

## THE OLYMPIC GAMES (7)

### The 1920 Olympic Games of Antwerp Belgium

The 1920 Olympic Games were hosted by a war torn country that had the spirit to recover. King Albert and Queen Elizabeth, his wife, were on hand to open the VII Olympic Games to twenty-nine nations and over twenty-six hundred athletes in twenty-one sports. Cardinal Mercier held a Requiem Mass for the war dead. Belgium had only had eighteen months to prepare to host the Olympics.

For the first time the Olympic flag flew over the Olympic Games and the athletes recited the athlete's oath. Faster, Higher, Braver (*Citius, Altius, Fortius*) coined by the French monk, Father Henri Didon made its first appearance as the Olympic motto. Americans were transported to Europe on the *SS. Princess Matoika*, an old Army transport that had just off-loaded eighteen hundred war-dead in coffins that filled the air with the smell of formaldehyde on the New York docks. On arrival in Belgium, American athletes were relegated to living quarters at an old school house with small cots instead of a hotel with decent accommodations. Such traveling and living conditions put the athletes in a sour mood and they revolted against the US Olympic committee administrators.

The Finns who were now independent from Russia challenged the US in many track and field events. Hannes Kolehmainen and Paavo Nurmi won medals in the distance running events and Finland took first, second and third in the javelin throw. Swimming and diving were conducted in an old moat that surrounded Antwerp. It was dark, bottomless and cold. The moat did not seem to bother Duke Kahanamoku of the US. He won the one hundred meters and eight hundred meters freestyle races. The US Army and the US Navy sent athletes to the Olympics for the first time. Eddie Egan the US won a gold medal in heavyweight boxing. Twelve years later Egan won a gold medal in the four-man bobsled in Lake Placid and became the first person to medal in the summer and winter Olympic Games. Jack Kelly, the father of actress Grace Kelly and Olympian Jack Kelly Jr., won the single sculls and double sculls rowing competitions. Kelly later was to give the presidential nomination speech for Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the 1940 democratic convention. Jack wore his trademark Kelly green hat to the winners stand to receive his medal in rowing.



Coubertin had moved the International Olympic Committee headquarters to a neutral Lausanne, Switzerland due to the war. In a speech culminating the Olympic Games of 1920, Coubertin said: "The Olympics are a festival of human unity. The Games had not managed to stop the war that tore the world apart; however, the Olympics had managed to bring part of the world back together."

### The 1924 Olympic Games of Paris France

Coubertin requested that the 1924 Olympic Games be hosted in Paris. They were almost moved to Los Angeles because the French economy was in recession and the Seine River flooded in 1923. Paris recovered in time and hosted the Games of 1924 in stifling heat; Los Angeles was promised the 1932

Olympic Games. A winter Olympic Games were held for the first time. Over three thousand athletes from forty-five nations participated in the VIII Olympic Games which had become more popular due to the previous successes in Stockholm in 1912 and Antwerp in 1920. The US sent a strong contingency to Paris aboard the *US America*. Athletes and officials were housed at the Prince Joachim Murat Rocquencourt Estate. Johnny Weissmuller, the future "Tarzan," won three gold medals in swimming. Benjamin Spock, the future baby doctor, won a gold medal in crew rowing. Gertrude Ederle, the US English Channel swimmer, won two bronze medals. The US won the last team rugby competition; however, numerous fights in rugby and a biting incident in boxing ignited the media against the holding of future Olympic Games. Coubertin commented: "Only a few hoodlums can cause trouble for the Games; he instead was dreaming of the twenty-sixth and twenty-eight Olympiads in the years 1996 (*Atlanta, GA*) and 2004 (*Athens, Greece.*)" Coubertin resigned as IOC President after the Olympic Games!

### **The Olympic Games of 1928 in Amsterdam**

The Olympic movement was at its pinnacle of popularity and Count Baillet-Latour of Belgium had replaced Coubertin as IOC President. Coubertin was too sick to travel to the Netherlands for the Games; however, he along with Pope Pius XI protested the entry of women in track and field events. For the women, the pants leg must come down to within four inches of the knee! The beautiful Canadian Ethel Catherwood known as the Saskatoon Lily won the high jump. Another Canadian, Percy Williams, hitchhiked across the country to get to the Canadian Olympic trials and went on to win the 100 meters and 200 meters in Amsterdam. Weissmuller added two more gold to his medal count of five. The Germans were allowed to compete for the first time since the war. Torch lighting became an Olympic tradition. India began its dominance in the sport of field hockey. The great Paavo Nurmi of Finland completed his nine gold medal performances in the distance events and is considered the greatest runner of all times. One woman running 800 meters collapsed at the finish line. Women would have to wait another thirty-two years to run that distance again in Rome!

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