

# OLYMPIC IMPRESSIONS

By Mr. J. J. KEANE

(Member Olympic Games Committee)

EDITOR'S NOTE.—Mr. J. J. Keane, native of the Glen of Agherlow, on the Limerick side of the Tipperary border, is perhaps the best-known personality in Irish Athletics. Coming to Dublin in early manhood, he played much Gaelic Football before founding the famous Geraldine Club, for whom he won two All-Ireland championships—he was a powerfully built man with speed and dash.

Turning his attention to Athletics, he won many sprint prizes before becoming dual Irish champion in the 120 yards hurdles. Mr. Keane followed the late F. B. Dineen as President of the G.A.A. Athletic Council, a post which he occupied with distinction for 26 years. There were two amateur bodies in control of Irish Athletics then, and Mr. Keane set about bringing them together. His grit, determination and shrewd judgment of men and matters brought quick success, and he established the National Athletic and Cycling Association in 1922—bringing Athletics under unified control in the whole 32 counties.

Commissioned by the heads of the movement to secure international recognition for Ireland at the Olympic Games, Mr. Keane attended many councils before securing his object at the Paris Olympiad Meeting in 1922. It was a remarkable achievement in face of many difficulties.

Mr. Keane believes that our present international difficulties in Athletics could be overcome in a diplomatic way without loss of prestige. He has not yet given up hope of lending a hand in securing peace with honour. His impressions of the Berlin Olympiad make interesting reading.

—Ed. "An R."

I do not think it is any exaggeration to say that the Olympic Games which were held in Berlin last year attracted a greater volume of interest than any preceding Games. The Olympics were organised in their modern form by that famous sports-

man, Baron Pierre Coubertin, and an infinite debt of gratitude is due to him for the impetus and inspiration he provided to amateur sport the world over. The first meeting was held in Athens in 1896 and was attended by a satisfactorily large number of competitors from several countries, particularly U.S.A. The growth in the number of countries competing and the size of their teams at each succeeding meeting have been amazing, and the founder of the Games deserves the heartiest congratulations on the success achieved.

I have personal experience of five Games, but it is not my intention to enter into the history or comparison of them. I shall confine my remarks to these 1936 Berlin Games.

I arrived in Berlin on the evening of July 27th, which was three days before the opening of the Games. The object of arriving so early was for the purpose of the meeting of the International Olympic Committee to get through the agenda before the opening. I arrived rather late at night, with the result that I was only able to meet a few of my colleagues, the others having retired for the night. The next morning, when we all assembled at the meeting room, I felt as if I had been transported into a new world during the night. Assembled there were fifty representatives from all the nations of the world, and listening to the various languages and attempts at speaking different languages, was most amusing. Of course, French is the official language of the Games, and everyone understands and speaks that language to some extent. While there are so many varied nationalities, the greatest possible good fellowship exists between members; and no matter how Government may differ (and at the moment there are a great many countries not



in a very friendly spirit towards one another), yet the members of the International Committee are like one large family.

The items on the agenda are considered in a most friendly and business-like way. On this occasion the allotting of the 1940 Games was the most important item to be discussed. The two competing countries for the 1940 venue were Japan and Finland, and so important was the matter that discussion occupied the whole day. The pleadings of each country for favourable consideration was in language of exceptional merit. Finland being in Europe, I thought the voting power would be in their favour, but to the surprise of everyone Japan won by a pretty large majority. The Japanese representatives remained motionless for a time with joy, and the representatives of Finland were very disappointed. However, to the credit of the Fins, their representatives were the first to rush forward and congratulate the Japanese and guaranteed every possible support to make the Games in their country a success. This had now concluded the business of the International Olympic Committee, the next day being set apart for the opening ceremony.

In the morning, when the members appeared, to take part in the procession to the Stadium, we were agreeably surprised to find that a fleet of beautiful motor cars was placed at the disposal of the members of the International Olympic Committee for the duration of the Games.

This was only one indication of the hospitality which was afforded us during our visit. The German nation spared no expense to make this Olympiad the "best ever."

From the moment that one arrived at the German border one felt the enthusiasm and keenness with which everyone was imbued. Towns, hundreds of miles from Berlin, were gaily decked with the Olympic and German flags—the Olympic flag being five coloured circles interlocked against a white ground—symbolic of the friendly relations of the five continents.

In Berlin the streets were ablaze with decorations, wireless speakers in all main thoroughfares blared out information and instructions, and a huge holiday crowd jostled and mingled in the streets and cafes—from Bavarians in their picturesque leather costumes to stately Indians in pale blue turbans, and little Japanese carrying the inevitable camera which every one of them seemed to wear, as we would wear a hat.

The opening ceremony was superb in its dignity and impressiveness. No nation on earth can equal the Germans in the fervour of emotion, and as one stood in the huge Stadium watching the picked athletes of the world march in, watching them dip their standards to the salute of the Fuehrer, watching them stand to attention while a massed choir of thousands of voices sang the Olympic Hymn, one could feel almost tangibly the patriotism and pride of the German majority in that huge assembly.

The opening ceremony has been described in more lyric words than I have at my command. Suffice it to say that at no Olympiad at which I have attended has it been carried out with more impressive dignity.

Herr Hitler was present at the opening ceremony, together with his chief Ministers—and that was natural enough. One got a clearer indication, however, of the enthusiasm of the Fuehrer, from the fact that every day subsequently he was present, too, and watched each event with keenest interest, many of the winners being brought up to his box to be personally congratulated by him.

The Stadium itself must be one of the most superb in the world, worthy of comparison with the Wembley Stadium, and with the Soldiers' Field in Chicago, and the famous Bowl at Los Angeles. Oval in shape, it is superbly proportioned and built in tiers, each tier having balconies along the outside which enables spectators to enter and leave with the minimum of crowding. It is more than a mere Stadium, for in addition to a splendid arrangement of



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dressing rooms, baths, etc., there were huge post offices and refreshment rooms of all kinds. In fact, it was a small world in itself. Apart from the main Stadium, Reich Sportsfield included the finest polo ground in the world with accommodation for some 40,000 spectators; a swimming stadium with accommodation for 15,000, and various smaller pitches for hockey and basketball. The boxing stadium, which was also specially built for the occasion, had accommodation for 12,000 spectators, and cost, I understand, more than a quarter of a million pounds.

And now for a brief sketch of the outstanding performances. These, of course, were dealt with exhaustively in the newspapers at the time, but a description of the Olympic Games of 1936 would not be complete without reference to the amazing running of Jesse Owens, the coloured American athlete who made fresh history in Berlin. Owens not only won every event for which he entered, but he won them so easily and so effortlessly that his performances were almost unimpressive. In the 100 metres and 200 metres races his running was so well-balanced, so rhythmic, that he seemed to leave the others toiling behind—at least that was the impression one got, even though he may have only won by a matter of a yard or two. He was hardest pressed in the long jump, in which it was his final leap that gave him victory and a new world's record.

In regard to this particular event, it is of interest to note that Peter O'Connor, of Waterford, held the world's record for no less than 21 years.

It is a remarkable indication of the progress of athletics during the 20 years in which I have been so closely connected with the Games that the world's record in this, as in other events, has

moved steadily upwards, until one begins to wonder what limit can be set to man's achievement.

Next to Owens, in my mind, comes the superb 1,500 metres victory of Jack Lovelock, the fair-haired New Zealand boy, who is one of the keenest athletes with whom I have come in contact. Lovelock has not the terrific physical attributes of, for instance, his greatest rival, Glen Cunningham, of America, but he has studied athletics to a degree which few athletes take the trouble to cultivate, and his scientific application of training methods is of great interest. He claims that only once in a season can an athlete of his particular type reach the peak of perfection, and during the past summer he studied himself rigidly to achieve this peak at the time of the Olympic Games. He was beaten on a couple of occasions by the Englishman, Wooderson, in races prior to the Olympic Games, but subsequent events proved that these defeats merely indicated that the races were part of Lovelock's preparations for the biggest test of all. In the race itself Lovelock was content to remain in the rearguard until more than half the race was run, and in the last lap came out with a long sprint, stronger and more sustained than any I have ever seen in a race of this distance.

There were other features of the athletic portion of the Games which are worthy of mention, but perhaps the most interesting for us is the hammer-throwing—a sport in which Ireland has always been pre-eminent. On only one occasion since the Games were inaugurated—in 1896—has any but an Irishman won this event. This was in 1924, when Houser, of U.S.A., won in Paris. Moreover, Houser could claim Irish blood upon his mother's side, so that the victory of Hein, the brilliant German, broke the remarkable sequence of Irish victories. I have never seen such wonderful hammer-throwing. With almost every throw, Hein was out to the Olympic record mark, and with almost every throw he sent the ball sailing out straight from the circle with an accuracy which betokened perfect timing. It is a remarkable fact that O'Callagh-

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an's winning throw of 1932 at Los Angeles would only have gained sixth place on this occasion, so greatly improved was the general standard of competition. But the world's record is still held by an Irishman, Paddy Ryan, Limerick.

It is worthy of note that at one time Irishmen held more records than any other country in the world. Unfortunately, from one cause or another, athletics were more or less neglected. There is some first-class material in the country still, and, thanks to the managers of our colleges and schools, some splendid material was produced during the last few seasons. Last year I was present when a boy jumped 5 feet 8 inches, though scarcely 17 years of age. You will no doubt agree with me this was a marvellous performance. He is only one of many who are capable of great things. I doubt if you could find better boys in any part of the world; yet, sad to relate, when these boys leave the colleges and schools they are scarcely heard of again. In foreign countries every encouragement is given to the students to train. The members of our own Government are becoming very much interested in the welfare of amateur sport, and, I have no doubt, within a few years something will be done to enable the youth of our country to regain our lost athletic prestige.

To give an idea of the difference between the old time methods and the present day, records are as follows:—

- 100 metres—1896, 12 seconds; 1936, 10 3/5th seconds.
  - 200 metres—1896, 22 1/5th seconds; 1936, 20 2/10th seconds.
  - 400 metres—1896, 54 1/5th seconds; 1936, 46 5/10th seconds.
  - 1,500 metres—1896, 4 minutes 33 seconds; 1936, 3 minutes 47 seconds.
  - 16—1896, 46ft. 3 seconds; 1936, 53.2.
- Noteworthy features of the Games,

besides the Athletics, were the splendid swimming of the Japanese and the diving of the Americans, who once more made a clean sweep of all the diving events. Japan has made astounding progress in the space of a very few years, and in no sport has this been shown more clearly than in swimming. They won a majority of the events, but a word of praise must be given to the Hungarian, J. Cziki, whose victory in the 100 metres astonished the world. This race has been regarded as a match between the American and the Japanese, and Cziki's victory was as brilliant as it was unexpected.

There were numerous team games—association football, field handball, basket ball, and hockey, and in these the outstanding feature was the brilliant play of the Indian hockey team. Their stick work and combination had to be seen to be appreciated, and they went through the Olympic tournament without default; indeed, it would not be too much to say that they outclassed every other team against whom they competed.

Ireland's absence from the Games was criticised by many Germans who were not associated with any of the sporting organisations, and I want it to be made perfectly clear to everyone that Ireland's absence from these Games was not as a result of any objection to the management of the internal affairs of Germany. It was, as everybody here knows, the result of differences of opinion between the International Athletic Federation and our home Athletic Organisation. It was remarkable the popularity of our country in Central European and other countries, and the scene which I witnessed in Los Angeles, when Bob Tisdall and Dr. O'Callaghan won their events on the same day, will never be forgotten. As you are aware, Tisdall won the 400 metres, and Dr. O'Callaghan the

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hammer. When Dr. O'Callaghan was taking his last throw the enthusiasm of the spectators and their shouts of encouragement to the doctor were unprecedented in the history of the Games. 80,000 people stood on the seats and roared encouragement. Eventually the loud-speaker announced, "Would you please keep quiet and give him a chance." In an instant there was dead silence. The doctor proceeded to take his throw, and before the hammer had landed the public realised that he had secured victory, and it was the first time during the entire games that I thought the crowds of people would break through the barriers to congratulate him on his victory.

Amateur sport is the greatest asset any country can possess, and great credit is due Herr Hitler for what he has done for amateur games in Germany. Every day during the athletic

performances he was to be found in his position at the Stadium giving encouragement to his boys to secure victories for young Germany. It was not lost time—the progress in the various lines of sport was remarkable. In 1932 Germany scarcely won an event in Los Angeles, and this year they had a points victory over the greatest athletic country in the world—America.

In conclusion, I should like to say how pleased I was to receive from the Government Charge d'Affaires, Dr. Koesser, on behalf of his Government, the presentation of the German Olympic Decoration, First Class, which was awarded to me in recognition of my services in the organisation of the Olympic Games. It was a very happy gesture upon the part of the German Government, and one which I shall always cherish.



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