

are known to British athletes, and that British athletes should be involved. The doubts that were expressed by a number of athletes after the Munich Games (admittedly often by those who were disappointed with their performances in the Games) concerning the expertise of

those who were responsible for the direction of the training at St Moritz were very real. We must, for once, do our own research and not rely upon the work of others.

DISCUSSION

DR TRAVERS: To underline these problems of training on return to sea level my good friend, Stephen Hollings, has kindly agreed to recount his problems.

MR STEPHEN HOLLINGS: The feelings I experienced on arrival at Munich were also expressed by many of my colleagues who had been to St Moritz; they were basically of let-down. St Moritz was probably the greatest training area to which most of us had been. We arrived down at Munich to a massive complex with no grass, no lakes, and no mountain scenery. This was depressing for a start. Many of us were experiencing our first Olympic Games also, and it was all rather overawing.

I suffered bad headaches while in Munich – for the first five days before my competition – as did many other team members. Listlessness was a problem, and I also had difficulty in sleeping.

At St Moritz training was a joy and we really enjoyed going out. I am afraid that at Munich it was a case of having to force myself and getting other people to ask whether I was coming out training – we just did not want to train at all. Many people experienced this; we had to go out in groups and make each other train. Morale was getting very low.

Certainly my muscles felt very stiff when training in Munich. Cardiovascularly, it was superb and I did not seem to breathe, by my legs would not seem to go with it. That was the general feeling.

DR NORMAN MacLEAN (Doctor to British Winter Biathlon Team): Can you tell us how many athletes who beat others had had altitude training?

DR TRAVERS: I am afraid I have no figures for this.

MR WILSON: I can tell you that. Of the Finnish athletes, Vassala had spent approximately three months at altitude, and Viren had spent almost the entire previous winter at altitude.

Before the European championships the previous year Vaatainen had spent almost nine months in various places – Mexico and other places around the world. Bragina, who set that astonishing world record in the women's 1500m, had spent three periods at altitude. Gamoudi, of course, is almost a permanently based altitude athlete and, so are Jipcho, Keino, and others such as Yifter.

MR CHRISTOPHER BRASHER: Could Dr Travers comment on Paul Nihill and Ron Hill, in particular whether he had any contact with them before their event? I am trying to discover any feeling they might have had of let-down. How did they feel when they went down to Munich? What was the gap between St Moritz and their events?

DR TRAVERS: I was with Paul Nihill more or less the whole time at St Moritz. I have given you his time trials two days before going to Munich. He went down absolutely convinced he would win a gold medal, and probably break the world record as well. As I said, I had no contact with the athletes from the day they left St Moritz. Nihill went down five days before his first race and, of course, stayed down for the second walk which was towards the end of the Games when, comparatively, he did very much better.

I had no knowledge of Ron Hill at all because he was one of the athletes who did not attend for testing. As a result of his first experience in St Moritz in May, he had decided that he would like to stay up for an additional period. Special arrangements were made for him to do this, and he went down exactly five days before the marathon. This was his own wish.

Don MacGregor went down much earlier, and by comparison did much better.

DR JOHN WILLIAMS (Secretary-General International Federation of Sports Medicine): We have heard that in the endurance events in the Munich Olympic Games there was a British competitor in every final. In terms of the rankings, how many British competitors should we have had in every final? Did we have more finalists than would have been expected from the rankings, or was our achievement merely a reflection of our national strength in endurance events?

DR TRAVERS: Perhaps Arthur Gold or Denis Watts would like to comment on this; my impression is that there were a few surprises. Certainly, if the press reports are to be believed, there were many surprises.

MR GOLD: I am speaking from memory, but I think that in the women's 800m and 1500m we did not expect to do as well as we did – certainly not from the times that were available beforehand.

I think it would be fair to say that before the Games we did not have a man in the first eight in each of the ranking lists. The ranking lists are themselves misleading because middle- and long-distance times frequently depend on the pattern of the race and not on its quality.

CHAIRMAN: Perhaps there is a sex difference in the question of altitude training.



Discussion

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