

# Cancelled but still counted, and never annulled: the Games of 1916

By Volker Kluge

As early as 1896 Dr. Willibald Gebhardt full of enthusiasm and without any consultation with the German government had put his home city of Berlin forward to host the 1904 Olympic Games. He did so at the first IOC meeting on 6 April 1896.<sup>1</sup> Pierre de Coubertin, at that time General Secretary, made a note of the offer in the minutes, but secretly he had long had other plans. The third Games were to take place in the "New World", in the USA.

Five years later, in 1901 in Paris, the German IOC Members (now three in number) restated their proposal – however this time for the year 1908.<sup>2</sup> Once again the offer did not fit into Coubertin's strategy, as he had for some time intended Rome for that year. Rome was in the same position as Berlin. In both cities plans existed – but only on paper – for a stadium, without even mentioning the financing of the project. Notwithstanding this, Gebhardt repeated his application in 1904 in London, but as Coubertin, supported by Count Baillet-Latour and the Latin members, maintained his line, Gebhardt finally withdrew Berlin's candidature to the applause of his colleagues.<sup>3</sup>

What followed is well known: the Games of the IV Olympiad took place not in Rome, but in London.<sup>4</sup> At the IOC Session held there, a fourth German approach was made. By this time Gebhardt had all but retired. A research chemist he struggled financially after economic failures.<sup>5</sup> Coubertin too was probably more interested in an influential aristocrat than in an impecunious bourgeois.

In London Berlin was in competition with Stockholm, but General von der Asseburg, who since 1905 had presided over the German Reichsausschuss for Olympic Games (DRAfOS), was able to point to the "earlier rights" of the imperial capital. A decision was however postponed to the next Session, which the Germans did not regard as a disadvantage, since it was to be held in Berlin.<sup>6</sup>

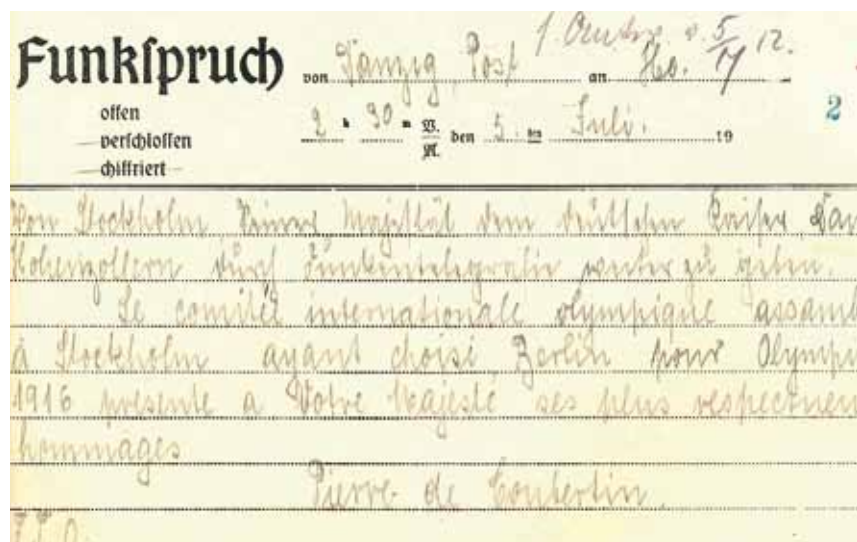
However the financing of the stadium was still completely unresolved, so towards the end of 1908 Asseburg issued a "call to participate in the construction of the German Stadium". This he directed to some 130 German towns which had more than 50,000 inhabitants and to all Prussian provincial administrations.<sup>7</sup> Yet of 180 requests only one was successful:

the town of Brandenburg indicated that it would give a loan of 1000 Marks. On 31 March 1909 Asseburg passed away. Carl Diem, who three years later became General Secretary of the Organising Committee for the 1916 Games, wrote of him: "... he died because of the stadium."<sup>8</sup>

When the IOC met at the end of May 1909 in Berlin for its 12<sup>th</sup> Session, Graf von Wartensleben, by now the only German still to belong to the IOC, was forced to admit that it would not be possible to build a stadium in time for 1912.<sup>9</sup> Thereupon Stockholm was unanimously nominated. For the host of the Session, who had relied on home advantage, it was a poor consolation when at a festive meal in the restaurant of the new Grunewald racecourse, Coubertin predicted a "Scandinavian-Germanic" period for the Olympic Games. This would follow what he described as a "French period", followed by a "British" one. The IOC President even considered the Germans to be particularly suited, because they would introduce a "strict and at the same time intelligent discipline".<sup>10</sup>

The telegram in which Pierre de Coubertin informed Kaiser Wilhelm II. The IOC decision about the award of the 1916 Olympic Games to Berlin was transmitted the following day at 2.30 a.m. by wireless to the state yacht "Hohenzollern" sailing off Danzig.

Photo: Bundesarchiv R 901/37985

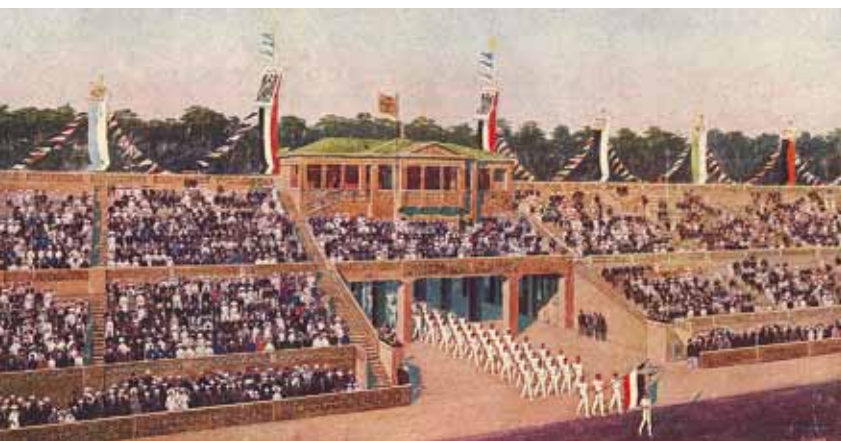


Asseburg's successor was another retired general from the Hussars called Victor von Podbielski, President of the elite Union-Club, whose career as an official had begun in 1894 with a spectacular blunder. Coubertin's invitation to the founding Olympic Congress landed in Podbielski's waste paper basket. With the best will in



the world, this landowner, who was first and foremost interested in breeding horses and hunting, could not imagine himself at an Olympic Games. But over the years Podbielski, who in 1906 had to resign as Prussian Agriculture Minister because of a corruption scandal, had realised their significance. In collaboration with Kaiser Wilhelm II, with whom he occasionally played cards, he promised himself that through the Games German prestige would be increased. It would be transformed into "economic values", but especially "strength and satisfaction, health and a determined will", which especially German youth should grasp "at all levels of society".<sup>11</sup>

As all attempts to acquire the necessary capital from the banks to build the stadium had however failed, Podbielski, whom Diem admired for his ruthlessness<sup>12</sup>, turned to the "Herrenreiter" [gentlemen jockeys] of the Union Club, of whom some had access to a huge fortune. Within six months he had raised the required 2,25 million Gold Marks.



The main stand of the German Stadium with the Imperial Box. On the occasion of the 'Stadium Inauguration' of 8 June 1913 this lithograph was sold as a postcard. Top: one of the German flags from the opening ceremony.

Photos: Volker Kluge Archive

Thus the most important obstacle standing in the way of Olympic Games in Berlin was removed. In May 1912 the DRAfOS sent in an application for 1916 to the IOC, whereupon Budapest and Alexandria, who had also had hopes, abandoned their candidatures. And so it was just a formality, when the IOC unanimously approved Berlin on 4 July 1912 – two days before the start of the Games in Stockholm.<sup>13</sup> Coubertin immediately sent a telegram to Wilhelm II. It reached him on the SMY Hohenzollern. The ship was on the way back from Baltijski Port, where the Kaiser had been meeting Tsar Nicholas II the previous day.<sup>14</sup>

With the Kaiser's agreement building could now start. The Union Club commissioned the Berlin architect Otto March, who had built the racecourse, opened in 1909, in whose grounds the stadium was to fit. So that the view over the racecourse would not be adversely affected, no building works except the Kaiser's box and the Victory column at the swimming pool stand was allowed to rise above the edge of the arena. Entry would exclusively be

through a tunnel underneath the racecourse. The Union Club remained the owner together with the Berlin Racing Club and the Club for Steeplechase racing. However they left the administration to DRAfOS. Among the conditions was that on race days other sports were not to take place.<sup>15</sup>

In addition the Union Club took in all the income. From the net income the club put aside 25,000 Marks annually to cover the expenses incurred by DRAfOS over a period of four years. Once the stadium was completed, the Reichsausschuss have been able to count on fifty per cent of the income, but this did not happen as the stadium was never completed.<sup>16</sup>

### "Stadium Inauguration" as homage to the Kaiser

Wilhelm II was determined to spare no expense on his silver jubilee, which marked 25 years on the throne. This fell on 16 June 1913. The festivities began on 8 June with the inauguration of the German Stadium. It was an occasion which architect Otto March however did not live to see. He died nine weeks before the opening from the consequences of a stroke, so that his leading colleague, Johannes Seiffert, had to complete the project alone. (Otto had two sons, Werner and Walter March, and 20 years later after the demolition of their father's work they began construction of the Olympic Stadium for 1936 on the same site.) Despite this unforeseen setback and thanks to the mild winter everything was ready by 15 May – since the official start of building only 200 working days had passed.

The "Stadium Inauguration" was in reality a ceremony of homage for the Kaiser, for which the DRAfOS had mobilised 30,000 gymnasts and sportspeople. The event was led by the General Secretary, a young lieutenant called Kurd Roessler, who was fresh from the war academy and for whom no task had been found in the German general staff. Carl Diem acted as his substitute. The parade itself, which presented a colossal image of Prussian militarism, was commanded by Lieutenant Walter von Reichenau, who in 1938 became an IOC Member and in 1941 as General Field Marshall and commander of the army group South-East issued the infamous "Commissar Order".<sup>17</sup>

For almost an hour the cries of "Heil" resounded, while Wilhelm II under the baldachin busily saluted. The "sporting displays" began thereafter to the joy of the monarch with two companies of the corps of guards in field marching dress. On their steeplechase run they had to cross and a escalade wall that was four metres high. The mass exercises of the female and male gymnasts were highly energetic and; even the runners raced in military step. While the cyclists trampled each other over 4000 metres, the athletes performed a relay race, the divers jumped from the tower and the





wrestlers fought in Graeco–Roman style, the Kaiser and his entourage were served breakfast. As a side note an IOC deputation with President Coubertin at its head were received, although their presence was however deemed hardly worthy of notice by the press.

When the displays were over, Wilhelm II roared off in an automobile to Grünau for the Jubilee Rowing Regatta, for which his grandfather had donated a perpetual trophy 30 years before. Before departing he had received of the winners in the stadium competitions, among them the decathlete Karl Halt.<sup>18</sup>

### **"In 1916 we must be victorious!"**

The concept for the stadium had stemmed from Willibald Gebhardt by now almost forgotten. In a five page memorandum, approved by the DRAfOS, of June 1907 with the title "The Stadium in the Grunewald, a central place for physical strength and agility" he had pleaded for a national stadium, which was to be not only a "place for a great international Olympia" but also the setting for cultural events.<sup>19</sup>

Effusively he drew the picture of a "consecrated place", from which he wished to ban screaming and howling as well as "professional sport". Betting which was then on the increase was to also to be banned. Gebhardt's ideas were ahead of his time. Proof of his modern thinking can be seen in his proposal to create a central site which he would make the spiritual centre of German sport. Here the central training centre would be, to prepare the best athletes for the Olympic Games.



Besides he proposed the erection of a sports academy, where teaching as well as research would be conducted.

Diem, who was well prepared to honour Gebhardt's part in the creation of the stadium, had as General Secretary for the VI Olympiad proclaimed a somewhat pretentious-sounding slogan: "In 1916 we must be victorious, and that right along the line!"<sup>20</sup> In the same newspaper article he described as the "happy completion" of the Games as a "national task". However the Germans were still some way short of sporting excellence, for in 1912 in Stockholm they had again shown themselves to be second class with only five Olympic victories.

To explore the reasons for American superiority, the DRAfOS sent Diem on a study trip to the USA. This lasted from 20 August to 23 September 1913. He was accompanied by Walter von Reichenau, Dr. Martin Berner, intended to be Olympic press chief, and the Munich thrower and later Reichstrainer Josef Waitzer. Diem took the opportunity to recruit Alvin Christian Kraenzlein, the four-times Olympic champion of Paris 1900 as Olympic trainer. Kraenzlein was at the time coach to the University of Michigan. He had been personally recommended to the Kaiser in a letter by North American runner Dr. George Orton.<sup>21</sup>

Kraenzlein, whose parents came from Würzburg (birthplace to both Diem and today's IOC President Thomas Bach), took up duty on 1 October 1913, for which he received what was for those days a princely annual salary of 18,000 Marks. His first task was to train "sports teachers" in the Berlin stadium – a job title which Diem had thought up, to avoid the foreign concept of "trainer".<sup>22</sup> Later Kraenzlein was to share his experiences throughout the entire Reich. In 1914 alone twelve "sports teacher" courses were planned.

In order to find the German participants for 1916, the DRAfOS had announced unified "Olympia Test competitions" in athletics, swimming and cycling and donated 60,000 medals which bore the likeness of the Kaiser. The DRAfOS wanted to "get together" the best talents "in the German Stadium and have them trained there in the best methods under the oversight of the first

The only entry was by a tunnel that led under the racecourse.

The tunnel, named after the architect Otto March, is one of the last remnants of the German Stadium.

Today it leads to the catacombs of the 1936 Olympic Stadium. Like the London White City Stadium there was a running track, around which the architect had laid a cement cycle race track.

Left: A bird's eye the Stadium, encompassed by the horse race track. Opposite the Imperial Box the swimming pool 100 m in length can be seen.

Photos: Peter Frenkel, Volker Kluge Archive

The first 'sports teacher course' in the German Stadium, conducted by the four-time American Olympic champion Alvin Kraenzlein.



Programme of the Games of the VI Olympiad, for which the main events were to begin on 1 July 1916. Right: entry ticket for a seat in a box for the 'Olympic Pre-Games' of 27 June 1914. The next day the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian couple who were successors to the throne took place in Sarajevo.

Alvin Kraenzlein was well aware of the implications of the events that would follow the assassination. In a letter he said 'Goodbye' on 18 July 1914 to Berlin and to Olympic General Secretary Carl Diem, and returned to the USA.

Photos: Carl und Lieselott Diem Archive, Cologne

class sports teachers he had engaged".<sup>23</sup> To look after their medical needs and undertake "measurements", Dr. Arthur Mallwitz, an Olympic participant in 1906 and 1908, was specially employed.<sup>24</sup>

In the middle of 1913 the Prussian War Ministry ordered the participation of all regiments in the "Olympia Test competitions". Following this example the students and school pupils were supposed to be drawn in as well. The civil service was compelled to offer their employees for such courses free of charge. Private businesses were enticed by the offer of grants.

At the beginning of 1914 a rapid start was made to the preparations for the Olympic Games, which were to open in February 1916 with a "Winter Sports Week" in Berlin and on the Feldberg in the Black Forest. Diem canvassed for it by means of circulars sent to the sports departments of the German press and which were set in Berlin via pneumatic mail. He published a series of memoranda and demanded – one of the chief requests of his American travel report<sup>25</sup> – the introduction of a legal duty to build play areas in local communities. In several towns competitions took place, which were described somewhat presumptuously by the organisers as "Olympic Games".

After the main problem – the building of the stadium – was solved, Diem set about financing the Olympic Games, which he reckoned would require expenditure of 1,321 million Marks.<sup>26</sup>

In his calculations he could rely on the documentation of the Stockholm Organising Committee, which had recorded the costs incurred in staging the 1912 Games as 2,479,416 Swedish crowns (the equivalent of 2,775,000 Marks), which Diem considered too expensive.<sup>27</sup> At 66 million Germany's population was more than twelve times greater and as the seating capacity of the stadium was a third higher, he calculated that considerably more entry tickets would be sold in 1916. As a result he estimated an income of 1,810 million Marks, which would yield a profit of around 489,000 Marks.

This optimism seemed all the more justified on 14 February 1914. That day for the first time the German Reichstag had voted 200,000 Marks, which the DRAfOS intended to use for the preparation of the future Olympic participants. This despite the opposition of the strengthened Social Democrats and parts of the Catholic centre party. He hoped for further income from

*auch "Goodbye" zu Dr. Berner  
und Diem. Reichenau. Auf ein  
fröhliches Wiedersehen!  
ich mit Hochachtung  
Alvin Kraenzlein*

an Olympia lottery and the issue of special stamps. As the number of private "sponsors", among them the "armament smiths" Krupp von Bohlen and Halbach, grew to 456, the coffers of the DRAfOS were well filled<sup>28</sup>

## The sudden end of an Olympic dream

In June 1914 the sixth Olympic Congress met in Paris, and confirmed the programme for 1916 that had been worked out by the DRAfOS Competition Committee with a few changes. As in London and Stockholm the summer competitions were to be divided into three segments: a "Games Week" (28 May to 4 June), a "Stadium Week" (1 to 10 July) and a "Rowing and Sailing Week" (12 to 21 August). For the first time the Congress arranged the sports for future Olympic Games into two groups.

The first included the obligatory sports, to which belonged the athletic competitions (track and field and tug-of-war), the gymnastic competitions (gymnastics and weightlifting!), the combat competitions (fencing, boxing, wrestling and shooting), the water competitions (rowing, swimming, sailing), modern pentathlon and equestrian as well as the team competitions (football and tennis). In the optional sports of the second group were rugby, field hockey, ice-hockey, archery, polo, golf, speed-skating, cross-country skiing and ski jumping.<sup>30</sup>



As a result of the disqualification of the 1912 American Olympic champion in pentathlon and decathlon, James Thorpe for a breach of the amateur rules, the IOC decided in its Session of the 16 June 1914 to introduce an Olympic Oath, which would be sworn on his national flag by an athlete of the host nation's team as a representative of all. An age restriction was rejected, the participation of women in athletics refused. However a big majority voted for female participation in swimming, tennis and fencing.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand the Olympic flag, officially presented in Paris for the first time by Coubertin is not mentioned in the surviving documentation. But it seems certain that it would have been seen in 1916 in Berlin for the first time at an Olympic Games, had they taken place.

Following the Olympic Congress many delegates accepted the invitation from Marquis Melchior de Polignac, a grandson of the famous Madame Pomery, to go to Reims.<sup>32</sup> There they also visited the Collège d'athlètes, which had been erected in the "Champagne Parc" and in which French sportsmen were trained for the 1916 Olympic Games. This had been financed by the house of Pomery.<sup>33</sup>

The excursion ended on the last weekend of June, on which "Olympic Pre-Games" took place in the Berlin stadium, regarded by DRAFOs as qualifying competitions. On the Sunday afternoon the march music suddenly broke off just before the end of the event, and the black, white and red flag sank to half-mast. The news spread like wildfire. At around 11.30 in distant Sarajevo a 19 year old Bosnian nationalist called Gavrilo Princip had shot dead the Austro-Hungarian successors, husband and wife, to the throne. "This means war!" explained Victor von Podbielski, experienced in military questions, cryptically.<sup>34</sup> He was to be proved right.

In diplomatic and general staff circles a hectic bustle of activity had broken out, but to begin with the sports event in the stadium proceeded according to plan. At the express wish of Mrs. Gerrard, the wife of the American Ambassador, a baseball game was played in Berlin for the first time on the 18 July. This featured the "Giants" – members of the US colony in Germany against the "Athletics", a team from the Anglo-American Medical Association.<sup>35</sup> Against that Alvin Kraenzlein was uncomfortable. On the same day he ended his job as trainer and returned to the United States "for personal reasons".<sup>36</sup>

On the 28 July Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, thus starting a chain reaction. Kaiser Wilhelm II replied to Russian mobilization on 1 August 1914 with declarations of war on the Tsar's empire and two days later on France. After the German army had marched into neutral Belgium, in order to advance through Northern France to Paris, following the "Schlieffen Plan" of 1905, Great Britain also saw itself obliged to break off diplomatic relations with Germany, which equated to a declaration of war. A world war had begun, described in France as early as 1914 as "Grande Guerre" and in Great Britain as "The Great War".<sup>37</sup> There may have been a premonition that it might not have been the last, when two years after its end it was for the first time provided with an ordinal number.<sup>38</sup>

### "Away with everything foreign!"

According to his own testimony, Reserve Corporal Carl Diem did not share the joyful enthusiasm of his friends and fellow soldiers, although he was among the first to sign up as war volunteers.<sup>39</sup> He escaped being called up to the not very highly esteemed Landwehr through his connections to a major named Walter Kortegan, responsible in the War Ministry for sport. To him had been handed the command of a battalion which was regarded as the "sports regiment". However the privileges were restricted, for soon afterwards the troops raced through Belgium, to experience their baptism of fire after crossing the river Meuse. No sooner had they begun than a ricochet into his chest stopped

Diem's march on Paris. To recover from his wounds he was allowed to return to Germany.

Like most Germans Diem believed that the war would not last long and that the Olympic Games of 1916 would be able to take place as planned. From the front he informed people that the sending out of invitations would be postponed until "a more peaceful time", since the interests of the army and navy now had priority. "On the other hand" said Diem, "we can be reasonably sure that modern war will not last so long, so that long before the dates when we will celebrate the Olympic Games peace will again reign and peoples will unite in sporting competition."<sup>40</sup>



The consequence was a furious outcry among the leaders of the Deutsche Turnerschaft (DT) [German Gymnasts], who had fought from the start against the Olympic Games. Diem's announcement that he would continue his work after the war represented blasphemy to the Bonn gymnastic teacher Ferdinand August Schmidt. His answer ran: "No, Herr Diem! Peace may and hopefully will return by 1916. But that we are to receive the sporting gentlemen of England, as well as Belgians, French, Russians and whatever all these dear friends are called, in two years in a friendly way for a 'sporting contest' in Berlin – that is a thought that that should bring a flush of shame to one's face."<sup>41</sup> Schmidt's postulation: "Away with international Olympia!" and "Away with everything foreign!"<sup>42</sup>

Diem's longtime friend and colleague Karl Markus thought it appropriate to give his former boss "covering fire" against such attacks. In a reader's letter to the *Düsseldorfer Zeitung* the sports journalist reacted to the statement by the DT President Ferdinand Goetz, according to whom the "European War" had given the "Olympic nonsense" its death-blow, with the reproach that Goetz had not understood the meaning of the Olympic Games and their significance as a "cultural act". However Markus also blew loudly into the chauvinistic

'Olympic Games 1914: run a race' – so-called joke postcard, to restrict the enthusiasm for war of the Germans.

Photo: Volker Kluge Archive



To prove his patriotism, Pierre de Coubertin, who had never done military service, reported to the French army at the outbreak of war. For a short time the army employed him as an interpreter and information agent. Coubertin's uniform shows no badges of rank, only the tabs indicate, according to Jacques de Navacelle, that he belonged to the information and communication unit.

Photo: IOC Archives



trumpet, when he announced: "Whatever may be wrong about the Olympic Games of Baron de Coubertin will be wiped away by this war, and in 1916 we will show the splendor of our Reich at the Olympic Games proudly to the whole world."<sup>43</sup> However he wished participation in the Games to be restricted only to the allied and neutral states, which in his view would be largely sufficient.

Coubertin too was struggling with his conscience. The IOC President had reported for military duty immediately after the outbreak of war, but the 51 year old was considered too old for active service. Instead the Education Minister Albert-Pierre Sarraut charged him with visiting the country's schools as a propaganda speaker, to awaken patriotic feelings in the youth of France.

At the same time Coubertin was confronted with "proposals" to move the site of the Olympic Games.<sup>44</sup> The former Secretary of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), James E. Sullivan, would have like to see them in New York, but shortly afterwards he died unexpectedly after an operation for intestinal trouble.<sup>45</sup> From San Francisco too, where during the Panama-Pacific International Exposition on 18 March 1915 an International Olympic Committee Day was to be celebrated, came a seductive offer.<sup>46</sup> No less attractive was an offer from Cincinnati, whose Chamber of Commerce promised to raise half a million dollars to build a stadium and also declared itself prepared to cover the costs for the foreign competitors.<sup>47</sup>

And finally the Scandinavians could also see themselves carrying out the Swedish Games (Svenska Spelen), planned for the 8 to 16 July 1916, as replacement Olympic Games. But Coubertin did not want under any circumstances to endanger the unity of the Olympic Movement. Looking back he wrote: "I therefore rejected any kind of action of this sort."<sup>48</sup> Instead he wanted to keep to the tradition of antiquity: "An Olympiad may fail to be celebrated; its number remains."<sup>49</sup>

His greater concern revolved round the IOC, which had elected him President in 1907 for ten years. Although by his own account he was willing after that to give up the office that he would in fact occupy for 20 years, he saw under these circumstances no more need to do so. "A captain does not leave the bridge of his ship during a storm", he wrote in his "Memoirs".<sup>50</sup> When in addition, he refused the demand of the British public to exclude the German members, the Briton Theodore A. Cook took that as his cue to leave the IOC.

A second problem was presented by the IOC headquarters, which at the time was located in Paris, where Coubertin lived. Still in force, but somewhat forgotten was a regulation which stipulated that the IOC headquarters was to be moved every four years to the country where the next Olympic Games would take place. It seemed highly possible that the Germans would now remember this at that very moment. To avoid all such imponderables Coubertin decided to move the headquarters of the organisation to neutral Switzerland, and headed for Lausanne. On 10 April 1915 the agreement was signed in the Assembly Hall of the Town Hall, whereby the town undertook to look after the archives of the IOC.<sup>51</sup> Coubertin was accompanied by his Swiss friend and colleague Baron Godefroy de Blonay, whom he asked to act as "President ad interim" from 1 January 1916 for the duration of the war.<sup>52</sup>

After Coubertin had shaken off all attempts to move the 1916 Games to another country, he looked ahead – to the year 1920 and even as far as 1924. There was no shortage of candidates, especially from the USA: Atlanta, Cleveland and Philadelphia promised new miracles, and even Havana and South America stepped onto the Olympic stage. But at the Paris Congress there had been two serious applications: Budapest and Antwerp wanted to stage the 1920 Games, and at the time the Hungarian capital seemed to be the slight favorite.

In October 1914, his travels as propaganda speaker led Coubertin several times to Lyon, where irrespective of events at the war fronts the Exposition internationale urbaine (International Urban Exhibition) was continuing.<sup>53</sup> On one of these occasions the mayor Édouard Herriot showed him the Stade de Gerland, planned by the architect Tony Garnier, the building of which had just been interrupted because of the war.<sup>54</sup> When Herriot asked Coubertin if his city would have

favourable prospects of holding the Olympic Games in 1920 or 1924, the IOC President was careful not to answer "no".<sup>55</sup>

In addition, the following year, Coubertin had a contract signed between Herriot and Count Édouard d'Assche, who had led the Belgian delegation in 1914 in Paris. In it Lyon promised to postpone its plan still 1924, in the event that Antwerp maintained its candidature for 1920.<sup>56</sup>

### Only Gebhardt protested at the breaking of bridges

On 1 October 1914 Podbielski had had the general secretariat of the VI Olympiad dissolved and the "Stadium Calendar", through which the DRAfOS had regularly kept the clubs informed since 1913, now stopped.<sup>57</sup> Diem, now recovered, had been soon promoted to sergeant-major and later lieutenant and ordnance officer of a brigade. When he came back from the western front to Berlin, he found only a ruined office.

With the beginning of the war the German Stadium had also been closed. In its buildings as well as in the surrounding racetrack stands a field hospital had been set up. On the nearby trotting race track of Ruhleben an internment camp was set up. This was used mostly for British civilians, who had been surprised by the outbreak of war in Germany.<sup>58</sup>

Although both sides plunged huge resources into the war. At the front it soon became a stalemate with no end in sight. Those who had remained at home began to re-adjust to the new conditions. In Berlin sporting life also began anew. On 8 August 1915 the stadium was reopened to hold "war competitions" in swimming and cycling.

Finally the prohibition on sport was relaxed. On 10 February 1916 the Competition Committee of the DRAfOS met for the first time since the start of the war. Their President Podbielski had died unexpectedly in January and the committee resolved to hold Games in his memory. The "Podbielski Memorial Games" were to be held annually. There was no immediate thought of a successor. Podbielski's deputy Ulrich von Oertzen, who was also a representative of the "Herrenreiter", was to exercise the office on a commissar basis till the end of the war.



The "Podbielski Memorial Games" took place for the first time on 25 June 1916 with 2000 participants, of whom many had been given short periods of leave from their service at the front. One of the attractions was a "head-spring in field equipment" from the 10 metre tower by the Frankfurt diver Fritz Nicolai<sup>59</sup>, which attracted 10,000 spectators. Also the character of the other competitions was adapted to wartime conditions; besides the discus throwing, hand grenade hurling was on the programme, as well as a "war relay" in swimming, a "Sturm Lauf" on a 75 metre long obstacle course, in which 50 shots had to be fired with a machine-gun and with an infantry rifle, and hand grenades were to be thrown.



Instead of Olympic Games Berlin saw army competitions (on the photo: 60 m light machinegun group steeplechase). Below: The wine bar in the main restaurant was used as a field hospital for wounded soldiers.

Photos: Volker Kluge Archive

What initially was merely an exception became the rule. But all those "German war championships" which could be seen over the next two years in the stadium were just a sad reminiscence of the cancelled Olympic Games of 1916, which were officially never annulled and which were no longer mentioned. The subject was probably regarded as closed.

This turning away from international sport clarified the request of the Competition Committee of the DRAfOS to change its name, which was resolved by its general meeting on 25 January 1917. The description "for Olympic Games" was cancelled and instead the name "German Reichsausschuss for Physical Exercises" (DRA) was introduced. This rationale was as follows: "The war has, as far as we can see into the future, made impossible the continuation of the old International Olympic Games for generations."<sup>60</sup>

The national Olympic Games too, which were intended to be held after years of planning in 1915 as elimination competitions for 1916, were renamed. They were now called "Deutsche Kampfspiele". As a new date for them to be held for the first time was set, "two years after the war" was suggested.<sup>61</sup> Only the request to "germanise" the concept "Stadion", to be replaced by "Kampfbahn" was refused.<sup>62</sup>

While the IOC Member Graf Sierstorpf<sup>63</sup> put up only weak resistance to Germany's withdrawal from the Olympic Movement, Willibald Gebhardt, who 22 years before had founded the first German Olympic Committee, was the only one to protest violently in a letter against the breaking of all bridges.<sup>64</sup> His letter was noted and put in the records.

Even for Carl Diem, since Kurd Roesler's "hero's death" the single General Secretary of the Reichsausschuss, the "thought of international games ... for Germany was dead".<sup>65</sup>

When he came back from the war at end of 1918, he stood in front of the rubble of years of building work. As far as his own economic future was concerned, he could at least look optimistically into the future: the DRA had equipped as from 1 January 1917 with a lavishly paid 12 year contract.<sup>66</sup> At the first main committee meeting after the war Theodor Lewald, who had been nominated in 1917 to be Under-Secretary of State in the Reich Ministry of the Interior, was elected as the new President. As there was no longer a Kaiser in Germany, both of them had opened their hearts to the republic. ■

- 1 Minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> IOC Session 1896 Athens, p. 2, IOC Archives.
- 2 Ibid, 4<sup>th</sup> Session 1901 Paris, p. 9, IOC Archives. Of the three German members only Prinz zu Salm-Horstmar was present.
- 3 *Revue Olympique*, No. 13, August 1904, p. 71.
- 4 Ibid, No. 13, August 1904, p. 71.
- 5 Letter from Willibald Gebhardt to Carl Diem, 23 October 1912, Carl und Liselott Diem-Archiv (CuLDA).
- 6 *Revue Olympique*, July 1908, pp. 103–105.
- 7 Circular letter, 30 December 1908, CuLDA.
- 8 *Das Deutsche Stadion*, August Reher's Verlag, Charlottenburg 1913, p. 10.
- 9 *Revue Olympique*, June 1909, p. 90.
- 10 Ibid, p. 104.
- 11 Bundesarchiv (Barch), R 901/37985, letter from Victor von Podbielski to Reichskanzler von Bethmann-Hollweg, 4 February 1913.
- 12 Carl Diem, *Olympische Flamme*, Deutscher Archiv-Verlag, Berlin 1942, p. 473.
- 13 Minutes, 15<sup>th</sup> IOC Session Stockholm 1912, pp. 12–13, IOC Archives.
- 14 Barch R 901–37085. The SMY Hohenzollern, which left the shipyard in 1892, was the current German state yacht. Incidentally the talks in Baltijski Port (which as Paldiski today is part of Estonia) brought no rapprochement between the two great powers.

- 15 Cf. Volker Kluge, *Olympiastadion Berlin, Berlin's Olympic Stadium*, Das Neue Berlin, Berlin 2009, p. 27f.
- 16 Agreement regarding handing over of the stadium to the DRAfOS, 28 February 1913, CuLDA.
- 17 Nuremberg Armed Forces High Command, Document No. NOKW-309 "Conduct of Troops in the Eastern Territories", 10 October 1941.
- 18 The later long-term member of the IOC was in 1921 awarded the Bavarian Militär-Max-Josef Order for his deeds in the First World War, an award which included personal ennoblement. Dr. Karl Ritter von Halt (1891–1964) was in 1936 and 1940 President of the Organising Committee of the Olympic Winter Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, in 1944 he became Hitler's last Reichssportführer.
- 19 Landesarchiv Berlin, A Rep. 039–03, No. 53.
- 20 Carl Diem, in: *Fußball und Leichtathletik*, 1913, No. 28, p. 465ff.
- 21 Barch R 901/37985, letter from Dr. George W. Orton to Wilhelm II, 23 September 1912. Orton (1873–1958), who in 1900 in Paris in the 2500 m steeplechase had become the first Canadian Olympic champion and then worked as coach at the University of Pennsylvania, wrote about Kraenzlein: "There is no other man available of his calibre in this country. In addition, he is of German parentage and speaks the language fluently. He can no doubt furnish you the best of references both as to character and ability for the work."
- 22 Carl Diem, *Ein Leben für den Sport, Erinnerungen aus dem Nachlass*, A. Henn Verlag, Ratingen n. d. (1974), p. 91.
- 23 *Memorandum on the preparation for the VI Olympiad 1916*, edited by general secretariat, Berlin, n. d. (1914).
- 24 Mallwitz (1880–1968) had organised the sports section at the International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden in 1911, which included a sports medicine laboratory. He was one of the founders of the International Union of Sports Doctors, whose General Secretary he became in 1928. He was one of the first doctors to take up the cause of sport for the handicapped.
- 25 Carl Diem, *Sport und Körperschulung in Amerika*, Bericht über die Sport-Studienreise nach den Vereinigten Staaten im August–September 1913, DRAfOS 1913 and Diem's report *Amerikas Sport und wir*.
- 26 Karl Lennartz, *Die VI. Olympischen Spiele Berlin 1916, Dokumente*, Carl-Diem-Institut, Köln n. d. (1978), p. 74.
- 27 Swedish Olympic Committee (Ed.), *The Olympic Games of Stockholm 1912, Official Report*, Wahlström & Widstrand, Stockholm 1913, p. 49. At that time the sum corresponded to 681,000 US dollars.
- 28 DRAfOS, *Activity report for 1913–14*, p. 24.
- 29 DRAfOS, Generalsekretariat für die VI. Olympiade, *Programm und Allgemeine Bestimmungen*, 17 December 1913.

## Amsterdam's National Olympics



'Olympische Spelen'  
1916 in Amsterdam:  
Poster by Willy Sluiter  
(1873–1949).

Photo: Volker Kluge Archive

In the First World War, the Netherlands was a neutral country! Because the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1916 had been abandoned, the Netherlands Olympic Committee decided to organise "National Olympic Games" in Amsterdam in the period Sunday, August 27 till Sunday, September 2, 1916. The programme contained several sports:

**27 August (Sunday):** Clay-bird shooting at the Nimrod facility in Haarlem.

**30 August (Wednesday):** preliminary football matches between the four champions of the districts: "Sparta" Rotterdam/Schiedam, "Willem-II" Tilburg; "Go-Ahead" Deventer and "Be Quick" Groningen; all matches in the (old) Stadium in Amsterdam.

**31 August (Thursday):** Final match in the Stadium; in the evening: aubade with 4000 singers with four orchestras in the completely lighted stadium, with at the end a big fireworks.

**1 September (Friday):** Stadium: field hockey; avionics; and preliminary athletic events for officers, plus a demonstration with miniature airplanes. Concert Hall: fencing, wrestling and boxing.

**2 September (Saturday):** Zeeburg (suburb of Amsterdam): shooting. Concert Hall: fencing and wrestling. Stadium: baseball and concours hippique for horses and continuation of athletic events for officers.

**3 September (Sunday):** Zeeburg: shooting. Heemstede, Obelt swimming pool: swimming. Stadium: athletics, "kaatsen", cricket, and marathon. In between: football match between Ajax (Amsterdam) and Quick (The Hague). In the evening: distribution of prizes. Further: 1, 2 and 3 September: exhibition of miniature planes in the stadium.

**From 31 August to 3 September:** sailing on the Zuiderzee.

**17 September:** rowing in two-oar sculling boats on the Amstel River.

**15 August:** golf for ladies at the Royal Golf Club in Santpoort.

**10 September:** golf for gentlemen in Noordwijk.

There were a lot of prizes presented: 48 silver cups; 79 gilt silver, 60 silver and 58 bronze medals. His Royal Highness Prince Hendrik presented an extra prize (a piece of art) for the winner of the clay-bird shooting.

Anthony Th. Bijkerk



- 30 *Procès-verbal de la Session du CIO*, Lausanne 1919, p. 9. The nine page protocol was only published as a special print in November 1919. Cf. also Wolf Lyberg, *The IOC Sessions 1894–1955*, Lausanne 1989, pp. 81–85, IOC Archives. Lyberg found a draft of the protocol in German in the estate of the Swedish IOC Member Viktor Balck.
- 31 Lyberg, p. 85.
- 32 Marquis de Polignac (1880–1950) was co-opted on to the IOC on 15 October 1914 despite the recently started First World War.
- 33 The College, inaugurated in 1913 by President Raymond Poincaré was headed by Georges Hébert (1875–1957), who had developed the “Méthode Naturelle” (also called Hébertisme). The lieutenant of marines was inspired to develop it on a journey to Africa, on which he had studied the astonishingly good physical condition of the Africans who lived in free nature. The institution was severely damaged in the First World War.
- 34 Diem, *Leben*, p. 93.
- 35 *New York Times*, 19 July 1914.
- 36 Kraenzlein, who travelled on 19 July 1914 from Cuxhaven by ship to New York, gave as a reason that his wife would not tolerate the climate in Germany. Cf. Farewell letter of 18 July 1914, CuLDA.
- 37 Frank H. Simonds (1878–1936), *The Great War. The First Phase*, Mitchell Kennerley, New York 1914.
- 38 Charles à Court Repington (1858–1925), *The First World War 1914–1918*, Constable, London 1920.  
In Germany the poet Stefan George (1868–1933) was the first to use the term “First World War”. Cf. Einem jungen Führer im Ersten Weltkrieg, in: *Drei Gesänge*, Georg Bondi Verlag Berlin 1921.
- 39 Diem, *Leben*, p. 94.
- 40 *Deutsche Turn-Zeitung*, 1914, p. 628.
- 41 *Körper und Geist*, Nr. 23, 1914/15, p. 147.
- 42 Ibid. “Welsche” (so in the original text) in the language of the Teutons referred to the Roman and Romanised Celtic peoples. Later the concept was used primarily in a chauvinistic way and generalised to mean anything foreign.
- 43 Karl Markus (1880–1968), *Düsseldorfer Zeitung*, n. d. (probably late August 1914).
- 44 Yves-Pierre Bouloungne, The International Olympic Committee in the Maelstrom 1914–1918, in: *The International Olympic Committee 1894–1994*, Vol. 1, IOC, Lausanne 1994, p. 132.
- 45 *New York Times*, 17 September 1914.
- 46 The Panama-Pacific International Exposition, which had the character of a world fair, took place from 20 February to 4 December 1915 in San Francisco. 24 countries took part; almost 19 million visitors attended.
- 47 *Deutsche Turn-Zeitung*, 1914, p. 780.
- 48 Pierre de Coubertin, *Olympic Memoirs*, IOC, Lausanne 1997, p. 167.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Minute concerning the decision of the IOC to transfer its headquarters to Lausanne, 10 April 1915, City of Lausanne Archives.
- 52 Circular letter to the IOC Members, December 1915 or January 1916, IOC Archives.
- 53 The international exhibition, dedicated to town planning and hygiene, took place from 1 May to 1 November 1914. On the outbreak of war the German and Austrian pavilion had however to be closed.
- 54 The works on the stadium, which with its 35,000 seats and its wide extent was reminiscent of that in Berlin, could only be restarted in 1919. The inauguration followed in May 1926. In 1961 Lyon applied with it for the 1968 Olympic Games, for which the arena was to be extended to hold 85,000 seats. But Lyon only received two votes in the IOC vote-off and lost to Mexico City (30) and Detroit (14).
- 55 *Memoirs*, p. 169.
- 56 Contract between the City of Lyon and Antwerp, 5 September 1915, IOC Archives.
- 57 The *Stadium Calendar* (Stadion-Kalender) was produced again for the first time on 20 January 1917.
- 58 In the camp were between 4000 and 5500 internees, mostly Britons. Among the prominent inmates was the New Zealander Tom Sullivan (1868–1949) who had worked as coach at the Berlin Rowing Club.
- 59 Fritz Nicolai (1879–1946), participant in diving at the Olympic Games of 1906 and 1908.
- 60 Minutes of the DRAfOS General Assembly, 25 January 1917, *Stadion-Kalender* No. 2, 15 February 1917, p. 31.
- 61 *Activity report of the DRA*, 1 April 1914–31 March 1919, p. 18. The First German “Kampfspiele” were in fact not carried out for economic reasons until 1922 in Berlin. Thereafter they took place until 1934 inclusive every four years. From 1937 they were transformed by the National Socialists into the NS-Kampfspiele.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Graf Sierstorpff (1856–1922) was the only active German IOC Member: the popular Baron von Venningen had lost his life on 25 October 1914 as Rittmeister at the head of a squadron during the attack on the particularly hard defended village of Domèvre-sur-Vezouze. The third German member, Graf von Arnim-Muskau (1875–1931), co-opted on to the IOC in 1913, was never effective on it. He was removed from membership of the IOC on 5 April 1919 along with Graf Sierstorpff.
- 64 *Stadion-Kalender* No. 2, 15 February 1917, p. 31.
- 65 Barch R 901/1712, letter from Dr. Willibald Gebhardt to the press section of the Foreign Office, 15 July 1920.
- 66 Contract between the DRA and Carl Diem, 31 March 1917, CuLDA.

## The Swedish Games of 1916

Swedish athletes in Olympic sports prepared seriously in view of the 1916 Olympics, to keep the top position from the Stockholm Games in 1912.

When, towards the end of 1915, it became clear no Olympics could be staged in Berlin the following year, Swedish officials started planning a replacement event, if small, at home.

In January 1916, an organising committee was formed for Svenska Spelen (The Swedish Games). The Games was held July 8–16, 1916, mainly in Stockholm with the 1912 Olympic Stadium as the prime arena.

Athletes from Denmark and Norway were invited to competitions in 51 events in athletics, cycling, fencing, shooting, wrestling and, as Nordic Championships, in rowing. The host country dominated with 40 wins, 28 second and 30 third places, while Denmark scored 8–9–6 and Norway 3–12–4.

Further, competitions with only Swedes were held in equestrian,



football, military sports and, as national championships, in swimming and tennis. Included in the programme was also a choir festival (as during the 1912 Olympics) with some 4000 singers, and gymnastics exhibitions.

The first permanent Swedish Olympic Committee (founded in 1913) refrained from taking charge of the Games. Instead, specialized sports associations, headed by the Football Association, shared the (successful) organisation. Leading officials were Anton Johanson, for many years

on leading positions in the Swedish Sports Confederation and the Swedish FA, and Erik Bergvall, managing director of the Olympic Stadium. Johanson was also the driving force behind the second (and last) edition of The Swedish Games, July 14–17, 1922, with only Swedish participants in athletics, football and, as national championships, swimming.

Ove Karlsson

**Svenska Spelen 1916:** the logo shows the flame on the tower of the Stockholm stadium.

Photo: Volker Kluge Archive