

DISABLED ATHLETES IN TRAINING

5th WINTER PARALYMPICS, TIGNES-ALBERTVILLE 1992

By Joseph Leal

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Why should not disabled athletes be sportsmen and -women like others? With the same rights and the same duties as all the children of the great Olympic family? It is here that the message of brotherhood addressed by Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, IOC President, to the organizing committee of the 5th Winter Paralympics in 1992 in Tignes-Albertville takes on its full significance.

I have pleasure in announcing that IOC is patron to the 1992 Winter Paralympics, a privilege which we have the honour of sharing with the President of the French Republic, Mr. François Mitterrand. The

IOC is certain that this important event in the domain of Olympism will help to promote still further the sports movement for disabled athletes and will reinforce unity among the organizations which belong to this movement and to the Olympic family."

This message went straight to the hearts of those who have been doing their level best for several months to ensure that these Winter Paralympics are a festival both of sport and of solidarity.

To be worthy of the IOC's patronage, the COPTA (Organizing committee for the Winter Paralympics in Tignes-Albertville) could not have found two more representative honorary presidents than the Co-Presidents of the Organizing Committee for the 1992 Olympic Winter Games, Michel Barnier and Jean-Claude Killy.

"We attach great importance to the Paralympics, which, like the Olympic Games, aim to highlight essential values: courage, perseverance, rigour, the desire to excel oneself." These are the words of the two COJO Co-Presidents.

The 5th Winter Paralympics will be held in France for the first time, and at one of the venues for the Olympic Winter Games - also a first - , with the support of the famous ocean racer Florence Arthaud, from 25th March to 1st April 1992. Their setting will be a major winter sports resort in Savoy, 83 kilometres from Albertville, Tignes, where the Olympic freestyle skiing events will have been held just before.

750 ATHLETES FROM 24 COUNTRIES

Given the quality of its sports facilities, which range from 1,550 to 3,500 m in altitude, the certainty of late snow and plentiful accommodation even in high tourist season, Tignes seemed to the organizers the most appropriate place to house properly 750 athletes - men and women - representing 24 nations and four continents (Europe, America, Asia, Oceania).

DISABLED SPORT

The paralympic runs will lie between 1,680 metres (new cross-country and biathlon trail at Les Brevieres) and 2,590 metres (top of the alpine ski run at the Lognan international arena). These runs, especially the alpine skiing pistes, are very close to the paralympic village, where all the competitors and their technical entourage will be housed at 2,100 metres. This Olympic venue at Lognan will also be the scene of a prestigious opening ceremony in the presence of the Presidents of the French Republic and the IOC.

The paralympic village, a vast accommodation complex usually inhabited by winter and summer vacationers, has been adapted in an exemplary fashion to enable people with mobility problems to stay there in conditions of accessibility and comfort they do not always enjoy - alas ! - in their everyday lives. All the communal areas (entrance halls, recreation rooms, lifts, telephone boxes), and some fifty bedsits or apartments have been especially converted for use by the disabled.

For its part, the municipality of Tignes has made great efforts to improve access to public buildings (town hall, post office, etc.). This is not surprising in view of the fact that the Mayor, Andre Baudin, is one of the Co-Presidents of COPTA, the other being Andre Auberger, President of the French Handisport Federation.

With the vital support of the public authorities and many private companies, hundreds of men and women of good will - 450 of them volunteers - have made a concerted effort to ensure that these 5th Winter Paralympics are a huge success. That is the goal of the COPTA, whose Director General, Pierre Guichard, a former international judo competitor, has very close ties with the Olympic family, as he is also Director of the elite sport promotion department of the French National Olympic Committee, the CNOSEF.

J.L.



Emblem created by Folon.