

History

PHILATELY AND OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES

«Even horses, that I loved so much, do not give riders that melancholy rapture which large frozen lakes give skaters.» (Alphonse de Lamartine in «Les confidences»)

Skating was the first sport on Coubertin's programme of Olympic sports, but only in 1908 was it an Olympic event; world championships of speed skating were held in 1889 (the first world championships of all sports), but made its Olympic debut only in 1924. Olympic winter sports strove for a long time to be accepted, mostly against Nordic resistance. The Nordic countries, led by IOC member in Sweden Viktor Balck wished to protect the Nordic Games he created as a winter counterpart to the Olympic Games (1901, 1905, 1909, 1913, 1917, 1922 and 1926). Curiously, when winter games were accepted, it was upon a proposal of the Norwegians!

Postal services, and their collectible effects - philately - were natural and necessary companions to the Olympic Games in general and Olympic Winter Games in particular. Postal services were a *sine qua non* to the Games: to correspond, to invite, to enable participants - athletes, officials or spectators - to write and tell about the Games. Postage stamps and postcards were the support normally used for these services. Stamps also con-

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tributed financially to the Games and to the preparation of the teams, as part of their revenue was ceded to the Organising Committees.

While philately is the second largest hobby in the world, Olympic

The postmarks pinpoint the dates and even the hours of Olympic events and until videos came into use (pictures are not precise enough), were the only proof to what happened.

Olympic philately is Olympic history. Olympic philatelists are Olympic historians. Their tools are postal documents; their duties, amongst others, include the obligation to check and control the official records; it is far from rare that Olympic philatelists succeed to correct errors - which are human. We take pride in having succeeded to obtain consensus on Olympic results (1896-1920) amongst leading Olympic historians - for the first time since 1928. Several hundred

of Olympic Winter Games medallists have been immortalised on stamps, on postmarks and on postal stationery, and they take less space than books!! And above all, let us not forget the fun of collecting stamps (but also

their venal value).

This article is an introduction to the Olympic Winter Games philately. It attempts to briefly describe the historical links between philately and these Games. The statistics shown prove what can be done, to write history with stamps and postmarks. The data are not exhaustive. A catalogue of all Olympic Winter Games stamps, blocs and stationery will be ready in 2002; it will be the first universal stamp catalogue "readable"



stamps play a more pertinent role; they are historical documents, since they tell us all about the sports, how they developed, the Olympic programme, the hopefuls of each participating nation. the venues, the winners, the ceremonies and more. The texts on the postcards sent tell us about what really happened, the atmosphere, the life of the athletes and more. The texts confirm and in many cases correct the official records.

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to more than 15 linguistic groups; a catalogue on many Olympic medalists will also be published in 2002; and another one on all postmarks will be published in time for the 2006 Winter Games.

Past and IOC Honorary President for Life, Juan Antonio Samaranch, himself an Olympic philatelist, realised the cultural and historical value of philately which spurred him on to create the International Federation of Olympic Philately (FIPO). Olympic philatelists are sport and culture minded, realising the importance of philatelic documents to Olympic history and also the fun that collecting can bring to them.

The Olympic Winter Games: Facts and Stamps

Striving for recognition and independence

Skating was one of the sports inscribed in the sports programme of the 1894 Olympic Congress in Paris. It was not part of the 1896 and the 1904 Games for climatic reasons and in 1900 as the skating rink was not finished.

London 1908. The gold medal won by the skater Nikolai Panin-Koromenkin (Russia) was found by a member of the Olympic Collectors Commission, in the vaults of the St. Petersburg Hermitage Museum in 1995. Florence Madeline Cave 'Madge' Syers (Great Britain) who won the Ladies event, finished second in the 1902 World Championship open for ladies and gentlemen. Part of the Games of the Olympiad, in turn part of the France-British Exhibition, the Figure Skating event was held at

the Prince's Skating Club Rink on 28 and 29 October. The special postmark for the exhibition is also the one for the winter sports.

Stockholm 1912. Count Brunetta d'Usseaux, IOC member in Italy, proposed to include winter sport events at the 1911 IOC Session in Budapest. To make it part of the Games he even proposed to end the Olympic year on 31 May 1913. The Nordic countries wanting to protect their 'Games', the IOC did



not insist. A step backwards for winter sports. Still, the gold medal of the art contest, for painting was awarded to paintings depicting winter sports!!

Antwerp 1920. The IOC Congress in Paris in 1914, drawing up the different categories of the Olympic programme, classified among optional sports, ice hockey, figure skating and skiing. That's how figure skating and ice hockey were in

the programme of the Games of the VII Olympiad in 1920. Ice hockey was invented by the Iroquois Indians some centuries ago and introduced to "civilisation" by Canada. The Belgian stamps and the special postmarks, issued on this occasion, are the philatelic-postal link to the competitions. One step forward towards recognition.

Chamonix 1924 Finally, an "International Winter Sports Week" took place in Chamonix. This was partial recognition and independence. The Canadian ice hockey team scored a goal ratio of 110-3, a superiority which is unique in Olympic sports.

For the first time a special, publicity, mechanical cancellation was used. Though used from December 1923 to February 1924, only one hundred of items bearing the cancellation survived.

Prague 1925. Winter sports were at last recognised as a full Olympic partner. The 1924 Chamonix Olympic Week was declared as the 1st Olympic Winter Games. The Prague Congress gave winter sports its full independence. The stamps, the postal stationery and the special postmarks of the Congress are considered as the philatelic counterpart of the "Declaration of Independence".

Consecration, consolidation and maturity

St. Moritz 1928. The first independent Olympic Winter Games. Six sports were inscribed in the programme, including a five-man bobsled race. Sonja Henie, who placed last four years earlier, won

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the figure skating competition. The Swiss ice hockey team included “Bibi” Torriani, won a bronze medal (he will get the same result 20 years later). Both feats are unique in Olympic history. Only labels and special post-cards were issued.

Lake Placid 1932. Lake Placid, the first Olympic Winter Games outside Europe. The speed skating contests were held with group starts and with heats and finals. Two-man bobs competitions were introduced, and also demonstration competitions included ladies’ speed skating and dog-sleigh races. The American Edward Egan, who won the Olympic title in the four-man bobsleigh event, is still today the only athlete who won a gold medal at the Games of the Olympiad (in boxing, light heavyweight category in Antwerp in 1920) and at the Winter Games. The first Olympic Winter Games stamp was issued...with a tremendous error: the ski-jumper

had “sticks”. We know from the non accepted designs that it was supposed to be a “jumper”. It could not be downhill or slalom as Alpine events were only introduced in 1936!

Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936. Alpine contests were held for the first time. For the first time Canada did not win the ice hockey tournament, losing to an “Anglo-Canadian” team. Demonstration events included German curling and International target and distance competitions (part of curling). Germany spared no efforts to promote the IV Olympic Winter Games. No less than 111 Post Offices used a publicity mechanical cancellation and beside stamps the first (2) Olympic Winter Games postal stationery were issued. An Olympic telegramme was also a first.

1940: Sapporo, St-Moritz, Garmisch-Partenkirchen: see the special insert.

Final evolution and great popularity

St Mortiz 1948. With individual downhill and slalom competitions in the Alpine events. Two American ice hockey teams(!), one of which was later disqualified by the IOC. Among the demonstration events a Winter Pentathlon. For the first time, Switzerland issued Olympic Winter Games stamps. Another philatelic first were stamps issued by non-organising countries: Austria and (non-participating) Monaco.

Oslo 1952. The torch was lit in Morgedal, the hometown of the famous first skier Nordheim (Telemark). A ladies’ 10 km cross-country race and giant slalom were added. Bandy was the demonstration contest chosen by Norway. Norway issued three stamps and used many publicity cancellations. Austria was the only other country which honoured these Games with a stamp. Norway will honour the 50th anniversary with stamps in 2002.

Cortina d’Ampezzo 1956. Soviet Russia for the first time at Olympic Winter Games. Tony Sailer (Austria) won all three Alpine events. No gold medal for Norwegian speed skaters. The biggest surprise was Russia’s victory in the ice hockey tournament. Six special Post offices in Cortina and around dispensed 51(!) manual and machine post-marks during the games, for each event. Canada used two propaganda cancellations. Three other countries, all non participating issued stamps.

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Squaw Valley 1960. This town did not exist when the Games were awarded to it. No bob races - violating the Olympic Charter. Biathlon for the first time and, also for the first time, a non-Scandinavian won the Nordic Combination. Another first: all gold medals in figure skating went to North America. A historic success was the US victory in the ice hockey tournament. The number of countries issuing postal items jumped from four in 1956 to 13 in 1960; four were non-participating countries whose inhabitants have never seen snow in their life. 40 propaganda and special cancellations were used in the USA, two in Canada, four in Austria, one in Germany, two in Soviet Russia and one in Togo!

Innsbruck 1964. Canada for the first time without a medal in ice hockey. J. Ueno, 22nd in ladies' figure skating took the referees Olympic oath in Nagano in 1998. Nineteen countries issued Olympic stamps, with a record of 57 postal stationery by Austria.

Grenoble 1968. Jean-Claude Killy (France), now an IOC member, won all the Alpine events. The first gold medal in cross-country skiing (30km event) is won by a non-Scandinavian, Franco Nones (Italy). The first mascot appears, 48 countries, more than double than in 1964, issued 537 Olympic stamps. Unfortunately, many did not participate or had no NOC.

Sapporo 1972. Karl Schranz (Austria) was disqualified (because of professionalism). Canada absent in ice hockey. Forty-two countries,



among Japan for the first time, issued 235 stamps.

Innsbruck 1976. Again after Denver renounced. There were two Olympic flame cauldrons (1964 and 1976) with two final torch runners. For the last time, an army rifle is used in biathlon. Thirty-nine countries issued 327 stamps.

Lake Placid 1980. Eric Heiden (United States) won five gold medals (unique). There is the historical victory of the US ice hockey team. Forty countries issued a record 580 stamps. The United States Postal Service arranged for special "Olympic Postal Service".

Sponsors used Olympic franking postmarks.

Sarajevo 1984. Forty-nine nations participated, thanks to "Olympic Solidarity". Three exhibition events by handicapped skiers. Twenty-nine countries issued 264 stamps. Yugoslavia's stamp programme contributed financially to a profit-making Games.

Calgary 1988. The Australian speed skater Colin Victor Coates demonstrated the "participation spirit" with six Olympic participations (as other five men and one woman). Demonstration sports included three freestyle, nine short track and two curling events. Exhibition programme included five events for handicapped skiers. Thirty-five countries issued 276 stamps. The first IOC/FIPO patronised stamp show.

Albertville 1992. Torch relay by 5,597 runners through France.



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Germany is represented again by a united team. One freestyle event (moguls) and two short track speed skating events become Olympic. Speed skiing is a demonstration sport. Fifty countries issued 276 stamps. A large Olympic stamp show is organised with the FIPO/IOC patronage.

Lillehammer 1994. The Olympic Winter Games in a new cycle. The “best, fairest” Games ever. Two torch relays were organised. All short track events and the aerials in freestyle skiing are Olympic. Johann Olav Koss (Norway), now an IOC member, is elected the best speed skater. Sweden won the ice

hockey tournament for the first time. The Norway Post sponsored with its stamp issues the 75-day national torch relay. PROLYMPIA was the large stamp show organised by the Post in collaboration with FIPO/IOC (also patron of the show).

Nagano 1998. A record 72 nations participation. Snowboard and curling became Olympic sports. The Czech Republic won the ice hockey tournament for the first time. Ladies’ ice hockey for the first time, though played by women since 1892 in Canada. Only 16 participants for the 10,000 m speed skating event are allowed (since 1994).

Fifty-six countries issued stamps. The Japanese stamps contributed financially. FIPO/IOC organised for the first time ‘Naganophilex 98’ in collaboration with the Japanese post.

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1940. The V Olympic Winter Games: Sapporo, St Moritz, Garmisch-Partenkirchen (for the 1940 Games); Cortina d’Ampezzo (for the 1944 Games) and St Moritz (for the 1948 Games).

Contrary to the Games of the Olympiad, the number of the Olympic Winter Games does not change if the Games are not celebrated. The saga of the V Olympic Winter Games started in 1937 when the Winter Games were awarded to Sapporo in Warsaw during the 37th IOC Session. It finished when the V Olympic Winter Games finally took place in St. Moritz in 1948. The story is summarised in the following insert.

Where and where awarded	Host city	Number of countries issuing stamps	Number of countries issuing other philatelic items
1937 Warsaw (37th IOC Session)	Sapporo (for 1940) (Renounced in 1938)	0	Postcards, labels
1938 Brussels (IOC Executive Board, September)	St Moritz (for 1940) Withdrawn during the IOC Session in London in June 1939	0	Labels
1939 London (39th IOC Session, June)	Garmisch-Partenkirchen (for 1940) Cortina d’Ampezzo (for 1944 - not celebrated)	2 (not issued) 0	Franking machine cancellation (Garmisch-Partenkirchen) Only a pin exists (Cortina d’Ampezzo)
1940	“War Games” organised by Germany in Garmisch-Partenkirchen		Postcards
1946 London (IOC Executive Board, Spring)	St Moritz (for 1948, these Games were held from 30 January to 8 February)	3	++++