

## The promotion of Olympic ideals in the GDR

by Martin Kramer,

Head of Press for the Olympic Promotion Society of the GDR.

In his memoirs, the Baron de Coubertin, founder of the Olympic movement of modern times, wrote that "the growing popularity of sport among manual workers is an undeniable guarantee for the survival of Olympism- whatever the outcome of the struggle for universal power between two totally opposed social systems may be". This implies recognition of a fact which has been strictly ignored in the past years, that "sport is not a luxury pastime, an activity for the leisured few, nor merely a form of muscular compensation for brain work. To every man and woman, regardless of their trade, it offers an opportunity for self-improvement".

A Society for the promotion of the Olympic Ideal was created in the German Democratic Republic in 1960. Together with the NOC, and German Gymnastics & Sports Federation, it is working towards the accomplishment of Pierre de Coubertin's humanitarian objective. The German Gymnastics and Sports Federation caters for 3.3 million members (20 % of the East-German population) and deals with 35 different sports. At the time of the Olympic Society's foundation, the German Democratic Republic could boast only one Olympic champion: Wolfgang Behrendt, Olympic bantam-weight boxing champion in Melbourne (AUS) in 1956. The "Olympic Society" undertook the task of widely promoting Olympic ideals and encouraging the greatest possible number of people to participate in its activities. Every East-German citizen can become a "sponsor" by offering his services and donating a yearly sum, the extent of which he himself sets. Some companies, and some public welfare institutions have also joined the Society's cause. Each sponsor constitutes a link between the Olympic teams and the whole of the country's population and regularly receives the Society's official bulletin, and documentation relative to the latest national Olympic news. These sponsors put up billboards and posters within the different companies and sports clubs, and

in any place likely to be in the public eye. They organise discussions and forums to which



*Klaus Köste, Olympic Gymnastics Champion and head coach at the Leipzig Sports club, congratulates and encourages young athletes.*

they invite Olympic champions as guest speakers, so that the public has the opportunity to meet them personally.

Another aspect of the Society's work is the sale of Olympic products for the promotion of Olympism in a small shop at 114 Friedrichstrasse, in the centre of the East-German capital. There one may find books on special sports subjects and on the Olympic Games, brochures, school textbooks, sports equipment, and any number of souvenirs (posters, flags, badges, calendars...) stamped with the Society's emblem.

The money coming from the sponsors' contributions and the sales of the Olympic products is given to the East-German NOC to cover the travel and equipment costs of the national Olympic teams. In 1982, Mr. Manfred von Brauchitsch, president of the "Society", was able to give Mr. Manfred Ewald, president of the East-German NOC, 2.5 million marks.

The Olympic Society is only one of the ways in which the German Democratic Republic promotes Olympic ideals. Another method is student education through sport in primary and secondary schools, in universities, and more specifically at the German College for Physical Culture in Leipzig.

And the fact that the GDR sends their trainers and experts to direct Olympic Solidarity courses in Africa, Asia and Latin America should not be forgotten either.

The importance of the Olympic movement in the GDR is underlined by all the work and contributions which confirm the fact that the young people selected to represent their nation at the Olympic Games benefit from the moral support of their fellow countrymen and sport fans.