

OPENING AMIDST THE PEAKS



The national orchestra of Lille played the Olympic Hymn.

Held on 5th and 6th February as a prelude to the XVI Olympic Winter Games, the 98th Session in Courchevel, one of the most prestigious resorts in the French Alps, was the first Session to take place in France since the 67th Session in Grenoble in 1968.

For the opening of this 98th Session, the IOC members gathered at the ice rink in the Forum complex, at the heart of Courchevel 1850.

Set amidst a decor of the red and white of Savoy, the host of the Olympic events, the ceremony was notable for its brief simplicity. Numerous personalities had responded to the invitation from Messrs Henry Dujol, mayor of Albertville, Michel

Ziegler, mayor of Saint Bon-Courchevel and the mayors of all the Olympic sites. The Olympic anthem played by the Orchestre National de Lille, which provided the entertainment for the second part, opened the ceremony, heralding the traditional speeches which are reprinted later in this issue. Mr Nelson Paillou, President of the French NOC, warmly thanked the IOC on behalf of the whole of France for entrusting to it the organization of the XVI Winter Games.

98th SESSION IN COURCHEVEL

For his part, the IOC President began by quoting from the work of his illustrious predecessor, Pierre de Coubertin. Stressing the place of France in the development and growth of the Olympic Movement, he recalled that this was the fourth time that France was hosting the Olympic Games, and he thanked the country for staging, in Paris in two years' time, the IOC Centenary Congress, an extremely important event at the threshold of the third millennium. President Samaranch expressed his satisfaction at the improvement in international relations and better understanding between peoples which had allowed the reintegration of the Baltic states, the entry of the Slovenes and Croats and the return of South Africa to the Olympic Movement. Such an impetus served to highlight the ideal of peace and friendship which the Movement was seeking to spread. Paying tribute to the co-presidents of the Organizing Committee of the Winter Games, Messrs Michel Barnier and Jean-Claude Killy, and the quality of the preparations, President Samaranch congratulated them in particular for their ecological commitment in seeking to protect the columbine, a flower which is now rare in the Alps. The IOC intends to play its part in protecting the environment, and in future candidate cities will be required to submit a study of environmental impact to accompany the plans of their sports facilities. This theme will also feature prominently on the programme of the Centenary Congress.

The French Minister for Youth and Sports, Mrs Frédérique Bredin, then took the floor on behalf of the Prime Minister, Mrs Edith Cresson, who was unable to be present owing to work commitments. She recalled how proud France was to organize the Games in the service of excellence: "Our concern," said the Minister, "which we share with all those who have played a part in the organization of the Games, has been to make the Olympic celebration a success with that 'taste for a mixture of excess and moderation' which Pierre de Coubertin could say was at the origin of the Olympic spirit."

This ceremony, wholly without affectation, which concluded with the classic

"Prague" symphony by Mozart, was enhanced - unforgettably for many - by the official presentation by Mr Maurice Herzog, IOC member in France, of the ice axe which accompanied him during his conquest of Annapurna in 1951. This tool which witnessed an extraordinary exploit will occupy a key place in the collections of the Olympic Museum. In an improvised speech, as fascinating as it was moving, Mr Herzog relived, as though it were only yesterday, the climb which made him into a hero, had a profound impact upon him and definitively turned the course of his life towards sport. The intense emotion felt by the climber as he parted with this piece of himself, skilfully made by a Savoy craftsman and his companion in his times of effort, was clearly visible, and every member of the audience was moved by it.

The 98th IOC Session was held amidst the peaks of Courchevel.

