

GRASS-ROOTS SPORT

40 % OF THE SPANISH ATHLETES WHO TOOK PART IN THE LAST THREE OLYMPIC GAMES (MONTREAL 76, MOSCOW 80 AND LOS ANGELES 84) WERE FORMED IN CATALONIA.

EDUARD BOET JOURNALIST



© ANNA BOYÉ

In the last few years, sport in Catalonia has undergone an important transformation. The change in the country's attitude to sport, and especially those aspects that affect the man in the street, have come about for several reasons, one of the most recent of these being the concession of the 1992 Olympic Games to the city of Barcelona.

For many years, and apart from very special cases, sport in Catalonia was restricted to activities which provided a spectacle. It was as if the only possible involvement in sport was to go to a stadium and follow events—normally a football match—from the stands. The authorities had no clear policy of support to popular participation in sport, and this did not help to produce top-quality sportsmen and women. Names such as Joaquim Blume, Santiago Esteve, Carme Valero and a few others are the exceptions that prove the rule. No one will ever fully appreciate the merits of sportsmen and women such as these. To achieve international victories un-

der the conditions in Catalonia in their time is worthy of the highest praise. In spite of everything, there has always been a sporting base in Catalonia which, though not particularly solid, is certainly tenacious. Thanks to this tenacity, and encouraged by the clubs in all parts of the country, and sometimes by private enterprise, sport has been kept alive in Catalan society.

However, the great impulse received by sport in Catalonia in the years since 1970 has been its promotion in schools.

Those who are now over thirty still remember what sport was like at school during their childhood and adolescence. The Physical Education classes were given once a week by a teacher who also gave lessons in political theory, which in those days was called 'Formation of the National Spirit'. Very little love of sport was learnt in those classes, where the teacher often directed gymnastics dressed in a jacket and tie. Also, as I said earlier, the conditions in elite sports made it unlikely that anyone

should stimulate young people's dedication. Their only stimulus came from footballers, collected by many on picture cards, or imitated in the street with a stone which led to the destruction of many a pair of Sunday shoes.

The times have changed, though. Today, school-sports are in the hands of professionals, and the authorities are carrying out a policy designed to develop the teaching of sport to our boys and girls. To this end, during the last legislative period the *Direcció General de l'Esport de la Generalitat* has given 600 million pesetas in subventions to schools, for the practice of 19 different sports, affecting more than 300,000 children from all parts of Catalonia. As well as this, to test the physical condition of schoolchildren, the *Generalitat* has examined 2,500 boys and girls between the ages of ten and fourteen, and has helped them to choose a particular activity.

The progress in sports in Catalan schools over the last few years—the basic, most important training ground—is



© ANNA BOYÉ



unquestionable. The schoolchildren of today have changed the old overall for track-suit and running-shoes.

Another result of the promotion of sport in schools is the increase of the number of people, especially adults, taking an active part in sports. Many sports federations have seen how the encouragement of sports in schools has led indirectly to an increased interest among parents. The most spectacular case is that of winter sports. Many adults have taken up skiing because of courses their children have followed at school.

The present policies have been reinforced by the good results that top Catalan athletes are beginning to get on the international scene. 40 % of the Spanish athletes who took part in the last three Olympic Games (Montreal 76, Moscow 80 and Los Angeles 84) were formed in Catalonia. The results obtained, though not spectacular, in many cases took the form of a medal. To give some examples: in 1976, Pere Millet won a silver in sailing; in 1980, Jordi Llopart also got a

silver in the 50 km. walk; also in 1980, the Spanish lawn hockey team, formed mainly of Catalan players, also won a silver medal; in 1984, José Manuel Abascal, born in Cantabria but brought up in Barcelona, won a bronze medal in the 1,500 metres and, the same year, a silver medal for rowing went to Lasúrtegui and Climent, from the Banyoles rowing-school. We must also mention, in the last two Olympics, the fourth position of the Spanish waterpolo team, in which all the players are Catalan. Gradually, the quality of our sportsmen and women is approaching that of countries which, a few years ago, were well ahead of us. In the words of the Catalan Josep Marín, 1983 world-champion in the 20 km. walk and now trainer for Mari Cruz Díaz European champion in the women's version of this event, 'The days have gone when the first of our athletes arrived at the finishing line after the winner had received his medal and heard his national anthem'.

In Catalonia today, after transfers from the central to the autonomous govern-

ment, sport is funded from two main sources: on the one hand there is the budget of the *Direcció General de la Generalitat*, which is about 2,000 million pesetas this year; and on the other the money from the football pools, which is administered by the provincial deputations. Each deputation receives 11 % of the annual takings, and it is calculated that for 1986 this could represent some 1,100 million pesetas.

The two administrations mentioned and the local authorities, some of which, like Barcelona, play an important part in the question of sports, have done everything possible to coordinate their different activities. Everyone points out the unity in which the three public institutions are working on the Olympic project of 1992.

Catalonia still has a long way to go. Some people think that what is being done at the moment is still not enough. The challenge of the 1992 Olympic Games will only be the end of one phase.