

## BOOK REVIEWS

***All-Time Greats of British and Irish Sports.*** by Peter Matthews and Ian Buchanan. London: Guinness Publishing, 1995. In English. 474 pp. ISBN 0-85112-678-2. Available for £12.99 from Guinness Publishing, 33 London Road, Enfield, Middlesex, ENGLAND. Reviewed by Stan Greenberg.

This is a long awaited book about the many world-renowned sportsmen and sportswomen from the British Isles. Written by those excellent researchers, Ian Buchanan and Peter Matthews, both founding members of ISOH, there is plenty to please the other members of the organization. There are detailed biographies of over 1,500 of the top British and Irish stars of the past and the present, and while one might argue with a definition of "All-Time Greats," I doubt that there are many omissions from anybody's list.

However, in this category I would take a claim for such as Mick McLeod (athletics), Eileen Armstrong (diving) and Allen Whitty (shooting), whose careers surely warrant an entry. As the authors point out there is great emphasis on the leading sports of football (soccer), cricket and rugby, but over 300 entries are of specifically Olympic competitors. These provide some interesting data that might not be known to those who only know of their Games achievements. There is a useful list of entries by sport, and another one noting less famous relatives who are mentioned in the text. Interesting additions are the tables of thirteen Award winners - Sports Personality of the Year, Player of the Year, etc. - possibly the first time that they have all been presented in one place. The authors have had the nerve, or audacity, to select their Top Ten Greats lists - men and women - not surprisingly producing two separate compilations. These will provide the basis for much argument among the many sporting "intelligentsia" who will find this volume a must for their bookshelves.

***De Herboren Spelen (The Reborn Games).*** by Prof. Dr. Roland Renson. Published through the Belgian Olympic and Interfederal Committee (BOIC) by AD Connection p.v., 1995. In separate Dutch and French editions. [French title: *La VII<sup>ème</sup> Olympiade Anvers 1920: Les Jeux Ressuscités.*] 81 pp. ISBN 90-75554-04-4. Price: 350 Belgian Francs. Order from: BOIC, Avenue de Bouchout 9, B-1020 Brussels, BELGIUM. Reviewed by Tony Bijkerk.

Over the years many publications have added useful information to the knowledge about the Games of the VIIth Olympiad from Antwerp 1920. Since this knowledge was quite scarce to begin with, it is no wonder that in 1992 we especially welcomed the publication of Bill Mallon's ***The Unofficial Report of the 1920 Olympics.*** But as of today we can add another most welcome historical publication on these Olympic Games, which many still describe as "the worst documented Games" ever. Prof. Renson made a very thorough study on the political and social-cultural background of these Games; not so much about the actual results, which were already done outstandingly by Mallon.

The book actually starts with the reason why Prof. Renson chose to write the book in the first place. Renson mentions in his introduction that Bill Mallon himself wrote in his Report, "I have not researched the political or social-cultural aspects of the 1920 Olympics to any degree . . . but have left other socio-politico-cultural topics to the academic historians." That was in fact an implicit invitation to Dr. Renson to fill the gap and publish this study on the political and socio-cultural aspects of those days and those Games of 1920. He starts

describing how Antwerp got the Games in the first place. “From the trenches to the track” is how he names the 1920 Olympic Games. It was certainly a political choice and also moral support for a country that had suffered heavily from the fighting during the first World War. Many interesting aspects have been unearthed, hardly known to the general public of today, but of immense importance for the developments which led to the organization of the 1920 Olympics. For the first time we come across the name of the Grisar family, which played such an all important role. Renson places his first chapter in the middle of a struggle between Flemish-speaking lower classes and the rank and fashion of the French-speaking elite. He describes the development of Belgian sports up to 1920 and situates this in its broad political and socio-cultural context.

As early as March 1912, during the 15th IOC session in Stockholm, Baron Edouard de Laveleye, president of the Belgian Olympic Committee had opted for the candidacy of Antwerp for the 1920 Olympic Games and in 1911 Pierre de Coubertin visited Brussels and Antwerp, before his visit to the Netherlands. Mr. Charles Cnoops initiated in August 1913 a meeting in the Royal Yacht Club of Antwerp to start the “bid” for the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp. This meeting resulted in a real bidbook; *Aurons-Nous la Vite Olympiade à Anvers en 1920?* which was published by a provisional committee, in which many important Belgians from the world of sports and physical education took part. This bidbook, with 109 pages, is actually more or less a work of art, as it contains no less than six reproductions of paintings by famous Belgian artists, like Rubens, van Dyck, Jordaens, and Fijt.

Renson describes how history then took over until the end of the first World War. The optimism of the original proposal had changed into much reservation, because Belgium had suffered so much from the war-of-the-trenches 1914-1918. De Coubertin himself had suggested in 1918 to give the Games to Antwerp, but it took the support from the Belgian Prime Minister, the governor of the province of Antwerp and the mayor of Antwerp to convince the responsible persons to proceed! All this is reasonably well-known, but the struggle that followed and the tensions that occurred between many of the parties involved, are described here for the first time in detail.

Dr. Renson has a very humorous pen and his descriptions are mingled with many interesting stories of all kinds. Many times he uses captions, both in the Flemish or in the French language, because he wants to stipulate many details which appeared either in the contemporary press or in the official report. It makes reading more difficult for some, but it also enhances the historical value of the book.

Special attention has been given to the “Wintersport-Prelude,” as Renson so aptly put above the chapter concerned. Also the next chapter with the title, “The Phantom of War” is very impressive, because it gives us the text of the modern Pindaric Ode, in which British IOC Member Sir Theodore Andrea Cook described his view about what he called the “ritual funereal games” to honor the dead of the first World War. With this “ode” Mr. Cook won a silver medal in the art competition of the Antwerp Games.

In the following chapters Renson writes in detail about the opening ceremony, the “fickle athletes” and of course about “from the trenches to the track”! Again not the results, but the story behind the athletes, put together in the context where it belongs! Of course Renson uses well known stories too, like the “Mutiny of the Matoika” and others from many Olympic authors of fame, but altogether it is very readable and anecdotal information.

The chapter on the “Uproar in the Swimming Pool” has a particular value for your reviewer, as for the first time the photograph is shown of the two Dutch female waterpolo teams that played the demonstration match on 29 August 1920, which I described in the ISOH journal in 1993 and which Dr. Renson found in a Dutch booklet on waterpolo.

The amateur-question, which was at the time a much discussed subject in the IOC, deserved a separate chapter! Roland Renson has been able to make use of many contemporary sources, most of them Belgian, but many others too. This information on gymnastics is almost

purely focused on his own country and for association football the same applies. That is not surprising since Belgium won the gold medal in that sport. Two chapters are dedicated to the differences between sports “for aristocrats” and sports “for the people.” Again we encounter the name of Alfred Grisar, who had been instrumental in bringing the Games to Antwerp. This Alfred Grisar came from one of the richest families in Antwerp and he might be called a “dandy-sportsman” from the Belle Époque period. He happened to be the owner of the grounds on which the Beerschot Stadium (which became the Olympic stadium) was built. We will encounter him again later in this book. In the chapter about “sports for the people” Dr. Renson gives an excellent description of what is called “Belgian archery.” With this chapter Renson closes down on the sports section of his book and follows up with some very serious financial information. The chapters “Mercantilism and Arrivalism” and “The Roots of The Financial Disaster” speak for themselves. This information is contrary to what the Official Report always told us; there was no financial “surplus,” but instead a financial debt of some proportion! There even existed a committee for the liquidation, which acted up to May 1923 to solve all the remaining problems! Dr. Renson was able to study all the eighteen “minutes of the meetings” of this committee and it must have been some sad reading! He mentions that he is planning to publish a separate report on these readings later. In the chapter about the deficit we again encounter the name of Alfred Grisar. Through some very difficult to fathom financial manipulations, which even Dr. Renson was unable to understand, the family Grisar was instrumental in buying back, after the Olympic Games, the Olympic stadium for the benefit of the football club “Royal Beerschot AC,” which in this way obtained a completely refitted stadium.

A special chapter is dedicated to the media coverage and the questions that Dr. Renson asked is: “Was there a local press boycott or was it just a general Olympic apathy?” A personal note from my side in this respect must be that the newspapers in the Netherlands, generally speaking, gave a fair coverage of the Olympic Games in Antwerp in 1920! In them I found many details covering items like the demonstration matches in korfbal and women’s waterpolo! And this information is nowhere to be found in the contemporary Belgian newspapers!

The last chapter of this very readable book makes up the final score of the 1920 Olympic Games. Again Dr. Renson used many different sources, giving various opposed opinions! Therefore he can easily conclude with his own opinions, which of course centers on the political and socio-cultural aspects. If you want to know about these opinions, I would advise you to buy this book. It is good reading and a tribute to the thorough work of our fellow member, Prof. Dr. Roland Renson. More than four pages with references, including many well known names among them, form the final pages of the book.