that in a few years' time, however, other countries having benefited from experience, will match and surpass the Scandinavians' performances.

It is perhaps too early to speculate whether the sport of orienteering will be included on the programme of the Olympic Games. Many questions will have to be resolved, including whether the sport is to be considered part of the winter or summer programme. Nonetheless, orienteers, often called the last amateurs in sport, will almost certainly be suitable competitors for Olympic events.

L.H.

