

FULL FOR KILLY

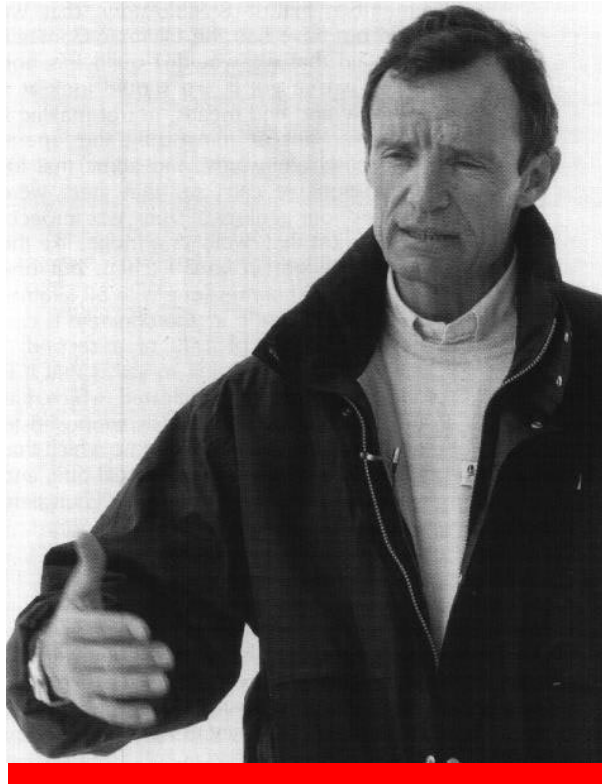
For the organizing committee of the Albertville Games, one deadline will follow another up to the day of the opening ceremony, on 8th February 1992. There is no longer any room for mistakes for those in charge in Savoy. The COJO co-president explains.

We have entered the last winter before the Games take place in Albertville, starting on 8th February 1992. The first test events, in Alpine skiing, freestyle and particularly cross country and biathlon, a few days ago in Les Saisies, have already taken place, and in general the results have been satisfactory on a technical level. Recently in Lillehammer, where the 1994 Games will be held, the IOC Executive Board under the chairmanship of Juan Antonio Samaranch gave the COJO the go-ahead, but asked it to lower the prices demanded for services offered to the media.

The COJO co-presidents, Michel Barrier and Jean-Claude Killy, are beginning the toughest phase of their challenge : meeting deadlines. The former triple Olympic champion Killy, the cornerstone of the Savoy organization, agreed to talk to us about it. Candidly.

— **Let's start, if you don't mind, with the hot spots, if one can call them that since we are dealing with snow and ice sports. This bob track is a real headache for you isn't it?**

— In theory, we should soon receive authorization to ice the run from the Ministry of the Environment. This authorization will be accompanied by new measures in order to ensure maximum safety, following the report by the expert from the ministry. Once we get the go-



ahead, the ammonia can come down from Le Havre and be in place to start operating in the next four days. The first bobs will then, I hope, be able to go down at the beginning of January. That is the wish of Prince Albert of Monaco, an IOC member and bob pilot himself, who has already looked over the run at La Plagne on foot. The first observation we have to make is, of course, the cost of this run. The high price is because the safety systems we have installed are double or even triple those which exist on the nine runs we know of in the world. Let's leave these safety worries to one side; we'll see about those later. For the most part, the technical aspects of the run are satisfactory. It's a superb, highly technical and spectacular design which I think fits into this valley successfully. The question of the cost of a facility like this one remains, but first of all we should

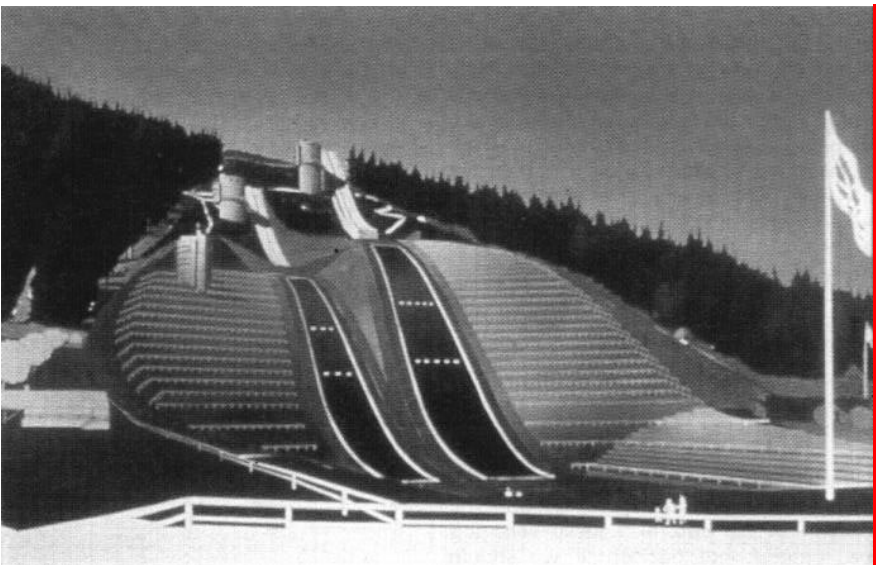
*Interview by
Michel Clare*

remember that it is obligatory, that we could not have had the Olympic Games if we'd said that we wouldn't build this bob run. As we've got it, we should look at it positively and find means, not of making it profitable, but of minimizing the operational costs afterwards, and admit that for 200 million we can't say that there were mistakes; our geological study was impeccable. It's just that, well, it's a fridge, like the one you've got in your kitchen, but one which is 1,800 metres long with 80 kilometres of piping inside it; the concrete is cast with a tolerance of 1/10 of a second, I believe. What I'm trying to say is that it is something highly sophisticated which has cost 200 million when it was supposed to have cost half that, and the hole which that makes in the budget is a very real one, and we have to find ways of making equivalent savings.

AN UNEXPECTED LEAP

— And what exactly is the situation with the ski jumps at Courchevel 1300 where you have had to delay putting them into operation until the beginning of April?

The Courchevel ski jumps have just been inaugurated.



— The situation with the ski jumps is much the same. We started off on a hillside which did not present any particular difficulties other than the ones we knew about at the time. Then we came across one spring after another, a varying flow of water, and an enormous water catchment area at the top of the hill. Well, if you wanted to take a very tough line, you could say that this is just not acceptable, but we are up against the situation and we're not going to start crying about it. The ski jumps are costing a lot more than anticipated, for technical reasons which can be explained. Here again there is an overshoot which affects the budget and which, as soon as we knew about it, forced us to look for how to make savings elsewhere. Here again, we'll have to succeed or we'll be left with it all at the end. It's unfortunate, but...

— By how much have you overspent? Double, like for the bob?

— Yes, it's practically double. A bit less than double, 40%. I should explain too, that the firms have the right to make claims when an unexpected situation arises. When you are building a house, you are told "that window will cost you exactly 1,200 francs", so you hand over the 1,200 francs and you're given the window. Here you hand over 60 million francs, but you're not given the ski jump because it's a system which allows for claims because the technical difficulties are so great. It's a system which exists, and again we just have to live with it.

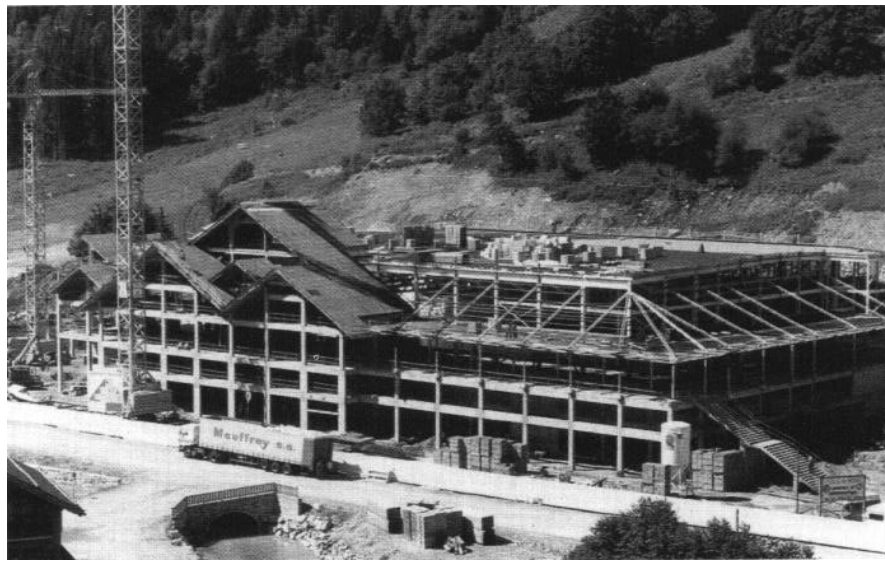
CREATING LASTING MEMORIES

— Let's move on to the areas which are a source of satisfaction at present, after the success in the downhill and cross country skiing test events. All the downhill runs are covered in snow, aren't they?

— Yes, all the runs are ready. Méribel was tested in February 1990, Val d'Isère too, in the French Championships in March last year. In connection with this, I should like to make a fundamental observation about the attitude which we all share

in the COJO. We chose the trickiest path by wanting to do better. But it seems that here the best won't cost us any more than planned. We asked Bernhard Russi to design the two downhill runs, and so we shall have some spectacular pictures. This was a promise we made right at the start, that these Games would stick in people's memories. And the only way to do this is through images; and images are television. And television is the filming of particular images which can be created only by showing the same view the athlete gets. In the case of the downhill, a downhill which brings out the best technical movements of the athlete, the approach adopted was not the simplistic reasoning which says: "we'll change the downhill". No, everywhere, at all times, we have tried to do better. And not just in the Alpine skiing but also the cross country where the runs were successfully tested last week by champions, and also by technicians from Finnish television whose pictures were superb.

For the downhills, the Americans are working with a camera attached to a cable which can follow the skier for around 300 metres by remote control. With the result that it will be practically be on the shoulder of the skier. It has worked. We are going to install it and hope that it will work again. Paid for by the Americans who, like us, are mad keen on good pictures. But I want to go back to cross country skiing because I believe that the demonstration at the Col des Saies was fantastic, particularly the atmosphere, as the team in Les Saies with Jean-Paul Pierrat wanted to go just that little bit further and revolutionize the spectacle of a cross country ski race. It seems that we had been expected to do this. And this shows our attitude from the start. We didn't want to follow the route taken by everyone else, but set off in another direction, where there was no-one, where we could change and modify things, where we had to take risks. This approach is well-rooted in the COJO: taking risks in order to be different. And possibly to make savings. When we talk of test events, it is these which immediately enable us to spot any weaknesses in the system. That was how we approached



The ice hockey rink is situated in Méribel.

the freestyle skiing world cup in Tignes, and we realized that we ourselves were not precise enough in terms of organization. It is vital that everyone treats the test event as though he or she were seeking a personal victory, from the driver to the person who helps to position the cameras, or the person who passes information to the director in the bus. Because if the director does not have precise information, he is in danger of not starting at the right moment. The COJO and the venues, because now the venues are associated with the management process, have to be in charge with, in my opinion, the COJO in control as it is the professional body responsible. From now on, in any case.

THE PRESTIGE OF THE OLYMPIC RINGS

Another source of satisfaction, I think, is with the members of Club Coubertin. Just to remind our readers, Club Coubertin groups together the 12 major sponsors of the Albertville Games : IBM, Crédit Lyonnais, Renault, BIS, AGF, SNCF, Evian, Candia-Yoplait, Alcatel, France-Télécom, Thomson and La Poste.

— No problem. Meetings take place regularly. This is a totally new form of partnership by saying to the top names of French industry, services and trade : we are interested in your money, certainly, but what we interests us primarily is the power of your firm and what it produces, because we need it for our organization directly. This good atmosphere is due to the approach we chose, an approach which came in for a lot of criticism initially, if you recall, because people thought we were heading for disaster. But in my opinion it is

especially due to the penetrating power of the Olympic Games, and the fact that the IOC, Olympism, is something which inspires confidence, which has a tremendous image. I am not conducting a campaign to get into the IOC. But you see I'm a salesman first and foremost, and my life as a salesman has never been so easy as since I've been selling the five Olympic rings.

SAMARANCH'S TIME-CHECK

— Let's go back to Méribel. What exactly are the difficulties you have been having with the ice hockey leaders?

— There have not been any rows; President Sabetzki and I have just had three years of face-to-face negotiations. And these ended in an agreement which is totally satisfactory as our dearest wish has been fulfilled, that of our sports director René Charmetant since he is behind this decision as to the choice of the form of the tournament. He wanted, we wanted to have the last match deciding who would be the Olympic champions. We had to negotiate the formula which would lead us to that as this was not the case before Calgary. We had to negotiate where the athletes would be housed, at a given altitude and as near as possible to the training and competition venues. These are at two different heights, since the training sessions will be in Courchevel, at 1,850 metres, and the competition at 1,450. We had to find accommodation between the two and get this accepted by Mr Sabetzki who came several times. Mr Samaranch also came several times to see the area in order to understand the nature of the problem.

COJO AND THE STATE : TENSION AS GAMES APPROACH

— And it seems that he even insisted on personally doing the journey which the hockey players will have to do.

— Yes, in the car we both timed how long it took to cover the distances. That is

to say 12 minutes between Méribel and La Tania accommodation), and 19 or 20 minutes between La Tania and Courchevel 1850. We assured the ice hockey president that the road taken by the team buses would be cleared by the police. I made this promise because you have to give in order to take. In addition, we now have agreements on all the COJO proposals; we have all the technical manuals signed, which means that all we were asking for has been negotiated and agreements reached with each of the six international winter sports federations. The French short-track team will, like the hockey team, qualify automatically. Which is important.

— Let's go back to your financial problems. If you have any more unpleasant surprises, do you have a reserve?

— We no longer have a reserve at present. That is to say that we are on a balanced budget which is extremely difficult to keep to. For the reasons we mentioned earlier; because we are spread over thirteen locations, which is a great first for Olympism; and because it is a difficult region in terms of geography. All these things are not new, but they mean that we have to be extremely careful to keep within our limits. And then there are uncertainties which can cost us a great deal, such as the effect of the fluctuation of the dollar on the last third which we haven't covered. The fact exists and nobody can do anything about it. We have covered two thirds, and I don't think that that is true for everyone. There are obviously uncertainties which could arise at the end.

— You would have to ask for help from the government. But I don't think that your meetings with the government, with the interministerial delegation, always go smoothly, and are sometimes even strained...

— Strained is going a bit far. I think that the closer we get to the Games, the harder it gets. That is due to the tension mounting, and the same is true everywhere. And so now we have to keep

going, adapt, calm things down, and the same is true in our relations with the government. But you mustn't forget that we have a permanent government inspector. It is important for the government to have full access, that it knows everything that is going on with regard to income and expenditure. And then all the people in the COJO are working tremendously hard, and it's difficult to take criticism with a smile. You know what I mean, and we had to get used to that as well. It's a difficulty we have to face. You mustn't see yourself as a kind of free agent who gives orders, you have to report, explain and seek authorization sometimes. I really feel that relations are better now,

BICENTENARY TWO

— **Let's conclude with the opening ceremony. You must have been sorry when Jean-Jacques Annaud withdrew, after you personally wanted and asked him to be the producer ?**

— It didn't happen quite like that. We shook hands to start with, and a year later we shook hands again because we didn't succeed in reaching an agreement. But we parted without bitterness, and we are still the best of friends. We never managed to agree on the figures. As I am very tenacious and so is he, we spent quite some time until we realized that it was impossible. Since when we have chosen another way. Instead of employing an artist to draw up a programme, we went back to the idea of using a production company. This has been a lesson which I personally have learnt, particularly from Jack Lang's right-hand man Mr Dupavillon who was in charge of the bicentenary celebrations and who has helped us a lot. We therefore turned to one company which is responsible for the budget and which presented us with several directors. Together we chose Philippe Decouflé who fitted in much better than the others we had seen with the idea we had of this opening ceremony. That is to say a France which is young, colourful, inventive. He had all of that in his proposal, with his feet firmly on the ground and his head in the clouds. I'm cer-

tain that it'll work well. He's a hard worker. He was at the Criterium for four days. He did a survey of the Val d'Isère runs from the air in a helicopter. He went to the top of the downhill to look at the drop. At the beginning of January we are going to meet again to draw up the plans for the opening ceremony venue. We'll study the artistic proposals first of all, and then the requirements in terms of construction and space. But that shouldn't be complicated. We're looking at a temporary stadium with 31,000 seats. That's a fair bit of work. But we are getting there. We approached a number of people to be sure of success, including some well-known French firms.

— **In conclusion, what are your feelings today?**

— When you've got a deadline, a time when things have to be ready - as you well know working for a newspaper - the important thing is to take a decision and quickly. That's very important. It is sometimes better to take a decision which is less than good, but to take it, rather than waiting and seeing. You just have to keep on going and going... Move on from the written word, files and theories. We had to go through the study stage; today we need people to deliver things. The IOC is right to select cities seven years in advance now. The COJO has had three-and-a-half years so far. That will not be one day too many. But on the other hand it'll be OK, it's OK. I mean, after all, the Games belong to nobody, no state nor individual however powerful he may be. They belong to the IOC. Therefore our job is to ensure they go on and help the Olympic Movement to develop. That's the only role we have. And when we understood that after 1986, we felt much better because we were in the role of a manager. We have to manage the idea. The important element is the five rings. In that there must never be, and at no time is there ever any question of personal advantage.

M. C.

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ALBERTVILLE 92

