

Olympism

THE UNIQUE OLYMPIAN NOBEL LAUREATE FOR PEACE – PHILIP NOEL-BAKER

The new code of ethics for the IOC starts with 'Dignity'. 'Safeguarding the dignity of the individual is a fundamental requirement of Olympism', it goes on to say. Such dignity, in my opinion, should be applicable as much to those no longer with us as to the living.

Philip Noel-Baker (1889-1982), silver medalist in the 1500m at the Games of the VII Olympiad in Antwerp in 1920; competitor at Stockholm eight years earlier; spectator in 1908 in London; Government Minister responsible for the Games of the XIV Olympiad in London in 1948; commandant of the British team in Helsinki in 1952; Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1959; delegate at the founding congress of the United Nations and UNESCO; first President of the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE) from 1960 to 1976; elder statesman and global peacemaker, is one deserving of posthumous honour and dignity when we speak about sport and peace.

I think of him, his life, his work, his love of the Olympic ideal, in this year 2000 designated the International Year for a Culture of Peace, and the creation of the International Olympic Truce Centre.

Philip was the foremost disciple of Coubertin in Britain. Many of us first heard of Olympism from his lips or his writings. He had met, in his life, all the IOC Presidents. He defended the Olympic ideal against all-comers. Those who attacked Olympism were 'chauvinists' who could not bear the thought of universal peace. In 1980

by Don Anthony*

when the Games of the XXII Olympiad in Moscow were under grave bombardment he stood up to be counted. His seminal article in 'The Guardian' was the most powerful intellectual argument which helped to forge British support for those Games and he was among those who announced that 'in Britain we follow Magna Carta – not Jimmy Carter'.

In 1981 at the Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden, he gained a memorable standing ovation for his inter-



The 'Philip Noel-Baker medal awarded to the Organizing Committee of the XIV Olympic Winter Games in Sarajevo.

vention. Here he proclaimed that he would nominate the IOC for the Nobel Peace Prize should they lead the way to sport for all for the whole world – especially the developing world.

Like Coubertin he believed that the past, the present, and the future were linked. To be interested in history did not mean to be backward-looking. Like Coubertin he could move with the times but not discard the essential principles. Like Coubertin he preached the marriage of muscle and mind – the wedding of sport and art and recognized that we had to choose between the Olympic athlete and the gladiator. For both men sport helped people to make the most of what education had to offer them.

In his later years he said 'The Olympic torch lit a flame in my heart which has burned brightly ever since' and 'In a nuclear world sport is man's best hope'. His Nobel Prize was his pursuit of disarmament, he held most modern wars to be the product of unabated and evil arms sale to poor countries.

Such a man is not known to the current generations. In London he is remembered by a Peace Garden and by a Blue Plaque on his residence near Victoria Station. He is also honoured in the University of Hiroshima where a sculpting 'Man of Sport – Man of Peace' inspires students year after year. For many years he attended the annual memorial meeting to mourn those killed in World War II and especially those incinerated by the atom bomb dropped on that city.

The sculpture shows Philip breasting a tape and the five Olympic rings

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The sculpture 'Man of Sport, Man of Peace', in the University of Hiroshima.

prominent – a champion of peace. The original was presented to the IOC by the British Olympic Association and the City of Birmingham during that city's Olympic bid in the mid 1980's.

The Noel-Baker family have had a home in Greece since the days of Lord Byron. The children learn Greek at primary school in the village near their home. Philip, too, could speak Greek as well as German, French and Italian, and of course, impeccable and inspiring English.

It is my feeling that the moment in time has arrived – and so has the place. An act of dignity would be the placing and unveiling of this sculpting in the new Olympic Truce Centre in Olympia.

Before he died Philip said to me 'I have said the same thing again and again since 1912'. Undefeated, he would say the same thing today – in a different context. What would he say? He would enjoy the idea of the two Koreas marching together in Sydney. He would like the thought of Henry

Kissinger accepting the Olympic Charter.

He would have congratulated Juan Antonio Samaranch on the many powerful initiatives for peace through Olympic action.

Four or five Nobel Peace Winners had an association with the Olympic Movement. At the founding Congress in 1894 they were named as Honorary delegates. Coubertin was himself nominated for the Prize – but unsuccessfully.

Alive today Philip Noel-Baker would have again called for IOC recognition at the Nobel table. I think he would have returned to the urgent need for action in the continent in most need – Africa. He would propose an Olympian idea truly worthy of the Nobel Prize.

He would not have expected Africa to meet the criteria for Olympic cities which means that they take place only in the richest countries. The exception would, indeed, prove the rule. His dream would be for an Olympic Games in Africa paid for by

the IOC, the NOCs, the IFs, the governments, the media, the sponsors, the public. They would pay according to their means: an airport from the United States of America, a university from Britain, a hospital from the People's Republic of China, an Olympic complex from Germany, transport infrastructure from France – and so on. The Olympic legacy would be a magnificent Olympic city – backed up by African teams at all levels, trained in expertise by the relevant NOCs and governments.

What better than such an African Olympic Games. A one-off perhaps – or even a new millennium beginning. And certainly slipped into the routine of Olympic bidding now – even for 2008. If that thought is unthinkable, then in 2012.

I hope I have not taken Philip Noel-Baker's name in vain. I was a close friend and colleague for his last 20 years. I think I know his mind. He would again quote Pascal: *'Nothing is more powerful than an idea which has reached its moment in time'*.

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Philip Noel-Baker and the IOC President at the Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden in 1981.