

Roland Renson, *The Games Reborn: The VII Olympiad, Antwerp 1920*. Pandora-Snoeck-Ducaju and Zoon, Leuven, 1996. Illus. pp. 96. Belgian Franc 680.

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The official report of the 1920 Antwerp Olympics, comprising 178 stencilled pages in a ring binder, was published at the behest of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) several years after the Games concluded. The report, published only in French, contained many errors and was incomplete. It is pleasing that the outcome of Roland Renson's thorough research and analysis of this most significant Olympic Games has now been published in English.

Although it was mooted by the IOC in 1912 that Antwerp would host the 1920 Games, the cancellation of the 1916 Berlin Olympics and the events and aftermath of World War I created many problems for the Olympic Movement. At the IOC meeting in Lausanne in April 1919, President Pierre de Coubertin stated: 'May fortune smile on Belgium for its brave and magnificent gesture in claiming the right to attempt to secure the VIIth Olympiad of the modern era, next year'. Officially, Antwerp became an Olympic host city barely sixteen months before the commencement of the Games.

The political, social and cultural context of the preparations, organisation and administration of these Olympics, which marked the re-birth of the Olympic Movement, is presented well by Renson. This is developed through the text (with additional footnotes), and also with the inclusion of numerous black-and-white photographs and captions, which average more than one per page. Statistical detail pertaining to medallists, competitors and participating countries are not included, however.

One brief section is entitled 'The Spectre of War' but the impact of the War, which left wounds that were still healing when the Games opened on 14 August 1920, remains a focus throughout the book. Invitations to participate came from the Games Organising Committee, not the IOC; Germany and its allies were not invited, neither was Bolshevik Russia. At the entrance to the Olympic Stadium was the sight of a statue, not of an athlete, but of a Belgian soldier throwing a grenade. However, it was significant that during the Opening Ceremony doves, the symbol of peace, were released and, for the first time, the Olympic oath and Olympic flag with the five interlocking Olympic rings was raised.

Roland Renson has provided much information about the Antwerp Games which reinforces the power of the Olympic Movement: the commitment of sport administrators; the dedication and brilliance of athletes such as Paavo Nurmi, Charlie Paddock, Duke Kahanamoku and Ethelda Bleibtry; and the spirit of idealistic internationalism. As Renson concludes: 'After the terrible events of the First World War, the Games in Antwerp in 1920 signified a turning point for the Olympic Movement, which accounts for the title of this book *The Games Reborn*'.

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