

CLOSING OF THE 1912 OLYMPIC GAMES

by Bill Mallon and Ture Widlund

In a letter of August 15th 2002, published in *Journal of Olympic History* no 1 2003, Manfred BERGMAN questions the opening and closing dates of the Olympic Games 1896-1936.

It is, of course, every historian's duty to question old "truths", to come up with new facts and to reinterpret old facts. So, there is no harm in raising the question of the opening and closing dates of the Olympic Games.

One of Bergman's objections to the conventional opening and closing dates of the Olympic Games is that the art events are not considered. We shall not argue with that. But is it really correct to include the art events within the time frame of the starting and ending dates? If we are to include the art events the starting date must be the earliest date an artist began to paint, sculpt compose or otherwise execute a work submitted to the Olympic competitions. Is this a possibility? We very much doubt. So, we will not consider the art events, only the athletic contests and the protocol surrounding them at the site of the Games.

The protocol of the present closing ceremonies, which was designed by Pierre de COUBERTIN, can be dated back to 1920. This means that before this date there were many interpretations of when the games actually ended. Manfred BERGMAN is also well aware of the fact that a closing ceremony does not necessarily mean the end of the Games, e. g. Lake Placid 1932 where the Closing Ceremony took place Feb 13 but the bobsleigh events continued to Feb 15.

Manfred BERGMAN states: "*It ought to be stressed that no historian has the right to apply present-day criteria in order to decide what was an Olympic event in the past.*" Unfortunately, that is exactly what Manfred BERGMAN himself is doing when defines criteria for opening and closing of the Games (the Head of State opens the Games in the presence of athletes from all participating nations, the IOC President closes the Games in the presence of athletes from all participating nations).

1912

We will now turn to the 1912 Olympic Games. Manfred BERGMAN has devoted a lot of space and energy to these Games, especially the closing date.

1.5.1

Opening date ... 5 June 1912

1.5.2.

MALLON and TILBURNE (who is TILBURNE?) claim that a closing ceremony took place 27 July in the Hasselbacken restaurant.

Manfred BERGMAN does totally disagrees.

An obvious misprint, it should be 5 May 1912.

Let us once and for all make it clear, we do not claim, we state that the closing of the Games, today called a closing ceremony (a term not in use in 1912), took place at Restaurant Hasselbacken 27 July.

1.5.1.(1)

It was a dinner organised by *Kungliga Svenska Segel Sällskapet* (Royal Swedish Yachting Society; KSSS), a private yacht club, not by the Olympic Organising Committee.

1.5.2.(2)

It was a banquet for yachtsmen only and the date was not 27 July, the date was 26 July.

1.5.2.(3)

Pierre de COUBERTIN did not attend the banquet in his capacity as IOC President and did not say the words "*I proclaim the Games closed*".

1.5.2.(4)

The final banquet in yachting is not mentioned in the *Official Report* as the Closing Ceremony.

It was organised by the 1912 Olympic Organising Committee through its committee for yachting, KSSS. It included the awards ceremony in yachting, the final banquet for the yachtsmen and the closing of the Games by the IOC President, Pierre de COUBERTIN.

The reason only yachtsmen were present is simple, the yachtsmen were the only Olympic competitors that were still around. The competitors and officials of all the other sports had already had their banquets. The penultimate sport Rowing had had its banquet July 19 or 20.

The date given in the festivities section of the *Official Report* is "*Saturday 26 July*". Saturday is correct, but 26 (which is Friday) is a misprint for 27. The correct date is to be found in the *Official Report*, in the general programme and in the yachting section.

Manfred BERGMAN has applied present-day criteria to the closing of the Games. That Pierre de COUBERTIN did not say "*I proclaim the Games closed*" is no argument that he did not close them. He delivered the closing speech and he did close the Games, but in other words. In the speech he spoke "*au nom du Comité International Olympique*", which he, according to the protocol, could not have done unless being the official representative, President, of the IOC.

Manfred BERGMAN again applies present-day criteria to 1912. There is no mention of a closing ceremony in the official reports for 1908 or 1912. Not even the final banquet is mentioned in the 1908 *Official Report* proper. Just in an appendix and just the speeches. You have to look hard, and to look very hard, to find the speech of the IOC Secretary-General, Count Eugenio Brunetta D'USSEAUX and the words "*Je proclame la cloture des Jeux Olympiques de Londres*". The concept of a separate closing ceremony had not been invented in 1908 and 1912. The Closing Ceremony was an innovation to the 1920 Olympic Games.

The attitude of Pierre de COUBERTIN

The ultimate authority to the question of closing the 1912 Olympic Games is Pierre the COUBERTIN, founder of the modern Olympic Games and President of the IOC at the times of the 1908 and 1912 Olympic Games. What is his opinion and what does he has to say in the matter?

In an article in the 1920 *Report of the American Olympic Committee* he says: "*Heretofore, the official closure of the Games had been announced at a final banquet*". Notice that he does not say "Closing Ceremony", just "*official closure*".

Does Manfred BERGMAN, or anyone else, doubt that "Heretofore" is not referring to the Games leading up to the 1920 Games, i. e. the Games immediately prior to the 1920 Games?

So, there is no doubt whatsoever, Pierre de COUBERTIN considered the Games being closed at the final banquets of both the 1908 and 1912 Olympic Games. In 1912 the final banquet happened to be for the yachtsmen.

Summary

To sum up. Manfred BERGMAN has based his view that the 1912 Games were not closed Saturday 27 July on a number of misconceptions and misunderstandings.

He has failed to notice that

1. the final banquet was organised by KSSS in its capacity as Organising Committee of the Olympic yachting events
2. the Awards Ceremonies, the presentation of medals, the Challenge Prize in the 6mR-class and the memorial plates to the owners of the medal-winning yachts, took place July 27 6.00 PM. Does anyone want to exclude the awards ceremonies from the Olympic Games?
3. the concept of and the term "closing ceremony" was unknown in 1912, thus no mention of it in the 1908 and 1912 *Official Reports*
4. Pierre de COUBERTIN held the closing speech in his capacity as President of the IOC
5. Pierre the COUBERTIN in his closing speech in fact closed the Games but not with the words "I proclaim the Games closed".
6. the date of the final banquet given in the festivities section of the 1912 *Official Report*, 26 July, is a misprint for 27 July.

Conclusion

The 1912 Olympic Games were closed Saturday 27 July 1912 by the IOC President, Pierre de COUBERTIN.

References

- Official Report of the 1908 Olympic Games
- Official Report of the 1912 Olympic Games
- Report of the American Olympic Committee 1920