

A stepping stone to greatness?



Are these the champions of tomorrow?

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The development and radical expansion of the modern Olympic Movement has clearly placed new and more demanding responsibilities on both international and national organizations. For example, a current world-wide concern is the need to promote and encourage sport among young people. This led in 1987 to a Dutch initiative which created and coordinated the first European-based youth multi-disciplinary event. Owing to the success of this event, two years later in Brussels, the European National Olympic Committees (ENOC) launched the first European Youth Olympic Days. These were given full patronage by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and are now recognized as an important and regular biannual event. This year, after Valkenswaard in 1993, the Days were held in the picturesque city of Bath in England, and were attended by 2,500 athletes and officials from a record 47 countries.

What is the EYOD all about?

The basic concept behind the Youth Olympics is to provide the young athletes of Europe with a stepping stone to full international competition. It reflects the need to promote junior sport and to build a bridge between early athletic development and performance at a more senior level.

The Days are designed and organized according to the model of the Olympic Games. This includes full protocol, such as opening, closing and medal-awarding ceremonies, a special Olympic village, international-standard facilities, entry and security procedures as well as a cultural programme. The event boasts a well-balanced variety of ten Olympic sports, which may vary depending on the host city's facilities. They are open to top European athletes aged between 12 and 18 years.

Cultural and Educational issues

As part of the EYOD Olympic educational programme, eight months before the event a pilot scheme called the Olympic Kit was introduced to 58 local and regional schools. This project incorporates the Olympic theme into curricula for all primary and secondary schools. It serves as an excellent source of ideas and practical lessons, both for teachers and pupils. The effectiveness of this initial pilot scheme will be assessed, and if it is successful, approval will be sought to introduce the scheme nationally.

The project was closed with a mini-Olympic festival. Representatives from the winning school were granted the honour of a free trip to the ancient city of Olympia to participate in the ceremony of the lighting of the Olympic torch. To align culture and entertainment with sporting achievement, a four-week cultural programme was incorporated in the EYOD. This included a variety of concerts, social gatherings, musical performances and art exhibitions that were designed to reflect the Olympic spirit.

EYOD - The way ahead

The European Youth Olympics is a new player in the diversified European sports market. The Days have a dis-

tinct profile which is closely associated with the image of the Olympic Games. It is important to promote the Games at local, national and international levels in a balanced format. Their cultural and economic impact is due to a complex interaction of many factors, including planning, marketing management and communications, In this respect, the EYOD goes far beyond the organization of an international sporting event.

There is a demand for closer cooperation between the project team members (the local organizing committee, the NOCs and the international governing agencies,

primary and secondary schools, much like the highly successful project organized in Bath.

It is important to mention that, should the EYOD develop in size and profile, there may be a danger that it will inherit many of the logistical and organizational problems found in its larger counterparts. Such developments should be carefully monitored so that the spirit of the EYOD will not be lost.

The past three editions of the European Youth Olympic Days have shown genuine potential in becoming an ef-



View of the opening ceremony.

which include the ENOC and the International sport Federations). Further coordination among National Olympic Committees and respective sport federations will be essential in achieving the best possible representation of young European athletes.

The Organizing Committees should consider the EYOD as an opportunity to increase positive awareness of Olympism and sport in young people. This awareness, which is the message that the Youth Olympics seeks to convey, can be achieved through better informed media coverage, and by creating a nation-wide partnership with

fective spring-board for young athletes. What is needed is a coordinated effort among international and national sport governing agencies and the host city. This will undoubtedly enable the youth of Europe to celebrate the true spirit of Olympism every two years and to carry it on to future Olympic Games.

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