

## The Soviets, radiantly happy ice-hockey competition winners

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It was with high hopes that the threshold of the 1984 Olympic year was crossed. Its introduction, the XIVth Winter Games in Sarajevo, is already behind us. The challenge was made, the athletes took it up.

The Games constitute an important goal, of a gold-edged value which is all the greater for the fact that they only take place every four years. This was not always the case, as there are many people who would once again like to be rid of these Winter Games which were introduced in 1924 as a mere appendage to the Games of the Olympiad. Unjustifiably, because the Olympic ideal revival involved all sports and not only summer sports, even though these traditionally represented the heart of the Games of Ancient Greece. At that time there were no winter sports and that is why Baron de Coubertin's idea could be incorrectly interpreted if it were taken in too narrow a context.

Participation in the World Championships is a goal worthy of effort, in the Olympics even more so, and an Olympic victory, be it summer or winter, represents the fulfilment of any athlete's life. It is for an Olympic victory that many stars on the point of turning professional remain amateurs for another year, so as to take up the Olympic challenge. Furthermore, the Winter Games are much more than the mere object of satisfaction through competition of personal sporting ambitions. Well beyond their pure sporting value, they are the means of construction of a framework of friendship among nations, resulting in the creation of winter sports and holiday resort in areas often difficult of access, and of leisure centres which ordinarily would never have been built.

Such are the consequences of the Winter Games and their future intrinsic role will be to initiate – to an even greater degree than the Games of the Olympiad – a movement similar to the one they generated for example in Sarajevo : until now, there had only ever been one ice-stadium in Sarajevo, but bobsleigh,

luge, skiing, figure- and speed-skating found a home there alongside ice-hockey, and therefore stimulated the enthusiasm of new devotees who ended up expressing their thanks to the IOC, which had made the creation of their new vital sporting areas possible

Whilst recognizing the value of the five other Olympic Winter sports, ice-hockey remains, of course, the main attraction of the Winter Games. If it were not for this thrilling team sport, the Winter Games would be like soup made without salt. The participation of all qualifying teams has been very disputed because of the strict eligibility conditions set by the IOC and the IIHF and which have been the cause of the elimination of several teams : it was for this reason that, for example in 1976 in Innsbruck, Sweden and Canada were not even allowed to take part in the competition. Even for these disqualified teams, the value of the Olympic medals was to recover its importance thanks to the IIHF's new strategy: the World Ice-hockey Championships, which used to take place the same year as the Games, were cancelled in favour of the Olympic tournament which consequently recovered so much value that hereafter, even gaining a place in the qualifying rounds constitutes a goal worthy of the greatest efforts for every IIHF member country.

This was very much the case for the Games in Sarajevo for which several nations had adopted new measures. The Games in Lake Placid in 1980 had been proof enough of the fact that no team has a subscription to the title. This was of particular encouragement to overseas countries such as the United States and Canada, but also to Czechoslovakia, nations which once again made extra special preparation efforts in order to refurbish past moments of glory. To this end, some of the participants did not hesitate to apply their own amendments to article 26 of the "Olympic Charter" for the liberalization of its interpretation, including in their teams players who could

not be considered to be in accordance with the criteria set up following the special agreement between the IOC and the IIHF, even if one were applying article 26 in the most liberal manner possible. For the first time in the history of Olympic ice-hockey, several players were disqualified, thereby seriously affecting the structure of the teams involved. As a result, the quality of the games between the teams of the bottom half of the table (none of which, as it turned out, reached the finals) suffered.

As foreseen, the Soviet Union became Olympic champion and was always in control of its opponents, even if mere scores could have cast doubts on the outcome. The final against Czechoslovakia was nonetheless a first-class ice-hockey match, a game full of tension, elegance and technical subtleties, a fitting conclusion to the Games. And when Mr.

Samaranch, President of the IOC, and Mr. Sabetzki, President of the IIHF, hung the gold medals around the necks of the radiantly happy Soviet players, it meant, in the eyes of their coach Tichinov and of the whole of the Soviet Union, that order had once again returned within the world of ice-hockey. They had acquitted themselves of the Lake Placid "breakdown" in 1980 (where they had "only" been silver medalists) and, for the first time ever, the Moscow "Sputniks" at last held every one of the four major international ice-hockey trophies : the 1980 Challenge Cup, the 1981 Canada Cup, the 1983 World Championships, and now also the 1984 Olympic title. The ice-hockey crown belongs to the Soviet Union. Who will challenge them for it ?

G. S.



*In an atmosphere of general elation, the Moscow "Sputniks", the 1984 Olympic champions, surround their coach Tichinov.*



Under cover...



... or outdoors in the bad weather,  
one imperative only : work.



*One of the Curves of the superb Trebevic track*

