

THE BERGVALL SYSTEM

by Ove Karlsson

The so called Bergvall system was used in the 1912 Olympic water polo tournament and in some subsequent Games. It was invented by Erik Bergvall (1880-1950), a pioneering Swedish sports man, official and journalist.

A water polo player (Olympic bronze medallist in 1908, Swedish champion in 1906 and 1909), Bergvall was among the founders of the Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA) in 1908 and member of its board until 1928, the last four years as president. He was also a founder of the Swedish Swimming Association in 1904, its secretary in 1904-08 and chairman in 1909-32.

Furthermore, he was a member of the board of the Swedish Sports Confederation (Svenska gymnastik- och idrottsföreningarnas riksförbund, now Sveriges riksidrottsförbund) from its foundation in 1903 until 1945; assistant secretary of the Swedish Olympic Committee in 1906 and from the foundation of the present committee in 1913 until 1924; and general manager of the Stockholm Stadion (the main 1912 Olympic arena) in 1916-45.

As a journalist, Bergvall worked mainly at the sports paper Nordiskt Idrottslif (published in 1900-20), in 1900-03 and 1905-20. He was the editor of the 1912 official Olympic report and wrote/edited or was a main contributor to some 30 books, including reports on the Olympics in 1920-48 (some of them for the Swedish NOC).

The following explanation of the Bergvall system is based on articles in the official report of the 1912 Games and in the 1913 year-book of the Swedish Sports Confederation.

According to Bergvall, a straight knock-out competition gave a justified result only as far as the ultimate winner was concerned. With an open draw (no seeding), he wanted to give strong teams defeated in early rounds chances to remain in the tournament and fight for 2nd and 3rd place. A fair distribution of all medals would thus be secured, and with a minimum of matches, Bergvall claimed.

Beside the usual knock-out method, teams defeated by the eventual winner should compete for 2nd place, and those defeated by the second placed team should continue to compete for 3rd place.

Depending on previous opponents and results, the losing finalist was not necessarily 2nd in the tournament. That team could be forced to play (again) for 2nd place and - if losing that match - for 3rd place. With the exception of the losing finalist, a team was definitely out of the competition after two defeats.

Should a team not have entered into a match, that team was out and had also forfeited the position it had obtained previously in the tournament.

If byes were necessary, teams having played most matches in the competition should have priority.

The system was used also in some individual sports. Bergvall stressed the advantages of a reduced number of matches in his system, as compared to other systems, especially with a large number of entries. Modified versions of the system have also been used.

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NOTE: See also *"The Birth of Swedish Ice Hockey - Antwerp 1920"*, by Kenth Hansen in *CITIUS, ALTIUS, FORTIUS*, Volume 4, Number 2, May 1996. (*CITIUS, ALTIUS, FORTIUS* was the previous name for the Journal of Olympic History).

Examples

Our example has nine teams divided into two pools. The first mentioned team is the (assumed) winner in each match. A concrete example, from the 1912 Olympic water polo tournament, with an even number of teams (six):

Main draw			
Pool I			
A-B			
	A-C		
C-D			
		A-E	
Pool II			
E-F	E (Bye)		A-G
G-H			
	G-I	G (bye)	
I (bye)			

Main draw:

The eventual winner, Britain, defeated, in turn, Belgium, Sweden and Austria.
 The losing finalist Austria, defeated Hungary, had a bye and lost to Britain.
 Sweden defeated France in the remaining first round match.

Qualifying rounds:

Belgium defeated Hungary, France had a bye.
 Belgium defeated France.
 Sweden defeated Austria.
 Belgium defeated Austria.
 Sweden defeated Belgium for 2nd place.
 Belgium, having beaten all but the two top teams (Britain and Sweden), placed 3rd.

Qualifying rounds for 2nd and 3rd place			
Case One			
Q I	Q II	Q III	
B-F			
	B-C		2nd place
		B-D	B-E B-G
D-H			
	D-I		3rd place
			C-E C-G
			Alternatively
			2nd place
			E--B E-G
			3rd place
			B-G

Case Two			
Q I	Q II	Q III	
F-B			
	F-C		
		I-F	2nd: G
H-D			
	I-H		
			3rd place
			I-E