

**No. 2**

**The Nordic Games:**

**Visions of Olympic Winter Games or a National Festival?**

Jens Ljunggren & Leif Yttergren

**Introduction**

In 1901 the first Nordic Games were arranged in Stockholm by Sweden's Central Association for the Promotion of Sports (Centralförening for idrottens framjande - CF). The Association had been founded in 1897 and was characterized by a socially exclusive membership group. The officers' corps dominated the Association's governing board, but there were also many businessmen and entrepreneurs, high ranking civil servants and politicians involved. Many of the nation's influential politicians became members of the Association.<sup>1</sup> In total the Nordic Games were organized seven times: 1901, 1903, 1905, 1909, 1913, 1917, 1922, and 1926. All Games took place in Stockholm with the exception of the 1903 event, which was held in Kristiania (Oslo), under the title Nordic Winter Sport's Week. As the Norwegian name suggests, the Games lasted for one week. The events were extensive and grand, and were not far behind the modern Olympic Games. Nordic Games were also planned for 1930 and 1942, however, for various reasons, they never came to fruition.

**The Turn of the Century 1900 - National Romanticism, the Nordic Movement, and the Age of Oscar**

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the National Romantic trends made their way into art, literature, and architecture. Artists such as Anders Zorn, Bruno Liljefors, and Carl Larsson who are still among the most popular painters, made their breakthroughs in that era. The extremely conservative ruler, Oscar II, left his imprint on much of the fashionable cultural life. The dominant style around the turn of the century, sometimes referred to as Oscarism, was dominated by the values and ideals of the upper middle classes. Oscarism bore many similarities to English Victorianism in questions of morals, and to the German Empire's sense of pomp, bombast, and self-glorification.

Just as during other periods of time, society was influenced by several ideological currents. During the last part of the nineteenth century a rising interest in things pre-Nordic as well as in Nordism was also noticeable.<sup>2</sup> Several Nordic organizations and associations were founded, whose goals were to increase understanding among the Nordic peoples.<sup>3</sup>

It is noteworthy that Finland was not included in the Nordic community. Finland's exclusion was probably due to the language barrier and its relationship to Russia. On the whole, there was seldom any differentiation between Scandinavia and the Nordic Countries. It was Sweden that was the driving force in the creation of the Nordic identity, and this was also the case with the Nordic Games. It is against that backdrop that both the initiation of the Games in 1901 and the selection of their name should be seen.

## The Start of the Games

The original impetus for the Nordic Games came from the professor and ophthalmologist Johan Widmark. By combining a series of sports competitions with various festive events, the desire was to create something *"unique for the North in terms of sports and truly worthwhile"*. It was hoped to attract participants from the entire North and from Europe by means of a large program. Even aesthetic elements or, as it was expressed at the time, "spiritual sports", were, therefore, to be showcased with the intention of providing a comprehensive picture of northern winter life. The event was to develop the nation's sportsmanship and at the same time create bonds between the northern countries by *"developing into nordic national feasts of great measure and import, and becoming the highpoint of the winter season."*

In 1899 CF reached the decision that the first Games would be arranged in Stockholm in 1901. The year was regarded as suitable as the Olympics were being organized in Paris in 1900.<sup>5</sup> The risk of competition and the arrangement of too many different events was less in 1901.

CF had been founded in 1897 at Stockholm's Royal Palace. Viktor Balck, Sven Hermelin, and Clarence von Rosen, all high-ranking military officers and well-known nationalists on the political right, were behind its founding. The board of directors consisted of people from society's highest stratum. High-ranking military officers were clearly the largest single professional category.<sup>6</sup> Several of them also held leadership positions in the early Swedish sports' movement.

Thus, they had considerable influence over the ideological and practical orientation of the sporting movement at the turn of the century.

It was no coincidence that it was CF that was behind the games. CF was the only athletic organization in Sweden around the turn of the century which had the capability of arranging such a large event. CF had the money, the personal resources, and the contacts. CF's attitude towards sports affected the shape and the orientation of the games. The organization used the Games to achieve its own goals, and these were to be found both within and outside of sports.

Why did CF decide to devote itself to the winter games? Probably the Olympics played an important role. There was the wish to avoid competition, but nationalistic motives can also be discerned:

*"// is in the winter season that we in Scandinavia are able to achieve a sport week as no other people in Europe, and we should hold our banner high where we are able; we should make the Swedish name known and respected. That has thus been a fundamental idea with the arrangement of the Nordic Games."*

It is apparent that the Nordic Games were something more than an ordinary sports competition. They should be seen as part of an older desire within Swedish sports. Swedish "sports" had, since the days of P. H. Ling, found nourishment both in ideals from classical and northern antiquity which had led to a fusion of Swedish nationalism with Nordic and Scandinavian identity. Moreover from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a dream of national sports festivals which could unite the entire population.<sup>8</sup> The inspiration came from the ancient Greek Olympiads.<sup>9</sup>

The contours of these arguments must be seen against the background of the contemporary intellectual climate. The idea of a national sports festival obtained renewed relevance at the turn of the century when concerted attempts to nationalize the population were made, embracing even the lower social strata which otherwise stood outside the bourgeois-dominated national movement. Turn-of-the-century Sweden was characterized by an intensive manifestation and celebration of national traits and traditions. In 1893, the Swedish flag day was celebrated for the first time; in 1894, the birthday of Gustav II Adolf was ostentatiously marked; and 1897 saw the Stockholm Exhibition.<sup>10</sup> It is in this context that the Nordic Games and the dictums concerning a national peoples' festival should be considered.

That the Games were to take place during the winter season was, according to Balck, only natural in light of the fact that it was the specifically northern aspect of the Swedish identity which was to be celebrated. During the winter, something could also be shown which could not in other European nations. Here the Swedish name was to be "known and regarded". The ancient idea of a peoples' festival was thus provided with yet another aspect. It was not only a case of furthering internal national consolidation but also of creating publicity for Sweden in other countries. Sweden, as a nation and as a tourism destination, was to be advertised. The purely idealistic nationalistic ambitions had thus been complemented with a commercial aspect.

The structuring of the Games becomes comprehensible against this background. The Games included a number of different activities such as hot-air ballooning, fishing expeditions in the Stockholm archipelago, visits to Skansen, theater, fireworks, and ordinary bandy. Even some non-winter sports were included, such as fencing, motor sports and riding. The Games were arranged in cooperation both with the Swedish Tourist Association (STF) and Skansen (an open air museum located in central Stockholm which was inaugurated in 1891 with the purpose of preserving farms, houses, churches and schools from the Swedish countryside). The Swedish Consulate in foreign countries was engaged in propaganda for the games, for instance in distributing material to the foreign newspapers which could not send their own representatives to the Games. The commercial tourism of the Nordic Games was very easily combined with the idealistic nationalist ambitions. Tourism was actually considered a way both to discover and market the nation.

During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, means of communication had developed dramatically in Europe through steam boat traffic, but above all through an increased railway network, in Sweden especially during the 1870's. Technically, one could now travel in a manner entirely different from ever before, which led to the development of the tourist industry. According to Hobsbawm, tourism was a middle class phenomenon. Neither the aristocracy nor the lower social groups travelled in the same manner. This sight-seeing and travelling bourgeoisie was above all drawn towards the Mediterranean, but also to the Alps where many tourists interested in sports, and notably the British, travelled to ski, hike and climb mountains.<sup>14</sup> Now even Sweden wanted to compete for these tourists.

During the week in which the Nordic Games were held there was also a series of festive events. In addition to the events at Skansen, the Opera and the Grand Theater, dinners and banquets were arranged. These were splendid social events where, for example, the king, the organizers of the Games, prominent foreign guests and Stockholm society participated. The fishing expeditions in the Archipelago were another activity where partying and social life were central. While the Nordic Games officially were motivated as a sports-active peoples' festival, they were also presented - but not as clearly - as an important aspect of the

social calendar and the habits of the upper classes. The following quotation from an advertising brochure directed towards a foreign market underlines this point:

*"The winter is the season par preference for fashionable gatherings in Stockholm, which then take the form of numerous entertainments, at which the many younger members of the Royal Family are often present. Enjoyable and, very often, really brilliant festivities in society circles follow each other in rapid succession, and the Northern Games have always opened the doors for many visitors from abroad to the hospitable homes in the capital of Sweden. The Northern Games have become quite as much a society function as a popular out-door sporting festival for a great part of the population of the city during the course of the second week of February."<sup>15</sup>*

The activities of the Central Association and Viktor Balck were generally directed upwards, towards higher social strata. To raise the status of sports and to give them a place in family life had also been indicated as one of the purposes behind the Nordic Games.<sup>16</sup> This certainly does not mean that people from other social categories could not enjoy or follow the various sporting competitions.

### **The Structure of the Games - Sports as Theatre**

The Nordic Games were, as we have said, not only sports competitions but also theater, gala performances at the Opera, excursions to the archipelago, parades and celebrations. In this way they were surrounded by a number of symbolic attributes. Special aims lay behind the Nordic Games and in this symbolic language values which corresponded well with the ideology found in the expressions of principle could be discerned.

By studying and interpreting the concrete structuring of the Games not only their ideology but also the other roles which the event can have played for its age can be investigated. What did contemporary society see in these Games? It is of course difficult to gauge how visitors experienced these competitions, but it is at least possible to analyze the reports of journalists. Here different perceptions and evaluations of the Games can be observed, not only in coherent discussions of principle but even in the reports on individual competitions. It is naturally not without risk to try to deduce from newspaper accounts how the readers themselves viewed the Games, but one can assume that the journalistic reports satisfied the needs of their readers. The manner of describing the Games was common to many different newspapers and similar from year to year.

First we will investigate how different symbols were used during the Games and then how certain politically conservative and liberal newspapers - Stock-holms Dagblad, Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet - reported. They primarily turned to a well situated public, above all the first two. Thereafter the Games are considered from another angle using the criticism which also was presented and where social conflicts were revealed.

The annual inauguration of the Games was very theatrical and based upon significant episodes in Swedish history. The inaugural day was a general flag day and a group of heralds rode through the city to proclaim this. This took place every day for the duration of the Games. The proclamation of the heralds was as follows:

*"Under King GustafV's benign and forceful protection the Nordic Games in male sports are held in this city. The citizens of Stockholm are encouraged to support*

*these Games with all devotion and by watching them, to provide themselves with pleasure. This is the first day of the Nordic Games."*<sup>17</sup>

This citation shows the important role of the royal personage for the Nordic Games. The Crown Prince, who was the chairman of the Central Association, had himself been active in the genesis of the Games. The members of the royal family followed the games diligently and often took part, in the ceremonies by distributing awards. In 1913, the king was nominated the "high protector" of the Games.<sup>18</sup>

In connection with many of the activities that took place during the Games, the nation's past heroic kings were commemorated. Skansen's mid-winter feast 1901 was a purely theatrical festival exemplifying the glorification of hero kings and the nation's history. The entire area had been decorated with torches and two alternating bands entertained the public with national music. Sentries in 17<sup>th</sup> century costume guarded the grounds. But suddenly the calm is broken as one of them cries: "To arms!". Gustav II Adolf comes galloping in. Several other Swedish kings were present - Gustav Vasa was of course represented. On this occasion he was hidden in a bale of hay and followed by his men of Dalekarlia. The evening's festivities concluded with fireworks.

As has been mentioned, the Nordic Games were held in cooperation with Skansen and many activities took place there. It was also Skansen's image of Sweden that the Nordic Games promoted. The Swedish people were presented, in the spirit of the "homestead movement", as idealized rural peasants. The same quaint image of Sweden characterized performances given at the Grand Theater and the Opera. There dramas about northern history were presented, northern melodies performed, the Swedish peasants in their "picturesque" folk costumes were lined up, homage was paid to the king, Caroline and ancient nordic motifs admired.<sup>20</sup>

Sweden's rural heritage was thus honored along with the nation's heroic kings and honourable history. As we have seen, national rhetoric intensified on many fronts at the turn of the century. Sweden's glorious past was a very important component in the patriotism of this age. The conception existed that ancient Swedes were a united people who always stood up for the nation and its monarch. There was also a didactic message behind this belief, which many Swedes believed that the discontented working class should partake of.<sup>22</sup>

At this time, the nations were also seen as participants in a continuous contest. The contest not only included the areas of industrial, economic or technical development but also age, size and beauty. To possess a distinct national style and a national culture laden with tradition was, therefore, very advantageous. At the great World Fairs which were held in various parts of the west from the middle of the nineteenth century, industrial capacity and innovative potential were the primary focus. Very soon, however, even folk culture was discovered as something that could attract a public. Consequently, nations competed in demonstrating the most lively folk culture. In Sweden, both ancient nordism and the peasant style were mobilized in connection with the *Nordic Games*.

It is thus obvious that in connection with the Nordic Games there existed a symbolic language loaded with politics and ideology. This is especially true about the official festivity arrangements and the many non-sport activities also arranged. Peasant romanticism was mixed with "Gotianism" (i.e, celebration of the ancient Nordic past), nationalism and royalism.

## The Nordic Games and the Winter Olympics

Did the highest leadership in sport in Sweden wish to establish Winter Olympic Games? Was it not natural to follow in the path of the Summer Olympics? The literature in the history of sport suggests that there were such intentions: *"The goal was to thus create something for winter sports to correspond with the Olympic Games for summer sports."*<sup>2\*</sup> The press of the day also on occasion called the Nordic Games the "winter's Olympic Games" or something similar. The following study shows, however, that CF had not Olympic ambitions. Several factors speak against the attempt to link together the Nordic Games and the Olympics:

- Ideology
- Swedish opposition to the Winter Olympics
- Chronology
- The program of the Games.

It has earlier been shown how strong the ideological motive was for the establishment of the Games. According to *Ny tidning for Idrott* (New Magazine for Sports), the CF publication, Swedish support was essential:

*"The most fundamental implications of the Nordic Games have been, in addition to the fostering of a hardy species, the rallying of the Swedes around something really national. It has long been a weakness among us that we have not had something acceptably national, which could assemble the entire people..."*

These ideas are far from Pierre de Coubertin's concepts of internationalism, brotherhood among peoples, and peace. In contrast to Balck, Coubertin was an internationalist and a humanist. Balck has rather been fittingly called the "trumpet of the fatherland."<sup>28</sup> Glimpses may also be seen in isolated comments in the newspapers that indicate that the Games should in no way be confused with the Olympic Games. The Games were regarded as better serving their goal as a national festival. It was better to allow the large countries to develop the Olympic Games.<sup>29</sup> There was thus an ideological gap between the two athletic events.

In both Sweden and Norway, there was also strong opposition to the introduction of Winter Olympics. Norwegian skiers nearly did not participate in the Second Winter Olympics in 1928 in St. Moritz. There was dissatisfaction from Norway with the fact that their national sport, skiing, was being steered by the International Skiing Association and International Olympic Committee. Similar sentiments were expressed by Swedish leaders in the field, but these diminished successively when the Swede Ivar Holmqvist was elected President of the International Skiing Association in 1924.<sup>31</sup> Adolf Murray, one of the central figures in the Nordic Games, expressed irritation over the fact that skiing was included in the 1924 Olympic program. He was of the opinion that it had an unfortunate effect on the "national work". Furthermore, it was said that there was only the need for "Nordic" contests in the Games.<sup>32</sup>

The organizers of the Nordic Games were negative towards all participation in the Olympics, as Sweden was opposed to *"the inclusion of winter Sports in the program of the Olympic Games."* Opposition to the Olympics even appeared at a practical level. Swimming was excluded from the 1922 Games with the motivation that swimming belonged to the Olympic program. The organizers maintained that Sweden's opposition to the inclusion of winter sports in the Olympic program could be weakened, if Olympic sports were allowed in the Nordic Games.<sup>33</sup>

Chronology also speaks against the conception that the Nordic Games were a forerunner of the Winter Olympics. The first Winter Olympics were organized in Chamonix, France in 1924. Over several years the Winter Olympics and the Nordic Games were arranged or planned side-by-side. The New Nordic Games were also planned for 1930, (1934), and 1942. The rivalry between the two winter arrangements appears to have been minimal, at least from the side of the organizers of the Nordic Games. These Games and the Winter Olympics were two separate events with different content and ideology.

To provide further evidence, the programs of the Games have been studied. The purpose is to demonstrate that the Games have a wholly or partially different program than the Winter Olympics. As was mentioned earlier, the Nordic Games initially had both an athletic and a tourist element. Thus is evident in the declaration in the first program:

*"To give a more comprehensive picture of life in the Nordic countries in the wintertime, the arrangement of such a sports festival should also have an esthetic element, or the spiritual recreations should take their places at the side of the physical, as was the case in our ancient admired athletic events and contests."*

What were then the various points on the program? A study of the programs shows that the selection varied sharply and to a certain extent differed between the Games. There was, however, a kind of basic program consisting of skiing, curling, equine sports, bandy, ice skating, and marksmanship.<sup>35</sup> The 1901 and the 1926 games will serve to illustrate further the contents of the Games (see appendix 1).

In the first Games pure athletic contests were combined with theatre, parties, excursions, exhibitions, and banquets. The program bore the stamp of upper middle class lifestyle. It contained some elements that seem peculiar in contemporary eyes, such as skiing behind horses, hunting from horses, sleigh riding, sledding, a torch light parade on skis, visits to Skansen (the open air museum in Stockholm), fishing trips, rides on ice breakers, etc. Additionally, there were pure athletic contests on the highest level. In 1901, the World Championship in speed skating was held during the Nordic Games. Furthermore, attempts were made to introduce and popularize winter sports such as ice boating, kick sledding, and ice sailing on skates. The newspapers, however, devoted the most attention to the skiing and skating contest.

Some criticism appeared in the newspapers concerning the comprehensive program. Some of the papers expressed the opinion that it was difficult to follow all of the different contests; others maintained that there were too many circus-like exhibitions, and yet others reacted to the many banquets that were limited to the "noblesse". Individual newspapers (in a typical Lingian spirit) also criticized the altogether too intensive competition. The critics, however, were clearly in the minority. For the most part, the press was very positive towards the Games regardless of political colour.

For the 1926 Games, several points on the program had been changed in comparison with the earlier events. The greatest difference was that only the "real" winter sports were included. Thus, automobile and motorcycle riding and sledding had been removed from the program, as had the competitions in winter sports for school youths. One sport which had also been excluded was kick sledding. It had its heyday around the turn of the century, when Swedish national championships were arranged during the 1905 games.

One new event in the 1922 Games was ice hockey. It had been of interest earlier, with minute halves and six man teams with the right to two substitutes. The field was surrounded by planks "at the height of a man" which acted as the boards. Ice hockey was only coolly received by the press, especially in comparison with bandy.

To view the Nordic Games as some kind of forerunner to the Olympic Winter Games is thus doubtful and bears the mark of anachronism. There is every reason to compare the events.

In 1896 in Athens, 311 athletes from thirteen countries participated, and in the first Winter Olympics in 1924 there were 294 participants from seventeen countries.<sup>37</sup> It should be pointed out that it has been difficult to obtain information on the number of participants in the Nordic Games, and in several cases the information in the press and in the records varies considerably. They are in agreement, however, in regard to the 1909 Games. About 2,000 people took part in the Games. Of these, more than half were marksmen, probably many military men, and nearly 300 participated in the horse racing. The foreign representation consisted of 32 persons from eight countries. The Games were thus primarily an event by, and for, Swedes. They did not in any way have the same international stamp as the Olympics.

### **The Debate over the Skiers from Norrland**

The criticism directed towards the Games of 1901 and 1905 came primarily from a group of journalists who felt that they represented the sportsmen and the working class public, but one cannot know with certainty that they really shared the feelings of the journalists. In 1922, however, some of those concerned voiced their opinions in a more direct manner. These were the skiers from Norrland who felt that they had been unfairly treated and who, therefore, protested, threatening to leave the Swedish Skiers' Association and form an independent association for Norrland. The conflict in the first place erupted over the size of awards given but in fact reflected social and geographical conflicts.<sup>38</sup>

The protesting skiers maintained that skiing had been placed in the background in favour of other "so-called winter sports events", sledding for instance.<sup>3</sup> What irritated them most was the fact that the sled riders had received more and better prizes. In addition, this year's relay race had been very badly organized. The skiers from Norrland held that skiing was a real sport with real sportsmen who fought for victory. Sledding was, however, an upper class diversion - it was in fact open to debate whether this could be called a sport at all.

The organizers of the games and the conservative Stockholm press delivered a strong rebuttal. Alex Lindman called the protest "not only stupid", but "malicious and naive". The general committee was not even involved in this issue. The organizers of each sporting event were responsible for collecting towards the awards. The skiers had, moreover, been given substantial sums towards deferment of their travel expenses and other costs. Many

fine prizes had been awarded to them. Since the skiers were numerous and divided into several classes, it was only natural that each award was somewhat smaller. The sled riders, on the other hand, belonged to a high social stratum and had, therefore, been able to obtain more valuable awards for this category.

But the protest also won support, and not even the conservative Stockholm newspapers were entirely unanimous in their condemnation. Skiing traditionally had an especially valued position in Sweden, partly because of its role in the defense of the nation.<sup>41</sup>

In Dagens Nyheter, Mr. Jones (a pseudonym) placed himself on the side of the protesters from Norrland and pointed out that the skiers had been humiliated during the award ceremonies at Hasselbacken when sledding, curling, races and military sports, which actually were irrelevant in the context of *Nordic Games*, had been assigned a more prominent role. At the same time that the three Nordic countries had met in order to compete in "serious sports", attention had been diverted by "Misses' sports and society games". The social character of the conflict could clearly be seen:

*"The protest of the skiers may be taken for what it is: it is not a hunger for awards that has arrived out of the blue, but rather the product of the feeling of the skiers after the grandiose tails- and display event at Hasselbacken. How should a plain man from Norrland or a man from Dalekarlia in rough homespun clothing and grain leather shoes feel in the face of this throng dressed in tails and these ladies in grand attire, who with a minimum of dutiful interest raise their lorgnettes towards the sportsmen stepping forth for their awards and who surely cannot truly understand that so much is written of these men?"<sup>42</sup>*

The upper class character was thus clearly focused in this debate: the homespun men of Norrland versus the snobbish Stockholmers. Mr. Jones advised the organizers to arrange more activities directed towards the population at large next time. Even other newspapers took the same line and contrasted entertaining salon sports with "real" sports. It was emphasized that the general public stood on the side of the skiers.<sup>43</sup> The leftist newspaper *Politiken*<sup>44</sup> spoke of the decline of Swedish competitive sports. Sled riding was pure "humbug" whose only purpose was to *"show off shapely legs, a rosy face and white teeth as well as an elegant sports attire, the latest fashion and, as a reward for these superhuman efforts receive a prize, which could make Salschow green with envy"*.

The discussion took place on two different levels. On the one hand, it took up varying views of how sports should be carried out and sports competitions arranged; on the other hand, it revealed clear social conflicts. In the context of the upper class symbolic language which characterized the games, many felt excluded, the critics said. This mixture of social criticism and positions of principles concerning standards for sports seems to have had a background in the fact that peoples' attitudes to sports are formed by lifestyles and normative systems. Much has been written on this subject.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu maintains that the working class has an instrumental relationship to the body. They use it to attain larger goals, to win sports competitions or obtain success. Therefore, exertion, self sacrifice, endurance and subjugation under collective discipline are appreciated. Upper strata, however, have a more distanced relation to their exercise of sports.<sup>46</sup>

That bourgeois respective physical labourer sports was not the same thing was further underlined by Bode Janzons dissertation where the early sports movement in Goteborg has been investigated. Those sportsmen who came from a middle class background emphasized the health aspects in their sportsmanship and were relatively uninterested in advanced competition. Doctors warned against over-exertion. In the press, the *Nordic Games* were also praised for not having let sound and health-promoting sports be replaced by onesidedness and sports idiocy.<sup>48</sup> Opposing views were, however, expressed.

Completely different norms and values prevailed in the worker-dominated associations. There are indications that it was here that one first began to show an interest for continual and specialized training and competition activity. The members of these associations were unaffected by the middle class normative system which strongly emphasized the importance of moderation, restraint, control, balance and self-discipline. The workers, used to physical exertion and on the whole living according to other values, were less inhibited in their relationship to competitive sports.<sup>49</sup>

It is one variation of this discrepancy of which we have seen an example in the debate over skiing versus sledding. The debate was not only about skiing versus sledding, curling and military sports. The discussion was extended to include the Games in general. Should they continue to be a social event, as they had been up to now, or should they be concentrated in the direction of becoming a pure sports competition?

Stockholmstidningen (liberal), which also took the part of the skiers, pointed out that while it was correct that every organizer should take care of awards within his branch, the protesters were still in the right, since the issue in truth was whether *the "Nordic Games should become a true competition in winter sports or a large social event with all kinds of more or less sportive points on its program ..."*<sup>50</sup>

*Stockholms Dagblad* was opposed to limiting the program. A major reduction had already been made this year in that swimming and fencing had been deleted. If one went further in this direction the Games would lose their character of a display of all northern sports. The meaning of the Games would be completely lost. The event would no longer stand apart from everyday life, neither for us nor for foreigners, for *"what kind of special festivity would be displayed by such a competition?"*<sup>51</sup>

In the background, we can also sense the issue of amateurism. The skiers were criticized for desiring monetary gain, which was condemned with the argument that sports were a reward in themselves through a sound mind in a sound body, and in honour, which was more important than money.<sup>52</sup> Research has shown that even the amateur issue had social aspects. The upper social strata could afford to be amateurs. The concept itself was in line with their moderated conception of physical sports. For working class sportsmen, economic rewards were often essential in order to afford both training and competition.<sup>53</sup>

## **The Death Throes**

In October 1931, RF appointed a three person committee to study the future organization of the Games. The intention was to arrange the Games again in 1934. There was, however, a one-year delay before the question was again taken up by RF. Then the 1901 idea that the Games should alternate between Sweden, Norway, and Finland was renewed. There were probably economic reasons behind this. RF reached no decision during 1932 about the

continuation of the Games, and shelved the question.<sup>54</sup> In 1933, however, it was decided that no Games would be held in 1934 out of consideration for the international ski competition being held in Solleftea the same year. RF also wanted to study the question further, which was also done.<sup>55</sup> In 1933 the question was taken up in the RF's Executive Board, where it caused a long and intensive discussion. The Crown Prince, who was also the chairman of the Olympic Committee, clearly had doubts about the continuation of the Games. He argued that the weather was uncertain and that other contests competed with the Games. He accepted, however, the proposal for an investigation, which was also decided upon.

After the RF's discussion, the Nordic Games appear to have been forgotten. Perhaps that was because there was no individual or organization to further the matter. The question was decided in the so-called Faelleskommittén. This was a cooperative committee of the Nordic national athletic associations which was founded in 1916.<sup>57</sup> In 1934 a decision was made that further study about the future of the Games would be made in 1935. After that the Nordic Games disappeared from the Committee's agenda.

Thus the games lacked any type of organizational motivation or personnel after 1930. CF, Balck, and Lindman were totally or partially out of the picture. RF's special organization was split on the question of its continuation, nor did RF appear to be eager to bring matters to a head. The issue was allowed to disappear by being tabled and studied until it was nearly forgotten.

### **The 1942 Fiasco**

During the middle of the War, a group of leading Swedish sportsmen, with Sixtus Jansson, Bo Ekelund, and Ernst Bredberg at the head, again tried to arrange the Nordic Games in Stockholm in 1942. This time it was not just the typical winter sports that were to be promoted, but other branches also were to be found on the program. According to the initiators it would be more comprehensive than earlier. Thus fencing, handball, bowling, gymnastics, and even wrestling, boxing, weight-lifting, swimming, and tennis were to be included.

Both CF and RF supported the idea. The chairman of the Organizing Committee was the sports-interested Prince Gustav Adolf, who was the chairman of both CF and RF. The decision was thus well grounded in the dominant athletic organizations. However, this was not the case among the press or in the government, which would soon become aware.

The decision awakened a strong reaction in the press, particularly for the lack of understanding of the plight of the Norwegians. In *Socialdemokraten*, the sport journalist and former track star Edwin Wide, sharply criticized the decision. He argued that it was a knife in the back of the struggling Norwegian sport, and that some Swedes had "little heart and feelings" for the Norwegians. It should be pointed out that the Norwegian sport's strike against the attempts of the German occupiers to intervene in Norwegian athletics was at its height. If the Swedish plans had been realized, probably only Nazi sympathizers or strike-breakers would have come from Norway to the Games. The remainder was on strike.<sup>60</sup>

After the Organizing Committee submitted its request, the government also determined that it was unfitting to arrange new Nordic Games with reference to the War. After the negative reply from the government, the Organizing Committee decided to cancel the Games, and no new effort has been made to revive them.

## Conclusion

The *Nordic Games* were motivated in several different ways. They were to promote Nordism and nationalism through their structure as a national, sport-active peoples' festival. They were to advertise Sweden as a site of tourism. They were to propagate for sports and particularly winter sports. At the same time, they seem to have been one of the large social events for the upper middle class.

In the press, the Games and the ideology surrounding them were received with widespread approval. But there was also criticism. In the newspaper debate, the opposition between the concept of the peoples' festival on the one hand and the upper middle class character on the other emerged. It is naturally difficult to determine how the man in the street really perceived the situation. The criticism of the Games came primarily from the liberal and socialist press. Those affected seldom directly voiced their opinion, with the exception of the protest of the skiers from Norrland in 1922. But in the criticism from the press, it was maintained that the event all too greatly was characterized by upper middle class values and that people with another cultural background felt excluded. It was, however, not only the general upper class character of the Games which was questioned but even the conception of sports which they represented. The social critique was often joined to a wish for a more "sportified" structure. The "real sportsmen" were contrasted with the "snobs" and a more narrow program with a concentration on fewer branches was called for. That the social conflict was often coupled to questions of principle on how athletics should be carried out, seems to have been connected to the fact that sport is not the same thing to all people but something which is shaped by socio-cultural circumstances.

In the debate surrounding the *Nordic Games*, different positions were confronted with each other. On the one hand there was a conception of sports where social activities and sports melted together into a unity and which seems to have characterized the *Nordic Games*. Here, sports was one part of a sphere of social activity. The excursions and the partying seem to have been as important as the competitions themselves. An entertainment spectacle was presented. The Games were a major "happening" and it thus really did not matter if the program was overburdened, it was actually an advantage.

On the other hand, the critique of the games also brought forth a "sportified" point of view which emphasized the trials of physical strength, hard training and victories. There was a wish to limit the games to established branches of competition. This point of view could be found among the working class population. Here competitive sports were treated in a far more serious manner than among the upper classes, who were characterized by a moderate attitude towards sports and an unwillingness to exert themselves physically.

In the material investigated, the criticism could be heard sporadically during the initial years in which the Games were held but became more intense, above all during the 1920's in spite of the fact that the program of the Games all the while seems to have developed in a more "sportified" direction. In 1926 the social aspects were no more visible in the criticism.

The question can be raised as to whether the conception of sports found in the *Nordic Games* was not quite typical for the first generation of organized sports movement in Sweden with the *Central Association* at its head. Later, other ideals would make themselves felt. In terms of organization, the hegemony of *Riksidrottsförbundet (RF - The National Association for Sports)* during the period between the World Wars and after the Second World War brought with it a stronger concentration on sportified competitive sports.

Today we can once more find examples of how the borderline between sports and entertainment has been blurred, for example in television's mix of sports and entertainment journalism. Sports programs are often structured as family entertainment, and sports journalists appear more frequently in pure entertainment programming.

## Notes

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- 2 Nordisk familiebok. Vol. 19, various articles with titles including the term nordiska (Nordic). Protocol kept at the board meeting for Sweden's general sports association at the Royal Castle, May 3, 1899, press clippings Vol. 1, Sweden's Central Association for the promotion of sports, F II cb:l. The document was signed by Viktor Balck, Adolf Hejden-skiöld, Hans T. Naes, Clarence von Rosen and Johan Widmark.
- 4 Riksarkivet (The Swedish National Archives - hereafter RA), CF:s arkiv, AII:1, CF:sförvaltningsutskott föredragningslistor och protokoll; Styrelsens protokoll 1897-1902
- 5 Lindroth, J.: Idrottens väg till folkrörelse. Studier i svensk idrottsrörelse till 1915. Studia historica upsaliensia 60. Uppsala 1974, p. 145.
- 6 Ny tidning för idrott 1901/ 7. 8.
- 7 On the Nordic Games as a feast of the people, ef. Nordiska spelen i Stockholm 1901. (Advertisement from the committee for the Nordic Games), press clippings Vol. 1, Sweden's Central Association for the promotion of sports, F II cb:l.
- 8 In 1836 an event called Olympic Games was held in Sweden (Helsingborg), ef. Svahn, Å.: "Olympiska Spelen in Helsingborg 1834 and 1836". In: Idrott, historia och samhälle. 1983, pp. 77-105.
- 9 Björck, St.: Heidenstam och sekelskiftets Sverige. Studier i hans nationella och socialaförfattarskap. 1946, pp. 47-48.
- 10 Ny tidning för Idrott. 1901, nr. 7-8, p. 1, 1905, nr. 6, 7-8.
- 11 Ny tidning för Idrott, 1901, 21/2, nr. 7-8, p. 74, 1905, 2/3, nr. 9, 1909, 25/2, nr. 7-8, 1917,22/2, nr. 8-9.
- 12 Nv tidning för Idrott. 1905, 9/2, nr. 6, p. 117.
- 13 Björck, St.: Heidenstam och sekelskiftets Sverige. Studier i hans nationella och socialaförfattarskap. 1946, p. 44.
- 14 Hobsbawm, E.: The Age of Capital (Kapitalets tidsålder). Swedish edition Stockholm 1975, pp. 276-282.

- 15 Press clipping 1913, advertising brochure printed in English, German and French, Sweden's Central Association for the promotion of sports, F II cb:5.
- 16 Protocol from a meeting with the board for Sweden's General Sports Association at the Royal Castle, May 3, 1899, press clippings Vol. 1, Sweden's Central Association for the promotion of sports, F II cb:l.
- 17 SvD 1909, 7/2, p.7.
- 18 On the role of the royal family in the sports movement ef., for example, Lindroth, J.: "Kungahus och idrott - kungliga inslag i den tidigare svenska idrottsrörelsen", Livruskammaren Vol. 15, Stockholm 1981, pp. 293-352.
- 19 SvD 1901 16/2, p. 4.
- 20 Nv Tidning för Idrott 1901, 21/2, StD 1901, 13/2, 16/2.
- 21 Björck, St.: Heidenstam och sekelskiftets Sverige. Studier i hans nationella och socialaförfattarskap. 1946, p. 10.
- 22 Ibid., p. 10.
- 23 Ehn, Frykman, Löfgren: Försvenskningen av Sverige. Stockholm 1993, pp. 36-41.
- 24 Lindroth, J: Idrott mellan krigen. Organisationer, ledare och idéer i den svenskaidrottsrörelsen 1919-1939. Stockholm 1987, p. 119.
- 25 Nordiska familjeboks sportlexikon. Vol. 5, col. 669; Mo 1989, p. 63 (not 39); Nordiska familjeboks sportlexikon. Vol.5 col. 669 ff.
- 26 Cf., for example, Standard 2/3 1901.
- 27 Nv tidning för Idrott 7/8 1901.
- 28 Sandblad: Olympia och valhalla. Idéhistoriska aspekter av den moderna idrottsrörelsens framväxt. Göteborg, 1985, p. 218
- 29 Lindroth, J.: Idrottens väg till folkrörelse. Studier i svensk idrottsrörelse till 1915. Studia historica uppsaliensia 60. Uppsala 1974, p. 190, pp. 286-287.
- 30 Dagen 15/1 1909.
- 31 Mo 1989, p. 50.
- 32 Hamilton 1942, p. 281
- 33 Stockholms Dagblad 31/1 1926.
- 34 RA, CF:s arkiv. Fil, Vol. 26, Organisationskommittéprotokoll 20/10 1921.
- 35 RA, CF:s arkiv, AII:1, Styrelseprotokoll (bilaga E), 1897-1902.

- 36 Printed programs 1901, 1905, 1909, 1913, 1917, 1922 and 1926.
- 37 RA, CF:s arkiv, Fil Vol.29, Handlingar rörande Nordiska spelen, Protokoll, verkställande utskottet 12/5 1925.
- 38 The Central association had been criticized for single-mindedly thinking of the capital city. There might have been discontent över this issue in the background. Nevertheless, the social aspect was most clearly reflected in the investigated source material.
- 39 Idrottsvärlden. 1922 13/2.
- 40 Aftonbladet, 1922 14/2; NDA, 1922 14/2; SvD, 1922 15/2, 17/2; StD, 1922 15/2, 17/2.
- 41 Lindroth, J.: Idrottens väg till folkrörelse. Studier i svensk idrottsrörelse till 1915. Studia historica upsaliensia 60. Uppsala 1974, pp. 286-287.
- 42 DN, 1922 16/2.
- 43 Cf., for instance, Svenska Idrottstidningen. 1922 16/2.
- 44 Left-wing socialist
- 45 Politiken. 1922 1/5
- 46 Bordieu, P.: "Sportens stilistiske univers". In: Centrine nr. 26 (Bavnebanke 1993).
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- 48 SvD, 1909 6/2, p. 4; StD, 1909 15/2.
- 49 Janzon, B.: Manschettvrken idrott och hälsa. Studier kring idrottsrörelsen i Sverige särskilt Göteborg, intill 1900. Göteborg 1978, pp. 184-192.
- 50 St Tidn. 1926 15/2, ef. even Norrlandskuriren. 1926 21/2; Norrbottens tidning. 1926 24/2.
- 51 StD, 1926 17/2.
- 52 NDA. 1926 15/2; SvD, 1926 15/2, 17/2; StD, 1926 17/2.
- 53 On the issue of amateurs, see, for instance, Mark, P.: "Den eviga mumien: Amatörfrågans behandling i svensk idrott 1880-1967". In Idrott: historia och samhälle (1989), pp. 73-107; Dunning, E., Sheard, K.: Barbarians. Gentlemen and Players. A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football. Oxford 1979.
- 54 For biographical information on Alex. Lindman, ef. Svenskt biografiskt lexikon. Vol. 23, col. 502 ff.
- 55 RA, RF:s arkiv, AIII, Vol. 14, RF:s förvaltningsutskottsprotokoll 15/13 1932. The questioned was also tabled the next time it appeared on the agenda 14/3 1933.

- 56 RA, RF:s arkiv, AIII, Vol. 14 RF:s förvaltningsutskottsprotokoll 21/4 1933
- 57 RA, RF:s arkiv, AI, Vol. 11 Riksidrottsmötets protokoll, RF:s överstyrelseprotokoll 23/4 1933.
- 58 RA, RF:s arkiv, AIII, Vol. 14, RF:s förvaltningsutskottsprotokoll. The complete name was: De nordiske Rigs-Idraetsforbunds Faelleskomitte.
- 59 RA, RF:s arkiv, ÖII, Vol. 1, Protokoll från De nordiske Rigs-Idraetsfaerbunds Faelleskomitte 5/5 1934.
- 60 RA, CF:s arkiv, Fil, Vol. 38, Kommuniké från organisationskommittéen 13/9 1941; AU-protokoll27 1941.
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