

DEMOLITION OF AMSTERDAM OLYMPIC STADIUM AVERTED AT THE LAST MOMENT

by Tony Bijkerk

In the ISOH Journal of Autumn 1995 (Vol. 3, No. 3), both Ruud Paauw and myself reported to the readers about the imminent destruction of the Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam, where the Games of the IXth Olympiad had been organized in 1928.

Both of us were then not very optimistic about the outcome of the decision from the Amsterdam-Zuid (South) City-council. They were quite absolute in their plans to remove the stadium and to use the old stadium-grounds for the building of 1,200 houses. But we had not reckoned with the tenacity and resilience of the "Committee for Keeping the Olympic Stadium," although for a long time nothing was heard about their plans.

When the famous Amsterdam football club Ajax played its last match in the old stadium in mid-May 1996, (they will be playing all their matches in the new stadium, "Amsterdam Arena," from August 1996 onwards) it looked like the old Olympic Stadium finally had lost the battle against survival.

But, all of a sudden, on 28 May 1996, during the general assembly meeting of the Netherlands Olympic Committee/Netherlands Sport Federation, one of the members of the "Committee for Keeping the Olympic Stadium," Mr. Piet Kranenberg received the opportunity to address the meeting of representatives from all Dutch sports federations. In a rousing speech he announced the plans for a complete renovation of the Olympic Stadium and asked the Dutch Sports representatives to support these ideas.

This is what occurred. In February 1996 a large working committee had been installed, in which both governmental and private organizations were represented. The Council for the Province of Northern Holland, the City of Amsterdam, the Amsterdam-Zuid City-Council, the State Institute for Monuments and its local counterpart in Amsterdam and finally the representatives of the stadium itself, all sent their representatives to the working group. There were four main points of study:

1. Were the estimated costs for renovating the stadium based on realistic calculations?
2. Was it possible to build 800 houses on the outside premises?
3. Will the renovated stadium and the building of the 800 houses conform to current and future environmental condition?
4. Would it be possible to exploit the stadium without any losses?

For the actual research the working committee engaged external experts. The restoration of the stadium conformed to the original plans of 1928, which also meant restoration to a state of a public monument and the use of the stadium for "track and field" and other sports-activities. The restoration of the stadium was supported by 85% of the population of the city of Amsterdam. To revitalize the stadium it was necessary to:

- Continue the monument in the new town-planning context;
- Bring it back to its original state of 1928;
- Emphasize the function of the stadium for amateur sport in historical and future perspective;
- Organization of new sports and cultural elements;
- To realize room for other users, particularly in the catacombes, to enhance the main function and to support the financial costs of the renovation;

- To realize a long desired traffic-instruction-school.

One of the main reasons for these plans was that the new Amsterdam Arena can not be used for several sports and cultural events, while the Olympic Stadium can utilize these events, because of the accommodations itself and its historic/monumental character.

For our members, I tried to find out more about the actual renovation plans of the Stadium, which were presented by the working committee in June 1996.

The renovated Olympic Stadium will be used as the basic stadium for all important “track and field” meets in the Netherlands, both national and international. It will be the home for all Amsterdam “track and field” clubs. The revitalised stadium will therefore have a modern eight-lane athletics track, with a football pitch in the middle. The current cycle-track will be removed.

The two concrete half rings, which were added in 1937 to bring the capacity up to 60.000, will be removed. The amount of spectators at the renovated stadium will be even less than in 1928, because of modernization, and plans are made for 22,500 seats. Underneath, in the catacombes, room will be reserved for offices and commercial organisations, catering, and sports-facilities.

The total renovation is estimated to cost 23 million guilders. (about \$13.5 million [US]), from which 8.5 million will come from the state-funds for monuments; the state and city of Amsterdam will furnish another 5 million from sports-funds; the National Restoration Fund will supply a loan for 3.5 million and the Province of Northern Holland will supply 1 million guilders. This leaves an amount of about 5 million guilders to be supplied by the “Committee for Keeping the Olympic Stadium” and that is exactly why this committee asked the support of the Netherlands Sports Federations in its address on 28 May 1996!

The “Committee for Keeping the Olympic Stadium” is planning to launch an all-out effort to raise the amount of 5 million guilders through sponsors and private donations and the time is ripe! One hundred years of Olympic Games should be reason enough to find enough assistance all over the globe to retain this 1928 Olympic Monument. Donations can be sent to Giro-Account-number: 60 757, on behalf of the Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam.