

A REFLECTION: MADAME MONIQUE BERLIOUX REVISITED

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Thirty-five years ago, in the summer of 1959, the American State Department, in response to a request from the Turkish Olympic Committee, sent me to that country as a track and field scientist. I did the best I could with their elite athletes and accompanied the team to the 1960 Rome Olympic Games. Somehow, through both good luck and great persistence, I've attended every ensuing Summer Olympic Games from that time to the present. Just as importantly, for not quite as long a period of time, I've been an eye witness at several score International Olympic Committee (IOC) meetings; continental/regional and national Olympic committee meetings; Olympic Scientific congresses; American and International Olympic sport federation meetings; Olympic Tripartite congresses; and special celebrations of Olympic academies, libraries, museums, memorials, and personal award ceremonies. All of them were important to my own growth as an Olympic scholar. None were more meaningful to me than the ten days I spent in Paris during the month of June 1994.

Between the 18th and 24th of June, I took three guided tours of Paris and "walked my legs off" around this gorgeous city. Early on in my Paris experience I attended a breakfast meeting featuring the eight-person delegation from the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG). This was followed by attendance at the annual meeting of the Association des Fédérations Internationales Olympiques d'été (Summer Olympic Games federations, AFIOE). IOC member, Primo Nebiolo, who is also president of the world track and field body, IAAF, presided over this three-day meeting. ACOG President, Billy Payne, gave a measured and honest report of the 1996 Olympic Games' progress. Mr. Nebiolo responded with the remark: "Mr. Billy Payne, once your Olympic Stadium is completed, I would be pleased if you would reserve, free of charge, one per cent of all the seats, in prime location, for myself and international delegates and their families from the IAAF ... the most powerful federation in the world." Billy Payne hesitated for a moment, collecting his thoughts, I'm sure, and responded softly: "With all due respect to you, Mr. Nebiolo, and all the good work that you've done these many years, ACOG cannot accede to your request." The affairs of the meeting continued, in the main more pacific than this encounter.

I mention briefly the memorable June 23 celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the IOC. On June 23, 1894, French baron, Pierre de Coubertin, only

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31 years of age, received from an international delegation "permission to revive the ancient Olympic Games in modern guise." The amphitheatre of the Sorbonne, University of Paris, erupted in full positive response, and the organizational process of the first modern Olympic Games was placed in the hands of Coubertin and a very small committee -- the IOC. The Sorbonne convocation site was then, and remains today, one of the beautiful buildings in a city of gorgeous structures. Twelve speeches, receptions, exchanges of gifts, media interviews, and another reception at the Paris City Hall ("Hotel de Ville") marked this a special day in Olympic history -- and, of course, a special day for me.

Leaving Paris on Saturday, June 25, I took the "bullet train" out of that city in a northwesterly direction and arrived in Bolbec, Normandy, by mid-morning. I was met at the tiny station, only 16 kilometres from the city of LeHavre (and the English Channel), by Mr. Geoffrey de Navacelle, the 74-year-old grand-nephew and only living relative of Pierre de Coubertin. I spent the day with Madame and Monsieur Navacelle in the thirty-room ancestral home of the Coubertin family. The eighteenth century mansion, a gorgeous structure, sits on a great property of trees, fields, farms, streams and ponds, lush vegetations, and scores of artifacts from twelfth century Scandinavian Viking invaders. All day we walked the property, talked, viewed endless Coubertin scrapbooks, photos, memorabilia, looked at but did not read the thousand book collection of the family Coubertin, and ate several meals. I took the train back to Paris, my mind filled with vivid impressions that will, I'm sure, endure through the remainder of my life.

To return to Wednesday, June 22nd. By good fortune (and 25 years' acquaintance with the lady), I was invited to the City of Paris Celebration honoring one of its most distinguished citizens -- Madame Monique Berlioux. My gold-embossed invitation was clear in its intent: "To honor an extraordinary lady for fifty years of distinguished service to the City of Paris, to France, and to the international Olympic Movement." Three hundred guests gathered in the 250-year-old stunning "Great Hall" of the Hotel de Ville. Everyone carried a gift, each received by Madame Berlioux dressed in a high-fashion Paris dress of ivory white silk. She was quite radiant and in an indefinable way looked different from the lady I knew for nineteen years as director of the IOC (1966- 1985). City Mayor and former French Prime Minister, Jacques Chirac, was the main speaker. In eighteen minutes, speaking eloquently, he encapsulated Berlioux's life: a courier for the French underground during World War II (swimming the River Seine with messages aimed against the German invaders); Berlioux's distinguished 10-year career as a national swim champion and semi-finalist at the London Olympic Games in 1948; her education at the Sorbonne; her career as a journalist in the print media, her three Olympic Games history books; her appointment by IOC President Avery Brundage as media chief; and finally, her momentous appointment as director of the IOC. Mr. Chirac was much too civilized to mention the difficult years 1984 and 1985, the irreconcilable differences between herself and IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, and Mrs. Berlioux's subsequent "resignation." Mr. Chirac was only too pleased to remind the delighted audience and the beaming guest of honor that in 1985 Mrs. Berlioux was hired as Paris Deputy Mayor, serving with great distinction to the present day. Chirac had had his say; Mrs. Berlioux spoke, sharing with us that, on the

eve of her seventieth birthday, she had no plans to retire, and that she “would continue to serve her city as best she could as long as the invitation to do so remained.” Two hours of exchanges, receptions, and visitations concluded this memorable meeting. Journalist John Rodda of the Manchester-London *Guardian* and I looked carefully about the chamber and noted nine retired IOC members in attendance, as well as two present IOC members -- one African and a lady from the Americas.