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The Olympics Considered as Political Exercise



Baron Pierre de Coubertin conceived the modern Olympics in pursuit of peace.

"We shall not have peace," he wrote, "until the prejudice which now separates the different races shall have been outlived."

The first modern Games were in Athens in 1896, and they achieved the Baron's intent: 285 young men from thirteen countries learned to measure each other by uncomplicated and friendly standards. They also served an incidental purpose. The Greek Royal Family, newly enthroned and of Germanic origin, saw an opportunity to identify with the glories of the Grecian past. The Crown Prince headed the Organizing Committee.

Since then the Games have grown enormously. Lord Killanin, President of the International Olympic Committee, says, "they have attained importance relative to the real size of the planet."

David B. Kanin, a graduate student at Tufts, suggests in a paper, "The Role of Sport in the International System" (presented before the International Studies Association in Toronto last February), that they have also acquired another purpose. He says, "politics are intrinsic to the sporting process" and considers the Olympics as a practical extension of diplomacy. He notes that

the track and field meets between the United States and the Soviet Union became a way of moving away from Cold War positions.

He also believes that the most significant participants in the Olympics are the spectators and notes that in the course of six decades spectators all over the world have learned to tune in directly, first by radio, then through television (between 900 million and a billion viewers are expected this summer). He says, "the mass public takes instant notice of contests between teams or individuals from friendly or hostile states" and "governments can use the identification between athlete and state to demonstrate the temper of relations between the countries involved."

Kanin believes that the link between the Olympics and politics is as fundamental as the one between a pole vaulter and his pole, but the young men and women participants still measure each other primarily by courage, stamina and achievements. Harold M. Wright, President of the Canadian Olympic Association, believes the Games "transcend many of the problems facing the nations of the world today." Ethologist Konrad Lorenz has written that the Games are "virtually the only occasion when the anthem of one nation can be played without arousing any hostility against another."

MANITOBA FREE PRESS
AUGUST 15, 1912

Hodgson Returns to Canada

G. R. Hodgson, winner of the world's swimming championships at the Olympic meet, returned to Canada this evening. . . .

Smilingly Hodgson acknowledged the compliments showered upon him by those who managed to get aboard the Royal George and search him out, but he was very modest about his achievements.

PRESCOTT TELEGRAPH, 1879

Football

Ottawa Young Ladies to the Front

There are six young ladies in the city of Ottawa, at present all unknown to fame, who are desirous of acquiring a reputation as athletes, and one of them has written us to say that they are willing to challenge any six young ladies in this town to a game of football, for a silver cup. We give their request publicity, but do not think there are any young ladies in Prescott who are ambitious to become champion football kickers.