

# Participants in the Olympic Games



## FRANCIS W. NYANGWESO

Francis Nyangweso has represented his country many times in the boxing ring. Captain of the national boxing team from 1958 to 1962, he took part in the Games of the XVII Olympiad in Rome in 1960, won a gold medal at the Hapoel Games in 1961 and a bronze medal at the Commonwealth Games in Perth in 1962. He was champion of East Africa from 1955 to 1962. After holding ministerial and ambassadorial posts, Mr Nyangweso embarked on a career in sports administration at national and international level. Serving in turn as manager of the national

boxing team at the Games of the XIX Olympiad in Mexico City in 1968, President of the National Sports Council, the African Amateur Boxing Association and the national boxing federation, board member of both AIBA and ANOCA and representative of Africa within the ANOC bureau, he has been President of the Ugandan Olympic Committee since 1979. He was elected as a member of the IOC in 1988, and has been a member of the IOC Commission for the International Olympic Academy and Olympic Education since 1990.

### **OR : What is your earliest image of the Olympic Games?**

Uganda first participated in the Olympic Games in 1956 in Melbourne, Australia, with three athletes. This was the first time I ever heard about the Olympic Games, which were highly publicized in cinemas and the BBC newsreels shown before the main feature films. We were able to watch the opening and closing ceremonies and some of the events in which the British Empire and Commonwealth athletes took part. At that time I was practising all sorts of sports at school: tennis, athletics, football, boxing, volleyball

When the athletes who had participated in the Melbourne Olympic Games returned, they went around to the schools, recounting their experiences in Australia at the Olympic Games. We were thrilled, and I decided to be among those to be selected for the next Olympics. I was advised by my physical education teacher that I had to specialize in one sport in order to attract the notice of the selectors, and of course that I had to be one of the best in the country in that discipline. I

ventured boxing, and eventually I made it to the Olympic Games in Rome.

### **OR : What is your best memory or favourite anecdote from the Olympic Games?**

I was extremely anxious to go to Rome. At school, we had studied the Roman Empire and its Emperors and I had learned that Emperor Nero was a musician and an Olympic champion who later banned the Olympic Games. Visions of the Leaning Tower, St. Peter's Basilica, and the Catacombs flashed in my mind as the day of our departure approached. I was so impa-

tient, that everybody noticed. When we were set up in the Olympic village, I hastened to explore my surroundings. It was summer. The sun was still up in the evening and it was warm, almost like it was at home. A few of us ventured out for a stroll in the city. Wherever we went, people were eager to meet us, welcomed us and wished us luck in the Games. Our cameras were kept busy photographing whatever we saw to prepare for the stories we would tell on our return home.

One day, on our way back from training, we were approached by athletes wearing apparel with the letters USA



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printed on them. One of them, very tall and big, spoke to us in an American accent. When I got used to his English, our conversation ranged over topics including wild animals, forests and snakes. Before we parted, this gentleman advised us that the boxer in our team who happened to be drawn against him should duck on medical grounds and should not try to fight him, for he, Cassius Clay, would not like to demolish a young brother from Africa. The Games made it possible for me to meet one of the greatest Olympic and World Champions of all times, Mohammed Ali.

**OR : In your opinion, what is the significance of the Centenary of the Olympic Games?**

To me the Centennial Games will prove the durability of the Movement. No matter what has happened to the world and its people, nothing has broken the spirit and ideals of the Olympic Movement. Through peaceful means, the world has instead been brought together, as exhibited in Seoul. By being host of the Games,

the Republic of Korea broke the bonds of isolation and made great strides in economic and political advancement.

**OR : What role do you feel sport and Olympism play in modern society?**

This topic is so broad and complicated that it cannot be fully covered. I would say that Olympism and sport are strongly intertwined. Each is a product of the other, depending on the angle from which you look at them.

Modern society is no longer dependent on manual labour, as it now relies on machines. Therefore, the element of exercise is drastically reduced. Hence, to keep healthy, one has to practise some sport, regardless of age. This is the process in which champions are created, and those champions become famous. Without their involvement in sport, these people might have been ordinary, but in modern times, sport and Olympism have so elevated individuals that they now become idols. This transforma-

tion of athletes has made people love sport. In the troubled world of past years, sport and Olympism have kept a fire of hope burning. The world has realized the importance of sport and Olympism in promoting peace, for whenever [sport competitions and the Olympic Games] are held, all other activities comes to a stop.

**OR : What message would you like to give to today's youth?**

It is imperative to advise the youth of today as our successors to engage in activities which promote peace and harmony among peoples. They should be aware that the world of tomorrow depends on a clean environment which will protect the ozone layer and prevent continued desertification. They should know that the world can only maintain peace through constant dialogue with fellow youth from all continents, regardless of colour, creed and tradition. To achieve this, we must work with establishments such as schools, sports [organizations], and of course the Olympic Games.