

THE ENTRY MARATHON OF THE SECOND SEX



To be allowed to compete, women have had to struggle against out-of-date ideas.

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Much has been said and written on the participation of women in the Olympic Games and Movement, particularly during the last two decades and, in spite of the notable progress achieved so far, interest regarding this subject still remains relevant. This, I assume, is due to the fact that the current situation is still not up to the mark of present-day requirements.

The few years to the end of the century promise to be momentous in most spheres of human activities. The Olympic Movement with the Games at its peak is not only apt but also intended to play a prominent part in this process and that in turn includes women's active involvement in it. An outlook to the future could, however, hardly be convincing if shaped on goodwill only. It is on the basis of re-

gistered positive and negative results in the past and present that expectations could be more credibly predicted. I therefore intend to dwell shortly on the situation prevailing during the initial period of the modern Olympic Games and to proceed thereafter to a follow-up of antecedent and present-day data regarding women's share in the Games and Movement in the light of a diversity of conditions.

WOMEN'S OLYMPIC START

At the turn of the century when the Games came into being, a long discussion on principles concerning women's participation in them took place. The founder of the Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, declared himself against. His concept of the Games was expressed in the following thought: 'The solemn periodic manifestation of male sport based on internationalism, on loyalty as a means, on arts as a background and the applause of women as a recompense.'

Coubertin's views were opposed by several IOC members who supported the stand that women had the right to participate in the Games, competing in sports fit to their capacities. Coubertin declared himself against this trend, too. He quoted on this point the French poet Alfred de Musset saying: 'A door should either be kept open or closed', and advanced the following suggestion, 'Since women cannot take part in every sport, why should they be allowed

a half-way participation? If nevertheless this should be imposed, it should be on equal terms with men.'

Considering the number of purely male sports at that time, as well as the lack of women's active involvement on a large scale in sports, such a possibility was inadequate and therefore inapplicable. The question, however, concerning Coubertin's concept of the Olympic Games as a manifestation of male sports only is in need of some comment. One can assume the reason to have been that sports, as already mentioned, did not enjoy any popularity among women, which is partly due to the fact that the question of the woman's legal rights in society was no more than a matter of wishful thinking. The image of the weak woman, entirely dependent upon and seeking the protection of man in the family and at every step, predominated. Within this context women in shorts competing on the sports ground for the sake of 'personal fame' as commonly believed, must have been thought completely immoral.



Coubertin, so very rationally-minded a person, struggling against many outdated views and customs, was probably unconsciously under the influence of this vision. Considering, however, his most praiseworthy initiative to restore the Olympic Games in tune with modern requirements which has brought about such outstanding results, any attempt to qualify his memorable contribution in favour of sports because of his particular attitude to women's participation in the Games should not deny his undoubted merits.

Having said this, I now proceed to a chronological follow-up of events connected to women's participation in the Olympic Games.

For greater clarity, the process of evolution is divided into three periods, namely: a) From 1890 to 1936; b) 1948-1968; c) 1972 to 1988.

Swimming was one of the early sports in which women were allowed to compete.



FROM 1900 TO 1936

As mentioned above, women's Olympic entry was strewn with difficulties. Here we should point out something of no little importance. Irrespective of the lively discussions, the pros and cons regarding the matter, women did take part at the second Olympic Games - 1900 in Paris - in two sports, i.e. tennis and golf. That was proof in itself that while for some the right to self-assessment was nestling in the private sphere of dreams, it started to be for others an open field for struggle. This first breakthrough of women's participation in the Games was the merit of courageous women from Great Britain and the United States of America. At present women from all continents and over 150 NOCs take part in the Games.

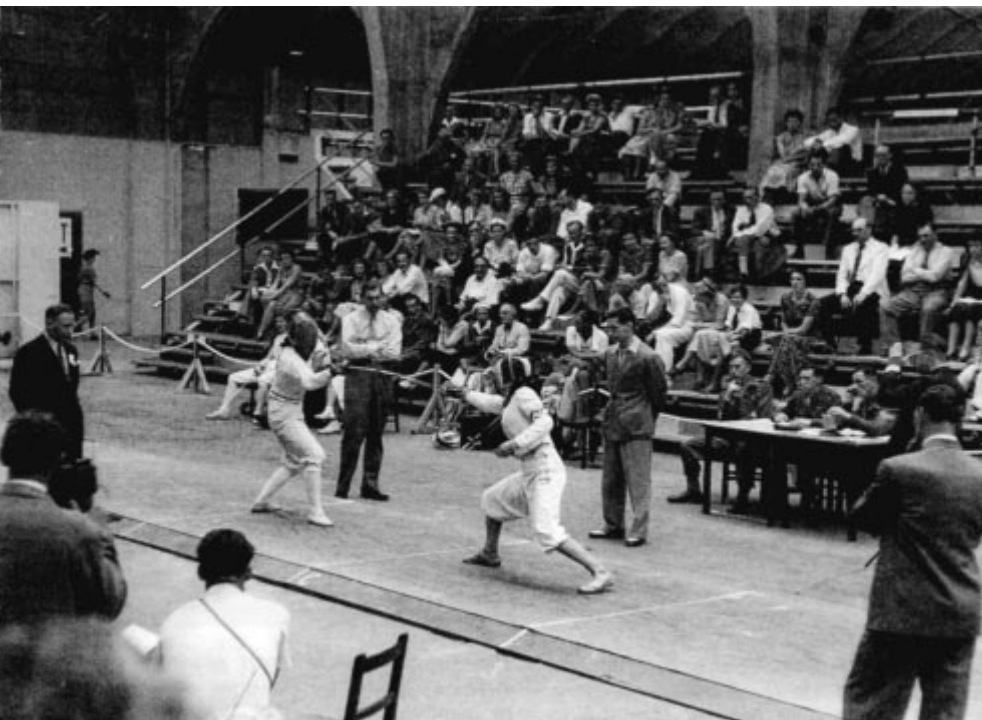
When the debates had reached a culminating point at the various IOC sessions in favour or against women's participation, one more sport was included in the programme - swimming (1912).

Between the very start and the following timid progress, i.e. between 1900 and

1920, a world war stopped altogether the development of sports. Thereafter peace and normal activities in all walks of life had to be restored. Women's participation in the Games was in three sports only - in other words more or less symbolic. In order of appearance they were: tennis, archery and swimming (golf was dropped from the programme).

Following this period of stagnation, the IOC undertook commendable efforts to give the Olympic Games a new impetus. The 22nd IOC Session held in Paris in 1924 decided to open the doors for a larger participation of women in the Games. This decision marked the beginning of a structured programme. We should not overlook the fact that at that time most of the International Sports Federations came into being, a very important factor in favour of the development of women's sport on a worldwide level. The road, however, between proposal and decision and between the latter and fulfilment has not always been an easy one. Between 1924 and 1936 inclusive, when women's sports developed at a much faster rate and came to include more countries, the number of Olympic sports remained practically unchanged. They were no more than four. In order of seniority - swimming, fencing, athletics and gymnastics. (Tennis was dropped from the programme and archery, although figuring in the programme, had at that time been practically abandoned.)

A somewhat curious fact is worthwhile mentioning at that point. At the 34th IOC Session, in 1935 in Oslo, an 'International Federation of Women's Sport' submitted to the IOC a proposal to exclude women altogether from the Olympic Games so that the Federation would be able to organize separate Games for Women only. Another similar proposal was advanced by an 'Amateur National Athletic Federation' to eliminate women's athletic events from the Olympic Games and to limit strongly their participation in all other sports. The opposition of a group of women to the participation of women in the Games was rejected by the purely male panel of the International



Women's fencing made its appearance in 1924.

Olympic Committee. The latter charged one of its commissions to undertake a detailed study on the participation of women in the Games.

FROM 1948 TO 1968

Another World War, incomparable to the first in destructiveness, stopped once again the normal development of life. The strife for freedom and conditions for personal assessment were strongly reflected in the 1948 Olympic Games in London, in spite of current after-war difficulties.

If the following period between 1920 and 1936 can be qualified as transitory, the second one between 1948 and 1968 marks a clearly upward curve of women's sports in the world, though not duly reflected in the Olympic Games.

In 1948 the number of sports amounts to five and in 1968 - twenty years later, to no more than six. They are: athletics, fencing, gymnastics, canoeing, swimming and volleyball.

In the meantime, at the 63rd IOC session held in Tokyo, 1964, a proposal was approved for a detailed study of the Olympic Programme aimed at overcoming certain drawbacks regarding the participation of women in the Games. The results of these findings have, however, not come to light as was the case with those of the first commission set up to examine the question.

On the 31st January 1968, a meeting of the then existing Committee for the Co-ordination of NOCs under the presidency of the late Giulio Onesti from Italy, was held in Grenoble at the time of 'the X Olympic Winter Games. A detailed study (the first, written by the present author) on the participation of women in the Olympic Games and Movement was submitted for discussion. Adopted by the Co-ordination Committee, the same study was presented in Mexico City, 1968 at the Meeting of the IOC Executive Board with representatives of the NOCs. A consensus of opinion followed in favour of increasing women's participation in the Games. This encouraging

step forward coincided with the establishment of the first joint commission on the Olympic Programme (IOC members and NOC representatives) which took a firm stand on the matter.

FROM 1975 TO 1988

This period is marked by the unprecedented advance of women's sports on an international scale, due mainly to the ambition of the IOC to overcome efficiently all obstacles in the way of so necessary a development; to the trend of the IFs to enrich their respective programmes and to that of the NOCs to be up to the level of progress. Behind this positive tripartite activity we must not overlook the merit of the IOC Programme Commission which has prepared standards for inclusion of women's sports and events in the Programme of the Games, considerably less severe in comparison to those established for men.

Once women are admitted into a sport, there still remains the question of increasing the number of events open to them.

In 1976 the number of women's sports amounts to 10, namely: Athletics, Archery, Basketball, Canoeing, Fencing, Gymnastics, Handball, Rowing, Volleyball and Swimming, plus 3 mixed events in Equestrian sports, Shooting and Yachting.

In 1988, four more sports are added: Cycling, Field Hockey, Tennis and Table Tennis.

Whenever the word 'increase' is being mentioned in regard to women's participation in the Olympic Games, the growth in the number of sports is not the only reliable evidence proving positive trends.



The programme of each separate sport increases mainly by the number of events or participants and that is also true of women's sports (See table below). The above mentioned - mixed events in Equestrian, Shooting and Yachting amount to 14 and are included in the total number of men's events.

At the end of this chapter I wish to note that it would be wrong to expect the number of women's sports to be blindly raised to the level of men's sports at all cost and that concerns also the number of events. Matters have to develop normally. It is, however, worthwhile mentioning that

Increase of women's sports and events in the 3 major periods

Year	Number of sports	Number of events
1900	2	2
1936	4	15
1948	5	19
1968	7	39
1976	10	49
1988	17	72

The mixed events (women and men jointly) are 14, included in the 165 events for men.

some prejudices stemming from the past still seem to be in force. They generally follow two lines of thought and taste, namely to either qualify a sport as unfeminine or to label it too graceful to be a true sport. Subjective views are unlimited and ought therefore not to weigh in the balance of selection. The standards prepared by the Programme Commission and adopted by the IOC for sports, disciplines and events are meant to rule out personal likes and dislikes.

With regard to the participation of women in the Olympic Winter Games, it has up to now always been abreast of the level of popularity of winter sports among women. The Programme develops normally and gives women a chance to prove courage, stamina and feminine grace. From 1924 to 1988 women have taken an active part in both Alpine and Nordic skiing, in Speed and Figure Skating and in Luge.

Summing up the above-mentioned data, the rating between men's and women's events in 1988 in the summer and winter sports separately leads to the following results :

SUMMER EVENTS

Men	Women	% Women
237	86	36,28

WINTER EVENTS

Men	Women	% Women
46	18	39,13

(Evaluated by N. Georgiev, Bulgaria.)

The above-quoted facts provide evidence that women's participation in the Olympic Winter Games is much better balanced than in the Summer Programme. We might conclude that the development on a large international scale of women's sports is predominantly due to the female participation in the Olympic and Olympic Winter Games throughout the years, as well as to the fact that the IOC acknowledged women's equality on the sports ground at a time when it was far from being given general recognition.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

If from a sporting point of view the participation of women in the Olympic Games is an encouraging fact, their share in the Movement is proportionally very poor. It was rightfully expected that the belated enlightenment on women's social equality would extend to the Movement too. Time passed, however, without substantial results. The long-expected breakthrough was made by the IOC under the Presidency of Mr Juan Antonio Samaranch in electing from 1981 onward several women to IOC membership. At present out of 90 IOC members 6 are women. Great Britain heads the list with two women members.



Judo is the most recent Olympic sport to be opened to women.

Considering that no woman has been a member of the IOC from the time of its foundation until 1981, i.e. for a period of 87 years, in spite of the fact that the Olympic Charter has never contained a provision barring women from membership, this long-expected conquest is to be considered of historic importance.

If only the National Olympic Committees took good notice of the example which the IOC has set. The number of women representatives within their sphere is insignificant. Among a total of 166 NOCs,

four women hold the post of president and three of secretary-general. The pattern is very much the same among the International Sports Federations. Among 30 IFs on Olympic Summer and Winter Sports Federations, only one woman holds the presidential post, while two are secretary-generals. There are also 23 International Organizations enjoying IOC recognition and here again only one woman happens to be president.

Let us now cast a look on the largest Olympic gatherings - the last two Olympic Congresses held in 1973 in Varna (BUL) and in 1981 in Baden-Baden (FRG). Should one view as normal the fact that at the 10th Olympic Congress just three women among 102 delegates were honoured to represent their NOCs? In Baden-Baden this percentage was further reduced - 6 women among 300 delegates from 149 NOCs. The numerical priority of men in comparison to women was also obvious among the delegates from the various International Sports Federations. In Varna three women among 66 men delegates and in Baden-Baden two out of 68 !

WHY SO FEW WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS ?

Bearing in mind the large participation of women in sports today, an answer is needed to the burning question of why women are so poorly represented in the Olympic and other sports leading bodies at local and international level. The usual argument is that they do not seem to be interested in the management of sports and that, consequently, qualified women for leading posts are just not available. If that were not the case they of course could hold them, why not? Such explanations sound unconvincing due to their superficial nature. The matter boils down basically to legal equality, or lack of such between women and men in society and the existing conditions for acquiring the necessary qualification. This in turn deserves a somewhat closer approach.

It is superfluous, I believe, to formulate arguments in favour of women's right to equality in all walks of life. Nothing has been left to add to all comments made throughout the years. No arguments have

been spared to convince those who apparently are convinced. Conditions prevailing in the various parts of the globe differ, however. Such is the case, for instance, of a society in which men and women are granted full civil rights and physical education and sports are considered an integral part of general culture, regardless of gender, race, religious or political creed, age and profession. Within the framework of such conditions, women are free to direct their attention to the choice of the best means favouring the implementation of the object pursued. Such women no more experience an undue sense of inferiority when working jointly with men in all spheres of human activity.

I will not dwell on the cases where women are fully deprived of civil rights. Their participation in the organization and administration of sports is ruled out by circumstances. Life, at the end of our century knows, however, no standstill. Healthy changes of attitude may realistically be expected. The IOC Solidarity Movement spares no efforts to promote the activity of women in the field of sports and their management wherever necessary.

A particular tendency is worthwhile mentioning, namely female separatism in some countries where women indulge actively in the practice of sports while being deprived of legal equality with men. Efforts are in such cases spearheaded towards the set-up of separate women's sports organizations under the leadership, naturally, of women's sports executives. I personally am of the opinion that a divided management of sports and particularly of 'sports for all' causes an unwarranted competition between women and men, turning equality into a synonym of feuding instead of useful co-operation. It is QUALITY irrespective of sex which ought to be the driving force for efficiency, self-assessment and recognition.

Participation in the Olympic Movement has yet another component, namely that of education in the Olympic spirit. The International Olympic Academy plays a prominent part in this respect, analyzing the historic past and the present-day complexity of such various Olympic problems. We note with satisfaction the increasing number of women participating in the



The Princess Royal, IOC member in Great Britain and president of the British NOC, is the only woman to be president of an International Federation.

yearly Sessions of the IOA. The number of National Olympic Academies is also increasing rapidly. I unfortunately have no concrete data on the participation of women in their management, but I believe that the young female generation, free from the prejudices of the past, will indulge ever more actively in the dissemination of Olympism - a very healthy form of education.

THE FUTURE

The time-period until the end of the 20th century is, as mentioned before, a short one. It seems most probable that the participation of women in the Olympic Games, be it separately or jointly with men, is bound to increase in tune with the growing popularity of sports in most parts of the modern world. This in turn is related to the general concern over the growing volume of the Olympic Programme. At the 11th Olympic Congress, 1981, in Baden-Baden, some delegates considered the increase of Olympic women's sports as one of the potential causes of the Programme's expansion. The latter, no doubt, is to be kept under control, though not to the detriment of women! Their share in the Games accounts for less than 50 % in comparison to that of men. There are various ways of limiting the Olympic Programme without damage and without falling back on separatism which has lasted all too long.

Every woman and man ought to be free to determine their goals in life. The striving to reach the limit is a natural human urge, noticeable in every sphere of human activity, sports included. 'Citius, Altius, Fortius' is not an empty catchword. It reflects the unfading endeavour of doing better than has been done before - a spiritual victory and triumph of human will over abandonment to routine. Like men, women have the capacity of giving the best of themselves and sport, as well as participation in its management, offers them an excellent possibility for qualification in the pursuit of the humanly possible.

The' short-term future ahead of us foretells not only interesting but most important events. Sports within a more consolidated

Europe is bound to acquire new dimensions and possibilities - a prospect which requires close analysis of conditions, foresight and readiness to foster the positive and to prevent the negative during the possible transition period.

'Sports for all' and fair-play education ought to be regarded as, I believe, the guiding line of action within the Olympic Movement, in regard to physical fitness as the natural ground for high-ranking performances and moral behaviour as a preventive measure against social evil.

'Updating', so often spoken of in connection with Olympic issues, is closely related to the stepping-up of women's full-fledged participation in the Games and Movement. Efforts should not be spared to translate this purpose into a tangible reality at the end of our eventful 20th century.

N. L.

The way ahead ? A world record in the women's triple jump was introduced by the IAAF in 1989. Here, the world title holder, Galina Chistyakova (URS).

This text is the lecture given by Mrs Lekarska at Olympia in July.

