



Preparing for the Games

Olympic concerns in 1952 were gentler, finds *Nigel Sharp*

If Ainslie, Percy, Goodison and Co are to repeat their previous Olympic successes this summer, they will have to hope for many things: all their wind shifts being free-ers, obviously, but more importantly that the Weymouth tobacconists are well-stocked, that their competitors are more “temperamentally unsuited to an ordered form of yacht racing” than they are, that they don’t find they are unnecessarily sentimental towards overseas sailors (especially Australians), and for the local hotel staff to be willing and versatile. That is if lessons are to be learnt from the Games of just over half a century ago.

Immediately prior to the 1952 Helsinki Games, a *Yachting World* correspondent found himself speculating on the British sailors’ chances. Quite rightly, he emphasised the need for preparation, boat speed and fitness, which itself would lead to an alert brain. “Has anything been left to chance?” he asked.



“Has the helmsman been provided with an adequate supply of cigarettes?”

“It may be difficult or impossible to get it. Has the helmsman been provided with an adequate supply of the right brand of cigarettes? They may not be available in Finland, and this may upset his nerves.”

Apart from a silver medal for Charles Currey in the Finn class, all Britain’s other results must have been something of a disappointment – in particular those of the Star and the Dragon, which both finished in 13th place. No Lucky Strikes for them, obviously.

Soon afterwards, the Royal Yachting Association produced a report on the Games in which it suggested that sailing shouldn’t even be an Olympic sport. “Olympic successes are only the dividend of discipline,” the report said, “and the essence of yachting is the escape which it offers from all that discipline entails – therefore, Olympic gold medals and yachting are not readily compounded... The committee feels that a greater realisation of these facts might save many from the troubles of Olympic sailing, and the RYA from the investment of funds in training yachtsmen who are temperamentally unsuited to an ordered form of yacht racing.”

Undeterred, British yachtsmen continued with “the troubles of Olympic sailing”. In the summer of 1956, *Yachting World* found itself looking forward once again, this time to the forthcoming Melbourne Games. A correspondent reported that he had met an Australian who was thrilled that the Duke of Edinburgh was to open the Games and “they were, he said, equally looking forward to seeing the British yachting team. So great was their enthusiasm that they

would almost prefer to see us win rather than the Australians themselves.” Presumably encouraged by this, and perhaps in defiance of the RYA committee’s view, British sailors won medals in three of the five classes.

At the Rome Olympics in 1960, our Flying Dutchman representatives were WL “Slotty” Dawes and James Ramus, with Adrian and Stuart Jardine as their training partners, and they were to find help from an unexpected source. Their preparation with regard to sail availability did not go entirely according to plan and, as the 1961 *Dinghy Yearbook* later reported: “One of the Lucas mainsails arrived at the 11th hour, and on being found to be 14cm (6in) too big on a width measurement, was altered by James Ramus, the Jardine twins and a chambermaid from the Hotel Royal where the team were billeted.”

Now, that’s what I call room service. In a fleet of 31 boats, Dawes and Ramus finished 7th. We will never know where they would have come without the help of the Signora in a shining pinny. 