

MR. JANIS DIKMANIS

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- Born in Riga, Latvia, on 10 June 1882; died in New York, USA on 7 June 1969.
- Latvian;
- Married, two children;
- Started his sporting career in 1904 in cycling, in Latvia;
- The founder of several major sports organizations during the beginning of the 20th century: The Latvian Track & Field Association, the Association of Latvian Sports Organizations, Latvian Olympic Committee;
- Member of the Latvian Committee for Physical Education and Sports;
- The first President of the Latvian Olympic Committee (1922 - 1933);
- Leader of the Delegation of the Latvian Olympic Committee during the VIIIth Olympic Games in Paris in 1924, the IXth Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928, the Xth Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1932;
- After the Xth Olympic Games in Los Angeles, in 1933, Janis Dikmanis received one of Latvia's highest civilian honours, the Order of Three Stars; the only representative of Latvia in the International Olympic Committee from 1926 till 1947.

The name of Janis Dikmanis, the founder and the first President of the Latvian Olympic Committee was regularly in the focus of attention of sports activists and reporters during the first two decades of Latvian independence (1918-1940). The journalists especially, whenever criticizing or extolling the achievements of Latvian sportsmen, did not miss the name of the leader of the Olympic movement in Latvia. As an erudite in all things related to sports, Janis Dikmanis was never angered by criticisms.

The biography of Janis Dikmanis is, at the same time, the history of the development of sports in Latvia.

Already at primary school at the turn of the century, Janis Dikmanis turned to cycling. When he started on his

working career, one of the first things he bought for his wages, was a bicycle. However, to take part in competitions, it was not enough to have a bicycle, you had also to be a member of some sports association. On May 15, 1904 Janis Dikmanis was admitted to the 2nd Riga Cyclists Association, which was the oldest Lettish sporting society. Starting his cyclist career in track, he soon became a road cyclist. At the same time, he took part in organizing events, in administrative work of his association and also was very actively engaged in the examination commission which checked the cyclists. There was so much work to do for him that, at the end of 1908, he stopped his active sportsman career and became wholly engaged in administrative work. Unfortunately, his more than fifty silver medals and awards have not been preserved: they vanished during refuge in Russia.

Despite everything his preference was always for sports. The organizing talents of Janis Dikmanis went as far that he was even the organizer of the first marathon in Latvia which took place on 6 May 1904 on the highway from Riga (city) to Jelgava (city). During the years of World War I, he went as a refugee to Russia, from where he returned to Latvia in October 1918. After returning home, he turned to restoration of sporting life with increased energy.

From 1921 on, he was the Deputy Chairman of the largest Latvian sports society - "The Latvian Sporting Society", and he chaired this organization from 1928 till 1944.

Latvians applied for participation at the Olympic Games in Antwerp in 1920, but were not accepted since no Olympic committee was founded yet in Latvia. On 23 April 1922, the Latvian Olympic Committee was established at a meeting of Latvian sports organizations. Janis Dikmanis was elected Chairman of the Latvian Olympic Committee. Promptly after founding the Latvian Olympic Committee, organizational work and preparations began for the Olympic Games in Paris 1924. Already in 1922, the ambassador of France, Count de Martel offered all the necessary information about the forthcoming Olympic Games in Paris, due in 1924. Soon after that, the Latvian Olympic Committee also became an announcement from the International Olympic Committee, confirming that Latvia was accepted as a candidate of the International Olympic Committee and was admitted as participant to the Games of the VIIIth Olympiad. One of the most serious tasks for Janis Dikmanis, while preparing for the Olympic Games in Paris, was to secure the necessary financial provision for the team. Despite the difficulties, the exiting moment arrived, and the Latvia team participated at the Olympic Games in Paris. Later in life, while living in the USA, Janis Dikmanis wrote a book about his activities in

sports and the Olympic movement: "60 Sporting Years" (in the Latvian language), in which he wrote with excitement about his first Olympic Games: "When our team, beyond the maroon-white-maroon flag, entered the Olympic stadium on the day of opening the Games, they received lasting, loud applause from the audience." Although we could not win from the great aces of sports during these world Games at which we participated for the first time, still our sportsmen, having left some of the old countries behind, entered the sports arena as equal partners, as it was confirmed by the President of the International Olympic Committee, Pierre de Coubertin, when I visited him before departure: "the sportsmen of your new Latvia", said he, "have honestly performed their task, they were chivalrous, what is most important, and thus they have deserved the acknowledgement of the Olympic community, the community of which they have now become a part of." The memories of Janis Dikmanis about the organizational aspect of these Olympic Games were not always positive. He believed that the Olympic village, which was introduced then as a novelty, was a complete failure, like also the long procedure of hand-shaking during which the President of France received about 2000 participants to the Olympic Games, in the Champs-Elysee, shaking hands with everyone of them. The procedure was several hours long.

In any way, the first Olympic start was very important in the further development of the Latvian sports. Candidates for the Olympic Games were selected in Latvia during the regular annual general sports festival.

In 1925, Janis Dikmanis, as the President of the Latvian Olympic Committee, participated for the first time at the Congress of the International Olympic Committee in Prague. During this Congress Janis Dikmanis not only learned his "Olympic Lesson", but also acquired many new friends. He established very good relationship with Guth-Jarkovsky, representative of Czechoslovakia with the International Olympic Committee. He and the Baron Pierre de Coubertin were the only founders still alive of the International Olympic Committee. The year 1926 was one of the most important years in the Olympic biography of Janis Dikmanis, because then he became a member of the International Olympic Committee. Dikmanis himself did not participate at the Congress in Lisbon. A Latvian reporter told him the news over the telephone. "Understanding the great responsibility imposed by this high position, I always tried to do my best in the performance of my duties. Probably it was a partial success. My cooperation with the members of the Committee was always running smoothly, in a really Olympic atmosphere."

During the years from 1926 till 1939, Janis Dikmanis participated at the inter-war congresses of the International Olympic Committee in Prague (1925) and Berlin (1930), as

well as the working sessions of the International Olympic Committee in Paris, Berlin, Barcelona, Warsaw, Oslo and the pre-war session in London in 1939. During the session in London, the possibility to organize the Olympic Congress in Riga, in 1942, was discussed with Count de Baillet-Latour, the President of the International Olympic Committee.

During the summer Olympic Games in 1936, Janis Dikmanis was mainly engaged in his duties and tasks as member of the International Olympic Committee rather than working with the Latvian team.

In his book of memoirs, Janis Dikmanis tells us about many interesting events from his Olympic biography, especially those related to the proceedings of the Olympic congresses and working sessions, as well as the struggle between the candidate-cities for selection.

As World War II began, the International Olympic Committee suspended its activities, and the further career of Janis Dikmanis as an activist in the field of sporting events and the Olympic movement became obscured. In August 1944, he left Riga together with his family on the German ship "Monte Rose", bound for Danzig.

In exile, most of the Latvian sports activists gathered together, and a Latvian Exile Sports congress was even held in 1946 in Augsburg. Sporting activities were resumed among Latvians, and one of the most serious issues was participation at the Olympic Games in London in 1948. On the initiative of Janis Dikmanis and his associates, "the Latvian Olympic Committee in Exile" was formed. The President of the International Olympic Committee, Sigfrid Edström, was informed about the desire of Latvians to participate at the Olympic Games. However, the application was rejected. Janis Dikmanis again applied to the President of the International Olympic Committee with a question about participation at the Olympic congress in Stockholm in 1947. The political games of the world precluded Janis Dikmanis from further active participation in the Olympic movement. He received an answer from the President of the International Olympic Committee stating that Latvian delegates cannot participate at the Olympic Congress because Latvia, as incorporated in the territory of the USSR, will be further represented by the delegates of the USSR. Despite this, a decree was issued to the Secretary General of the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne to send the official bulletin of the International Olympic Committee to Janis Dikmanis, which was done regularly.

In 1949 and 1950, many Latvian refugees emigrated from Germany to the USA. Janis Dikmanis with his family was among them.

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