

The International Olympic Academy an experience of a lifetime

by Janet Murugi Kamau (KEN)

We arrived at the International Olympic Academy (IOA) the venue of the 21st session of the Academy on the afternoon of Tuesday, 7th July having travelled some 400 km from Athens.

The IOA is set at the foothills of Mt. Cronion, only a few hundred meters from the original site, where the Greeks in antiquity took part in the Olympic Games, and gave sacrifices to Zeus. The temples and stadium, though now in ruins, still stand strong enough to give evidence of the long gone days. It is here where the pines and olives sway to the weather of the soft breezes, that the true meaning of Olympism is kept alive.

The IOA is the headquarters of Olympism to the world. Every summer it holds a session, which draws participants who are coached on subjects of both ancient and modern Olympism. Covering its history, philosophical value, its aims, objectives and problems. It is here that many learn the true and real meaning of the Olympic movement. Whether they pass it on, their return home is a different matter, and perhaps the most important...

That evening we attended the opening ceremony at the ancient stadium. How fascinating it was to see first how new the stadium looks. An act of the gods, perhaps? Here medals were awarded to those who have dedicated their lives to the Olympic movement. This was followed by the laying of wreaths at Pierre de Coubertin monument. The revivor of the Olympic Games and whose name was on everybody's lips...

The lectures averaging two a day were delivered in a well equipped lecture hall. The subjects chosen were varied, but all in one way or another related to the Olympic concept. The lecturers delivered it in a most interesting and comprehensive manner. However, I felt that some of the terminology used was above our needs, so to say. It seemed as though the



Miss J. M. Kamau (left) and Agnes Mwangiri in Athens for the opening ceremony of the 21st Session of the IOA in 1987.

lecturer was addressing the other lecturers, as the bulk of the questions came from the lecturers themselves. Do not get me wrong, I am not saying they didn't do their best, but perhaps if there was a mixture of young, and yet not-so-young lecturers the message would come across more profoundly.

Also, I thought perhaps that lectures should be included on problems encountered by the Olympic movement in the third world nations. In order to educate the non-third world participants on issues outside their home regions...

The discussions took place everyday in the cool evenings. The topics were chosen by a panel of participants representatives and the lecturers. Each discussion group was made up of about 25 participants, plus three lecturers. The latter acting as guides.

The discussions were quite hectic and we heard many views. Each of us gave contributions based on our different cultural and educational background...

The visits to the museums of ancient and modern Olympics were interesting and informative giving us a chance to compare what the Olympic Games were in antiquity and what they are to-day. It is evident that not much has changed in terms of the real concept of Olympism but the difference in size is astounding. The growth of the Olympic Games has been phenomenal. Today the games cater for the whole world, not just the cities of Greece. Attracting hundreds of athletes and millions of spectators, oblivious of their race, colour, belief or ideology culture or custom.

No words can express how grateful I am for being among the numbered few. My sincere gratitude to Mr. J. A. Samaranch, the President of the IOC, who, while on a visit to Nairobi, Kenya, gave me this scholarship to attend the 1981 Session of the IOA.

J. M. K.

