

# CURLING AND MILITARY PATROL OLYMPIC DISCIPLINES IN 1924!?

by Karl Lennartz

Shortly before the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin a news which was of particular interest to those interested in Olympic history haunted the media. British journalist Doug GILLON claimed another gold medal for his country. He said that the curling competition in Chamonix in 1924 was an official Olympic event and not just a demonstration, as statistics claim. In his opinion the IOC had to change its official statistics in favour of Britain. Even though it is true that there are no official medal statistics that are corroborated by the help of Olympic historians, the IOC is hardly interested in such problems, especially if they are far from being solved. But the journalist needed an IOC opinion, made telephone calls and discussed with the information management department. There a "spokesman" supposedly said: "It was a demonstration in 1928, but for the 'International Week of Wintersports' all the winners of the events are considered as Olympic Champions." GILLON gathered from this that Britain won its first Winter Olympic gold medal not in 1936 when they won one at ice hockey, but as early as 1924.

But what exactly had happened in Chamonix in 1924? Let us take a look at the sources:

In the IOC there had been calls for the inclusion of winter sports competitions in the Olympic programme - or simply for Winter Olympics for quite a while. In London in 1908 there had been four competitions in figure skating and in Antwerp in 1920 there had been three in figure skating and one in ice hockey. In 1914 the IOC decided to include figure skating, speed skating and Nordic skiing in the programme for the planned 1916 Berlin Olympics; figure skating and speed skating were scheduled to take place in Berlin in February and Nordic skiing in the Black Forest. It was above all the Scandinavian IOC members who were opposed to the idea of Winter Olympics, as they feared the

end of their Nordic Games, which had existed since 1901. The IOC found a compromise with the organizers of the Games of the VIIIth Olympiad in Paris in 1924. They were allowed to hold an international winter sports week in Chamonix towards the end of January/beginning of February. It should be emphasized that this "winter sports week" was held with the same ceremonial as the Summer Olympics which followed later, i.e. the parade of teams led by flag bearers, a representative of the state opening the games, the Olympic Oath, the hoisting of the Olympic flag and a final ceremony where the medals are awarded, and a speech by the IOC president (COUBERTIN). Was this really still an international winter sports week? There were 16 competitions: four in Nordic skiing, five in speed skating, three in figure skating, 4/5er bobsleigh, ice hockey, curling and military patrol. In the *Official Report of the Games of the VIIIth Olympiad* they are all described as being on equal terms with the competitions of the Summer Games. Curling can be found under "épreuve No 141" on the pages 711 to 713, military patrol is described under No 139 and on the pages 701 to 703. Why these high numbers? The authors of the report and correspondingly the organizing committee regarded all competitions - winter and summer - as a whole. Only the medal and the diploma were different from the awards of the Summer Games.

The award for the top three competitors was designed by Raoul BÉNARD. On the front side there is a winter athlete slightly raising his arms into the air and holding in his hands a pair of ice-skates (right hand) and a pair of skis. In the background there are the Alps and probably Mont Blanc. On the reverse there is a lengthy 14-line inscription:

"CHAMONIX / MONT-BLANC / SPORTS  
D'HIVER / 25. JANVIER - 5. FÉVRIER  
1924 / ORGANISÉS / PAR LE / COMITÉ  
OLYMPIQUE FRANÇAIS / SOUS LE  
HAUT PATRONAGE / DU COMITÉ /  
INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIQUE / A  
L'OCCASION / DE LA CÉLÉBRATION DE  
LA / VIII<sup>e</sup> OLYMPIADE".<sup>1</sup>

Here the expression "winter sports week" is not used, either, and there is a connection with the summer games. It should be added that the bronze medal was awarded to all athletes as a keepsake.

Just like the best figure skaters or alpine athletes, the top three curling and military patrol teams received gold, silver and bronze medals, too.

The IOC Medal for the  
Participants in Curling  
and Military Patrol



What was the procedure of the summer games half a year later? There sports were practised which are expressly referred to as demonstrations in the Official Report. It was decided for the VIIIth Olympiad that Demonstrations should be organised. Prior to the Games - in 1922 or 1923 - COUBERTIN had devised "*Les Règles Générales des Jeux Olympiques*", also printed in the *Official Report* (pp. 77-78). Until then, people had, for the most part, managed without such rules. The *Régies Générales* can be considered an early version of the *Olympic Charter*, in which there is a section with the title "*Démonstrations*". It says that the organizing committee can allow the demonstration of two sports, a national one and one from another country. Similar procedures had already existed, for example in Stockholm in 1912. The French OC "exaggerated" and had youths demonstrate Basque Pelota, Canadian canoeing, French boxing, stick fencing, gymnastics and other performances (amongst others basketball and volleyball). As for the winter sports week, nothing was said about demonstrations, thus we have another indication that curling and military patrol were competitions just like the others.

At the 24th session in Prague in 1925 the IOC decided to establish the Winter Olympics.

One year later, at the session in Lisbon, St. Moritz was charged with the organization of the 1928 Winter Olympics. Subsequently, the IOC also decided to give the "Games in Chamonix" the name "1st Winter Olympics" (6th of May, 1926).

When the programme for the winter games in St. Moritz was laid down, curling was no more, and military patrol and Skijoring were called demonstration sports. Why was there no more curling? Why was the military patrol only a demonstration sport now? Surely, this had nothing to do with the military character of this competition. At that time, this was no delicate matter for the IOC yet. Otherwise, the modern pentathlon with its underlying legend and the many shooting competitions would not have been accepted. A more likely reason is that there was no international association for this "sport". In the 20's it was very important for the IOC that every sport should be subordinate to an international association. The amateur rule of this organization had to be interpreted at least as narrowly as that of the IOC. It was for lack of an umbrella organization that hockey was not included in the programme of 1924, and rugby and tug-of-war disappeared as well and have been missing to this day.

Thus, taking these sources into account, one must conclude that in Chamonix in 1924 curling and the military patrol were on equal terms with



**Medallists in the 1924 curling competition: 1st Great Britain, 2nd Sweden, 3rd France**

the other 14 competitions and that the IOC made no decision to exclude any competitions when it promoted the competitions of the winter sports week retrospectively. At best, one could argue that the reports of the sessions are so summary that they do not comprise everything that was discussed. However, resolutions were usually written down.

Now, what was the procedure of the curling competition? Four teams had announced their participation, but only three competed: FRA (six announcements, four participants), GBR (eight



**1924 military patrol Olympic medallists:  
1st Switzerland, 2nd Finland, 3rd France**

announcements, six participants) and SWE (eight announcements, eight participants). Switzerland (eight announcements) did not compete:

28th of January FRA SWE 18:10

29th of January GBR SWE 38:7

30th of January FRA GBR 4:46

Final result:

1. GBR (T. S. AIKMAN, D. G. ASTLEY, W. BROWN, J. MCLEOD, T. B. MURRAY and R. WELSH)
2. SWE (Team 1: Carl Wilhelm PETERSÉN, Ture ÖDLUND, Victor WETTERSTRÖM, Erik SEVERIN, Team 2: Johan Petter ÅHLÉN, Carl-Axel PETTERSSON, Karl-Erik WAHLBERG, Carl Axel KRONLUND)<sup>2</sup>
3. FRA (F. CURNOLLET, André GERARDS, A. BENEDIC, P. CANIVET)

In 1932, 1988 and 1992 curling was "really" a demonstration sport before in 1988 it was elevated to the Olympic "heaven" in 1988, with one competition for men and one for women. While for several decades the Royal Caledonian Club claimed responsibility, in 1966 the International Curling Federation was founded, since 1991 the World Curling Federation (WCF).

What works for curling, should also work for the military patrol. The medallists of this competition also ought to be incorporated into the lists and statistics. One officer, one sergeant and two soldiers did 30 km on skis. After they had covered some two thirds of this distance, there was a shooting round where the sergeant and the two soldiers had to shoot six times each at balloons which were 250 metres away. For each balloon they hit they were given a 30 second bonus.

Final result:

1. SUI 3:56:06 h (Denis VAUCHER, Anton JULEN, Alphons JULEN, Alfred AUFDENBLATTEN)
2. FIN 4:00:10 h (Väino Elias BREMER, Aku. Aukusti ESKELINEN, Heikki HIRVONEN, Martti Eemil LAPPALAINEN)
3. FRA 4:19:54 h (Camille MANDRILLON<sup>3</sup>, G. BERTHET, Maurice MANDRILLON, André VANDELLE)
4. TCH4:19:54 h  
dnf. ITA  
dnf. POL

#### Notes

- 1 On the diploma, there is a reference to the winter sports week, though.
- 2 Every team played one match. Whether all of the eight Swedes received a silver medal, is unknown so far.
- 3 Another indication that the military patrol was on equal terms with the other competitions is that the warrant officer Camille MANDRILLON took the Olympic Oath at the opening ceremony.