



# Women's participation in the XVIII Olympic Winter Games in Nagano

by Katia Mascagni Stivachtis

Women's participation in the Olympic Movement has been growing steadily over more than a century. The XVIII Olympic Winter Games in Nagano were fully in keeping with this trend, including two new sports - curling and ice hockey - and several new events in the women's programme. A record number of women - 827 athletes from 54 National Olympic Committees, i.e. 35% of the total number of athletes, took part in these Games. Women's participation was thus up 58% over the XVII Olympic Winter Games in Lillehammer in 1994, a first in the history of the Olympic Movement.

Curling and women's ice hockey, on the programme for the first time, presented a high-quality spectacle throughout the tournaments. The performances of all the players and particularly of the three winning teams will no doubt help to enhance the popularity of these sports and increase the number of fans.

However, while this increase in participation is certainly encouraging, here is still considerable room for progress in the world of women's sport. In many countries, economic difficulties, not to mention cultural traditions, still place sport far behind other priorities. At Olympic Movement level, the various Olympic Solidarity programmes are often an important factor in the physical and technical preparation of women athletes.

through the Nagano preparation programme,

346 women were able to benefit from special financial assistance through their NOCs to pursue their preparations. Two hundred and twenty-two managed to qualify. Several of them improved their personal best performances and even won medals in their disciplines. Among them are Ekaterina Dafovska of Bulgaria and Elena Petrova of Ukraine, gold- and silver-medallists respectively in the individual 15km biathlon event, and Lyudmila Prokashcheva of Kazakhstan, bronze medalist in the 5,000m speed skating event. In the field of sports administration, women's participation also continues to be too limited. Taking as a basis its objective for the year 2000 of having at least 10% of women in all the legislative and executive bodies of the sports organizations, the IOC recently coopted two new women into its membership. Both have remarkable backgrounds, not only

as high-level athletes but also as coaches and leaders in national and international sports bodies. One is Nawal El Moutawakel, who has many sports titles to her credit and was the first woman from Africa to take a gold medal, winning the 400m hurdles at the Games of the XXIII Olympiad in Los Angeles in 1984. She has also served as secretary of state for youth and sport, and is a member of the IAAF Executive Bureau.

The other is Irena Szewinska of Poland, multiple Olympic champion and veteran of five editions of the Olympic Games (Tokyo 1964, Mexico City 1968, Munich 1972, Montreal 1976 and Moscow 1980). Her successes include titles of Olympic champion in the 4 x 400 m, 200m and 400m, silver medals in the long jump and the 200m and a bronze medal in the 100m. The IOC currently has 12 women among its 118 active members, which represents undeniable progress, and other women will certainly join them in the future. By the same token, on the occasion of the

elections for of new members of the IOC Athletes' Commission that took place during the Games, the athletes elected three representatives of Olympic winter sports, one of whom is a woman: Manuela Di Centa, an Italian skier who has won a number of Olympic titles in cross-country skiing and took a bronze medal in Nagano.

The trend that is discernible at IOC level but also within the IFs and NOCs is therefore a promising one for women's sport.



*The Canadian women's curling team.*