

# “THE RONDEAU OLYMPIC GAMES”



The 1996 Olympic year is a leap year as well... as if you didn't already know!

Like the leap year, the Olympic Games have always come around once every four years. In fact, the four-year cycle of the Olympic Games, which were revived by Pierre de Coubertin, might be seen as one of their fundamental characteristics. In 1935, in a speech entitled “The philosophical foundations of modern Olympism”, Coubertin declared:

*“... The Olympic Games must be celebrated with strict astronomical frequency, as they are the quadrennial festival of our spring-time, honouring the succession of human generations...”*

But in order to understand this concept of frequency we must go back to Roman times, to 45 BC in fact, when, with the help of an Alexandrian astronomer Julius Caesar decided to institute a reform to bring the calendar back into step with the seasons. Indeed, the Chaldeans, the Greeks and the Romans had, for many years, occasionally added intercalary months to avoid the problem of the years being too short. The Julian Reform was based on the adoption of a year containing 365 days, i.e. three years of 365 days followed by one of 366. For no apparent reason, the extra day was placed six days before the calends of March - “*sexto ante calendas Martii*” - and was called simply “*bis sexto ante calendas Martii*” (the second sixth day before the calends of March). whence the (now rarely used) expression “*bis-sextile year*”, more commonly known as the leap year.

by Patrice Cholley

The year used to be divided into twelve months, with 30 or 31 days in alternating months during leap years; in other years February had only 29 days. However, it was later decided to dedicate



Father Henri Didon,  
author of the Olympic Motto.

the eighth month to Emperor Augustus, so August was given 31 days to make it equal to July, dedicated to Julius Caesar. The day added in August was taken from the month of February, which was reduced accordingly to 28 days, and 29 in leap years. It was this extra day that attracted the attention of pupils at a seminary called Le Rondeau, not far from Grenoble in France, in the leap

year of 1832. That year, the instructors had not prepared a programme of studies for the additional day in February. After discussion with the pupils, they decided to devote the bissextus to games, that were governed by a charter. “*Article 1 - A festival called the Olympic Promenade shall be instituted at Le Rondeau Seminary in Grenoble, in commemoration of the games that were celebrated every four years at Olympia.*”

*Article 2 - Such festival shall be celebrated with games every leap year, on the 2nd day of the month of February, unless that day should be a Saturday or a Sunday, or a rainy day; [...]*

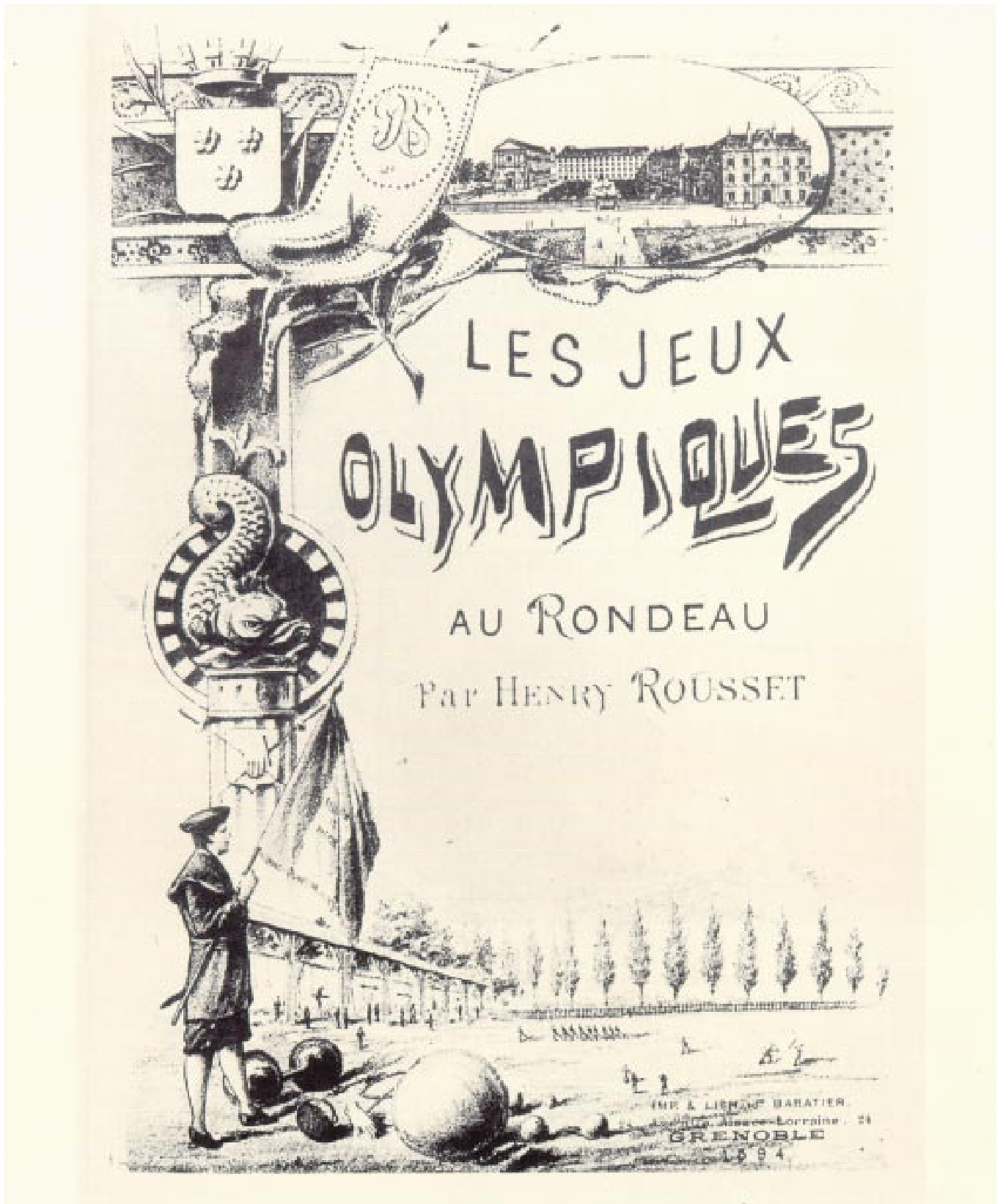
*Done in Grenoble, on the 1st day of the first year of the new Olympic Era, or the 2nd day of February 1832 of the vulgar era.”*

The little-known and extraordinary adventure of the “Rondeau Olympic Games” was certainly an important source of inspiration (along with the excavation of Olympia in the late 19th century, the doctrine of Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School, and the Much Wenlock Games created by Dr William Penny Brookes) for Pierre de Coubertin's revival of the Olympic Games.

## References

Henry Rousset - “*Les Jeux Olympiques au Rondeau*”, Joseph Baratier, Grenoble, 1894.

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Henry Rousset book "The Rondeau Olympic Games".