

Reflections on the Olympic movement

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Now that the Olympic Games in Moscow are over, we cannot disregard the crisis which the Olympic movement has undergone during the last few years. Any attempt to solve the problem of this crisis will not, in my opinion, change the situation. However, if the Olympic movement is important for the United States and the USSR, no efforts should be spared in order to clear up the situation.

Reflecting on the Olympic movement we must mention several events, the most important of which was in 1952 the Olympic Games in Helsinki. In Helsinki, the USSR joined the Olympic family and was warmly welcomed by the Olympic movement all over the world. However, already in the 1952 Olympic Games, the problem of China came up, causing bitter and difficult deliberations to which I was witness. Later on came up the problem of West-Germany and East-Germany and the two Koreas.

Needless to mention the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, when athletes from more than 20 countries left Montreal before the Games even started. It is indeed regrettable that all efforts made at the time in order to prevent the non-participation of these countries, were in vain. The climax was in Moscow, when a number of Olympic Committees decided not to participate in the said Games, at a time when the Russians have invested enormous financial and manpower resources in order to stage the greatest show.

These were not the only phenomena of the crisis. It started with the disregarding of the sublime idea laid down by Baron de Coubertin saying that the most important thing is the mere participation and not the winning. This idea has lost its meaning altogether. On the contrary, by watching the competitions at the Olympic Games, one can clearly see that the main thing is winning, not just participation.

From various studies one can see that what Baron de Coubertin actually meant was the importance of the meeting between the international youth. He considered equally important the representative sport and physical education in elementary and high schools. It

is regrettable that those who followed him somehow neglected the thought of popular sport and basic physical education.

The Olympic idea in itself is a wonderful framework which enables - every four years - friendly meetings between youth from all over the world irrespective of race, religion or nationality. I regret to say that even this idea was not preserved. Worst of all was the phenomenon when the Olympic Games started to be exploited for political and national purposes. This led to the terrible tragedy when Arab terrorists penetrated into the Olympic village, in Munich, in the course of the 1972 Olympic Games which resulted in the barbarous murder of eleven Olympic athletes from Israel. The show went on, and the International Olympic Committee did not react.

All those who participated at the meetings of the IOC Executive with the NOC's could hear, time and again, that if this situation continued, small nations would have no place in the Olympic movement. This concerns nations who had, in the not too distant past, played an important role in the Olympic family. These countries now feel like "second-rate citizens" and play the part of "onlookers". This was also expressed at the 1973 Olympic Congress in Varna.

There is no doubt whatsoever that all efforts should be made in order to overcome the crisis. Otherwise the Olympic movement is in jeopardy. In fact, the countries participating in the Olympic Games can be divided into three groups :

- a) The group forming 10 % which generally win most medals.
- b) 20 %-25 % of the countries which get some medals.
- c) The majority 60-65 % which do not win any medals and are simply "onlookers".

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Luckily the IOC is now headed by Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, who possesses all the capabilities and has behind him many years of experience as member of the IOC. He seems to be the most suitable person who might be able to overcome the crisis. We sincerely hope that Mr. Samaranch will take all necessary steps in order to safeguard the Olympic movement, and we wish him all the success.

H.W.

