

The village nestling in the snow

Perched up above Lillehammer, the wood-clad Olympic village would be lost among the pine forests were it not for the ochre, yellow, grey and blue colours which distinguish the chalets of each delegation. President Juan Antonio Samaranch officially opened this centre of Olympic life, where over 2,500 athletes, officials and coaches found a place to stay. Each day during the week before the

Games, the colours of 67 delegations were hoisted on one of the masts encircling the Olympic flag. The last to arrive was that of the Mongolians, who found, in extremis, the money to pay for the trip. For their part, the skaters and their entourage, 500 people in all, were accommodated in Hamar. Under the thick layer of snow which covers the roofs, nothing was left to chance in this complex. Every athlete

could eat according to his habits and nutritional needs. There were weight-training rooms for keeping fit and rest rooms in which to relax by watching the competitions of other athletes on a video screen. As at every Games, special security measures were set up. X-ray gates were installed and the security staff carefully checked accreditations at the entrances. "Our main objective," stressed the Mayor



of the village, Mr Kjell Einarson, "is to offer athletes and officials maximum safety, comfort and efficiency." In the international zone, all kinds of encounters are possible. Journalists, tape recorders slung across their shoulders, hover around the dining hall exit for their on-the-spot interviews, with lightweight cameras at the ready. You see them going off with that day's winners or losers, or tomorrow's hopefuls, for what they hope will be incisive questions to fill their Games-special programme that evening.

Once the events are over, the weight of competition disappears from the shoulders of the athlete, and youth returns at full gallop. At the village, the atmosphere is that of a bubble in suspension. None of the vague tension in the air at the venues is felt here. All this group know and respect each other, often as a result of many



years of acquaintance, having skied the same courses together, either at the Games or in championships at all levels. Some have been around for more than ten years, such as Italians De Zolt and Gunther Hubert, or Finland's Marja Liisa Kirvesniemi, all three of whom were at Lake Placid in 1980.

With the first two weeks over, the competition finished and medals collected, or more often missed, there is comfort in a youth-camp type relaxation. Faithful to its practical policy, LOOC planned to convert part of the village into ordinary housing. Some chalets are destined to become an old people's home; another will be a kindergarten. The wooden church will also be kept. The other constructions will be dismantled and used to house students in the north of the country.

The national flags of each delegation are hoisted upon their arrival. The IOC President, the Mayor of the Village and Mr Heiberg.

