

KORFBALL AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

by Anthony Th. Bijkerk

In 1920 at the Games of the IXth Olympiad in Amsterdam, Korfball was one of the two official demonstration sports. In the Official Report on the Amsterdam Olympic Games, a complete and extensive report about this demonstration has been given by the Organizing Committee. However, this demonstration was not the first time that the Olympic Family made the acquaintance of this typical Dutch sport.

The Netherlands Korfball Association was established in 1903 and its first chairman and “inventor” was Mr. Nic. Broekhuysen. During the national “Olympic Games” in Haarlem (these Games were actually trials of athletes for the real Olympic Games in London 1908), a korfball-match was played between the Dutch champions of 1908, **Swift** from Amsterdam, and the national team. This match would be the first time that the IOC Member in the Netherlands, F. W. C. H. Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken would “meet” with the sport of korfball.

Only three years later, on 29 March 1911, the President of the IOC, Pierre, Baron de Coubertin visited the Netherlands and on this occasion, especially to honor him, a demonstration korfball-match was played between two teams from Amsterdam. The President of the Netherlands Olympic Committee (since September 1912), Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken was nominated as the Patron of the Netherlands Korfball Association (Dutch: Nederlandse Korfball Bond = NKB) in July 1913, an honor that the “Father of Dutch Sport” gladly accepted.

It is well known that shortly after the end of World War I, the Games of the VIIIth Olympiad (1920) were awarded to the city of Antwerp in Belgium. The Board of the NKB launched the idea of organizing a demonstration match of korfball at the 1920 Olympic Games. Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken, as an IOC member and Patron of the NKB, was asked to write a letter to the Organizing Committee of the 1920 Olympic games about the possibility of organizing this demonstration match; but initially the answer was negative.

Being a stubborn “Dutchman,” Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken repeated his request to the President of the Antwerp Organizing Committee, fellow IOC Member, Count Henri de Baillet-Latour. And, lo and behold, on 27 February 1920, a positive answer came back from Brussels, with the following text:

Monsieur le Baron

Nous avons l'honneur de vous faire savoir, prenant en considération votre nouvelle demande relative au korfball, le Comité a décidé dans sa séance du 25 de ce mois, d'accepter en principe qu'une démonstration de ce jeu puisse avoir lieu à Anvers à l'occasion des Jeux Olympiques. Seule la date a été réservée; elle sera fixée ultérieurement. Nous ne manquerons pas de vous en faire part.

Le Président,
Baillet-Latour

The preparations for the demonstration match were given to a committee, consisting of the following NKB Board Members, Messrs. Broekhuysen, Heijboer and Wilson. But this

committee came upon financial difficulties when the inflow of money ceased. The budget for the demonstration had been estimated at NF1 1400 (very hard florins at that time - Tony B.), but in April 1920 only NF1 411 was actually available. Fortunately the korfbal district of Amsterdam came to the rescue and they organized a "korfbal day" on 18 April 1920, which brought in no less than NF1 687.15. The available budget for the korfbal demonstration came to NF1 1,377.55; making it definitely possible to organize the demonstration match in Antwerp after all.

Originally the Organizing Committee had fixed the date for the match as 1 August 1920; but shortly before that time, the Organizing Committee shifted the date to 22 August 1920. In this letter the Antwerp Committee also proposed that the NKB team play against the team of the YMCA, which normally played the American sport of basketball. So, finally, the NKB received permission to play a korfbal demonstration match with two teams on 22 August 1920, in the Olympic stadium at Antwerp.

In the archives from the now Royal Netherlands Korfbal Association, there exists a report on this match, which was composed by the team leader, Mr. S. A. Wilson. Through the fine assistance of the KNKB, I was able to obtain a photocopy of this report and from it, can translate the following excerpt:

TO THE GAMES

To be able to depart to the stadium at a quarter to one on Sunday morning, we had to dine early and so we sat down for dinner at half past eleven; as we would not have enough time for eating after the demonstration match. With a good-sized char-a-banc for the players and, for its time, a still dignified landau for the officials, we departed for Kiel (*Note: a suburb of Antwerp - Tony B.*)

The coachmen drove us along the fat pastures of Flanders far into the country, until we reached the fair at ; I do not remember exactly where; but they called this fair "De Olympische Spelen."

'Oh, the ladies and gentlemen want to go to the "lutte?" They should have said that before!' There we stood, in a pouring rain, far from the stadium. Now, we even stood the chance of being expelled from the programme for being absent! To run aground right in front of the harbour!

To top this misery the char-a-banc could not make the turn and the mules put on a strike. Thus all the players abandoned the vehicle; to take over the task of the mules and off we did go.

In the Stadium

Arrived at the stadium only 10 minutes before two o'clock; change of clothes had already been done at the guest-house; exactly on time we entered the arena, where we were received by Messrs. Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken and Waller (both members of the Netherlands Olympic Committee - Tony B.). There was a fair attendance, especially in the reserved stands. At the end one could even say that the attendance had been high!

When the players came onto the field, they were welcomed by Americans with a peculiar and rhythmic greeting, which was taken up by the Swedes. This must have been the American "cheerleading." A most sympathetic attitude, which did us a lot of good and even moved us for a moment.

The two teams of 12 players each, six men and six women, were as follows:

Team A- Amsterdam

Women

F. Jansen
A. van Beek
E. Teunisse
W. Stiens
T. Donker
M. Gregorius

Men

H. W. Vliegen
N. Ouwehand
J. Brinck
L. Brinck
J. de Nie
G. Sieverts

Reserves

T. Abeling (woman)
L. van Koesveld (man)

Team B - South Holland

Women

J. Schilthuisen
T. Buy
J. Christiansen
N. van Noort
S. Ballego
F. Dekker

Men

F. A. van Zimmeren
A. Ouwerkerk
N. Ragut
G. de Mey
K. Nieuwenhuizen
H. van der Reyden

Reserves

H. J. Popp (man)

The teams formed under the guidance of Mr. Repko, the referee for this demonstration match. Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken himself started the match. We cannot be very enthusiastic about the play that was presented by the teams. Many times we have seen better play during demonstrations or other important matches. The slippery field was undoubtedly the reason for this defraction of the game. Fine jumpshots were impossible, and the fast play of this sport could not be shown. Sometimes the match slowed down, but even worse was that some of the players seemed to forget that this was a demonstration match. At the score of 2-0 for the South Team, they imagined themselves to be somewhere in Holland, in one of the famous North-South matches (between teams of North- and South-Holland, two provinces of the Netherlands - Tony B.)

The Amsterdam team was most anxious to make at least one score at all costs and that made the play not very nice to look at. We admit that we pitched our demands high, but maybe we were somewhat prejudiced by the splendid matches that we had played earlier, like the one for Baron Pierre de Coubertin and the one in the Amsterdam stadium.

For the layman crowd in the stands, however, the play must have been very attractive. One of the "groundmen" could not stop to tell us about his unaffected admiration for this type of sport.

What the players and we especially appreciated, was the attendance of our Ambassador in Belgium, Jonkheer van Vredenburg. He came down to meet the players personally and told them how much he had liked the game. His Excellency regretted that he had been unable to get acquainted ith korfbal during his youth.

At exactly three o'clock the match ended. All players retired to one of the stands to watch the departure of the marathon runners and to cheer and encourage the Dutch participants in this race.

At a quarter past four we departed the magnificently equipped stadium and climbed up the high seats of the char-a-banc; this time the officials were also hoisted into this prehistoric vehicle, as a landau could no longer be afforded. And in this way we made our “joyeuse entree,” with 35 people, in one vehicle into the city of Antwerp.

It should be mentioned that both teams and officials returned by train to the Netherlands, that same day at a quarter past six.

It is interesting to add that already on 31 March 1920, the first Belgian korfbal club was founded in Antwerp with the name: Scaldis Sporting Club (before the demonstration match).

The actual outcome of the Olympic korfbal demonstration in Antwerp occurred on 28 April 1921 when the Belgian Korfbal Association was founded; the first of its kind outside of the Netherlands.

In 1923 another effort was made to demonstrate korfbal at the Olympic Games of 1924 in Paris. After a period in which “yes” and “no” alternated, finally in June 1924 the final message arrived via the Netherlands Olympic Committee, stating that it was not permitted to organize a korfbal demonstration match during the 1924 Olympic Games. From that moment the NKB could concentrate on the preparations for the official demonstration of korfbal at the Games of IXth Olympiad in Amsterdam in 1928.

It is now perfectly clear that to the surprise of all Olympic historians a new Olympic demonstration sport, i.e., korfbal, must be added to the program of the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp. And again we must conclude that nowhere in the modern Olympic literature could any trace of this match be found. It is only through the archives of the now Royal Netherlands Korfbal Association and a couple of articles in the now defunct sportsmagazine *Révue der Sporten*, that this fact from the Olympic past could be definitely confirmed.

[*Editor's Note:* In a most recent issue of the *GAISF (General Association of International Sports Federations) News* (No. 99/100), it was announced that the International Korfbal Federation (IKF) has been given provisional recognition by the IOC as a recognized federation for a two-year trial period. It is also listed in the *Olympic Movement Directory* in that section.]