

# “OUR SUCCESSES COULD BE EXPECTED”



## INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE NORWEGIAN NOC

*Par Philippe Broussard*

“Our successes could be expected” says Mr Arne Myhrvold. With seven gold, five silver and four bronze medals, the Norwegian team proved the biggest surprise of the Games. Its athletes distinguished themselves particularly in skiing and speed skating. In an interview with *Le Monde*, the President of the Norwegian Olympic Committee, Mr Arne Myhrvold, thought that these results were due to the considerable financial resources deployed during the last four years, and to an increasingly professional approach to top level sport. The next Winter Games, in 1994, will be taking place in Lillehammer, Norway.

## NATIONAL COMMITTEES

### **- Were you surprised by the performances of your athletes ?**

- Our successes could be expected. Before the Games we knew that we had a good team. Never before had a Norwegian team been so carefully prepared. In fact our success is the result of a programme begun in 1984 by the NOC, covering the whole of elite sport. In that year, after the Games in Sarajevo and Los Angeles, we changed our approach to top level sport, in order to move towards a more professional attitude.

### **- Why didn't you win any gold medals in Calgary, in 1988 ?**

- It's true that, for the first time in the history of our country, we went back to Norway without a single title! But even so I was not pessimistic. Aside from the lack of gold medals, the results were not catastrophic. We felt that something could happen, that we just had to be patient. We therefore stepped up our efforts during the period 1988-1992.

### **- Exactly how has your approach to elite sport changed?**

- Previously, the officials used to regard all the athletes as equal, and thought that none should be privileged any more than the others. We adopted an opposite strategy by identifying an elite and doing everything to ensure that they got results. In skiing and speed skating, we brought in the best Austrian or Yugoslavian technicians. Our different teams were able to go and train abroad, at altitude (1). Priority was given to the Games. Before Calgary, that had not been the case. Then, we were thinking more of international championships and world cups.

### **- That is almost a professional approach...**

- Absolutely. Success came through this change. We equipped ourselves with considerable financial resources. In order to prepare for Albertville, we enlisted the support of a dozen partners within our so-called "Olympia Top" programme. We also

received assistance from the state. In addition, the sale of rights to use the emblem of the Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games in Lillehammer also brought us some money. The various federations got more money than ever before. The ski federation has joined forces with a major ship-building firm and thus now has sizeable funds.

### **- Doesn't this "professionalism" go against the grain of the sporting tradition of your country ?**

- I don't think so. Money may be important, but it remains secondary. We have managed to preserve tradition, that is to say simplicity, in the relationships between people. It is all still very healthy, and very young too. The average age of the NOC board members is under forty, something which is unique in the world ! As for the athletes, they are not jealous of each other, and are even friends. The skiers



*Mr Arne Myhrvold is confident of the future.*



and skaters are very close. We have encouraged exchanges between sports and created bridges between teams. Before the start of this season, our skating coach worked with the Alpine skiers. He learned a great deal in terms of physical preparation and gymnastics.

## NATIONAL COMMITTEES

**- Parallel to these efforts, have you created new structures to enable you to spot talented youngsters ?**

- Talented athletes appear through their own efforts. It is not necessary to go looking for them too early. Here, the small size of our country is an advantage. Contrary to popular opinion, I don't believe that a country with a large population is at an advantage. In Norway, it is easier to spot the quality athletes, and we can take better care of them. But all that happens naturally, without any kind of talent identification programme. Our results in Alpine skiing (2), unthinkable ten years ago, should attract newcomers to the sport. We shall automatically benefit from that.

**- Has the fact that the next Winter Games will be in Lillehammer had an influence on the behaviour of your athletes?**

- Undeniably, yes. They all want to be the best in Lillehammer, and they are in such a hurry that this showed itself in France. Are they in danger of becoming victims by giving way to euphoria ? I don't think so. We shall continue to work. For, in addition to the triumphs, we had failures: the jumpers fared badly at the Games, as did the biathletes. Nor are the hockey players quite at their peak. On our home ground, we shall be entering an even stronger team.

(1) Norwegian cross country skiers spent over eleven weeks training in Italy at altitudes over 2,000 metres. They were constantly accompanied by coaches, staff to prepare equipment and physiotherapists.

(2) Norwegian skiers have won a gold medal (Kjetil-André Aamodt in the men's super G) and two bronze medals (Jan-Einar Thorsen in men's super G and Kjetil-André in giant slalom).

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*After having shone in Albertville, the Norwegian athletes are ready to do even better in Lillehammer.*