

Boycott the Olympics?

Committee member: 'Unfair' to athletes

Doug Roby, current member and former president of the U.S. Olympic Committee, does not believe that President Carter's threat of an American withdrawal from the Moscow Olympics will do much to upset the Russians. He also feels such a move would be unfair to the athletes who have trained hard and long for the games.

Carter said Sunday that American athletes would not be granted passports to attend the Moscow Olympics, set for July 19 to Aug. 3, unless the Soviet Union removes its forces from Afghanistan within one month — a date that coincides with the completion of the Winter Olympics, which will be held in Lake Placid, N.Y.

Barring a Soviet withdrawal, Carter said he favored moving the Summer Olympics to an alternative site or sites or postponing or cancelling this year's games.

Roby said he does not think the games could not be moved to another site this year, nor does he believe the Olympic Committee would agree to a postponement or favor a cancellation.

SPEAKING FROM his home on Geddes Road in Ypsilanti, Roby, who has been a member of the Olympic Committee for 22 years, stressed that President Carter has only threatened to boycott the Olympics.

Nothing definite has been done, he added, but he said the current discussion is hurting the Winter Olympics, set for Feb. 12-24.

"Don't forget, the official name of the games is the Olympiad, which means every four years. And the games are to be held in the final year of each four-year cycle."

"This would preclude any thought of postponing the games until 1981. They must be held this year. The Olympic Committee never would stand for a change."

Discussing the possibility of moving the games from Moscow to another site, Roby said: "Where to?"

"If you are thinking of Montreal, that is out of the question. Sure, the games were held there in 1976, but all the buildings erected for them are now part of a public housing program and would not be available."

For emphasis, he added: "We give every city awarded the games six years in which to prepare, so moving the games now couldn't even be considered."

ROBY SAID the current discussion could hurt the winter games because millions of dollars already have been spent there to stage the spectacular events.

"All the work could be placed in jeopardy and the money, some \$100 million, would have been spent in vain. Much of this money has come from the state of New York, television and other private sources. It would be a shame to have anything like this happen."

The veteran official, who tried for years to get the games for the city of Detroit, also pointed out the unfairness of a boycott or cancellation of the games to the athletes.

"Don't forget, this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance for them. They have trained hard and long to reach the goal of Olympic competition. If they would be faced with a delay until 1984, their chance possibly would be lost."

"They would have passed their peak in many cases and their long-cherished dream would be ruined. For that reason, the games should go on."

"Of course, our participation is up to President Carter. Maybe he couldn't order a boycott, but he could order a denial of all applications for passports. That would keep our athletes at home."

Doug Roby, a member of the U.S. Olympic committee, and Wayne County Judge Willis Ward, who refused to play in the '36 Olympics in Hitler's pre-war Germany, have strong views on the possible boycott of the summer Olympics in Moscow as staff writer W.W. Edgar discovered in these interviews.

'36 Berlin dissenter: 'Cancel' games now

Wayne Probate Judge Willis Ward, one of the first black athletes at the University of Michigan and a former track star who refused to compete in the 1936 Olympic Games held in Adolph Hitler's Berlin, advocates a boycott of the 1980 games in Moscow.

Ward, in fact, thinks the games should be cancelled.

"My country comes first," he said, seated in his office in the City-County Building. "It is far more important to me than the Olympic games."

"I think we have been kicked around long enough. And boycotting or cancelling the games would help to show the world what we think of the Russians."

The judge created a stir in 1935 when, after being named a member of the Olympic team, he refused to compete because of the manner of Hitler's Nazi regime.

"That case was a bit different," Ward said, "because Hitler's activities concerned racism. If you recall, I was kept on the bench when the Michigan football team played Georgia Tech and I didn't want to go over to Berlin and be insulted."

THE JUDGE said he believes that Russia hopes to encircle the oil fields of the Middle East and, if successful, will try to squeeze us a bit more, and we shouldn't let that happen.

Ward also said the Russians may be guiding the Iranians and playing a hand in holding the hostages for so long a period.

Then, raising his voice for emphasis, he said: "And I am not too sure that the Russians wouldn't hold the entire U.S. team as hostages after the Olympic Games end, and wouldn't that be something?"

RETURNING TO the suggested boycott, Judge Ward asked:

"If you were invited to a party and then just before the event the host slapped you in the face, would you go to the party? I guess not. And we shouldn't go either."

Remembering that he had trained long and hard to make the 1936 Olympic team, the judge was asked if he didn't think it would be unfair to the current athletes to boycott or cancel the games.

"I've got to repeat — my country comes first. The Olympic team is only a small group. Sure, it is a tough break for the athletes, but they should realize that our country's welfare is at stake. So the members shouldn't mind."

Ward said he feels that President Carter has been hesitant to act thus far.

"He should do something drastic — something that would show the world that the United States is a leader."

"If Harry Truman still was our president, he may not order the dropping of a bomb, as he did on Hiroshima, but you can bet he'd do something and have those hostages back home."

"Our country has got to do something," the judge continued, "and the Olympic Games is only part of it. Boycotting of the games won't hurt the Russians much, but it will tell the world just what the other countries think of them."

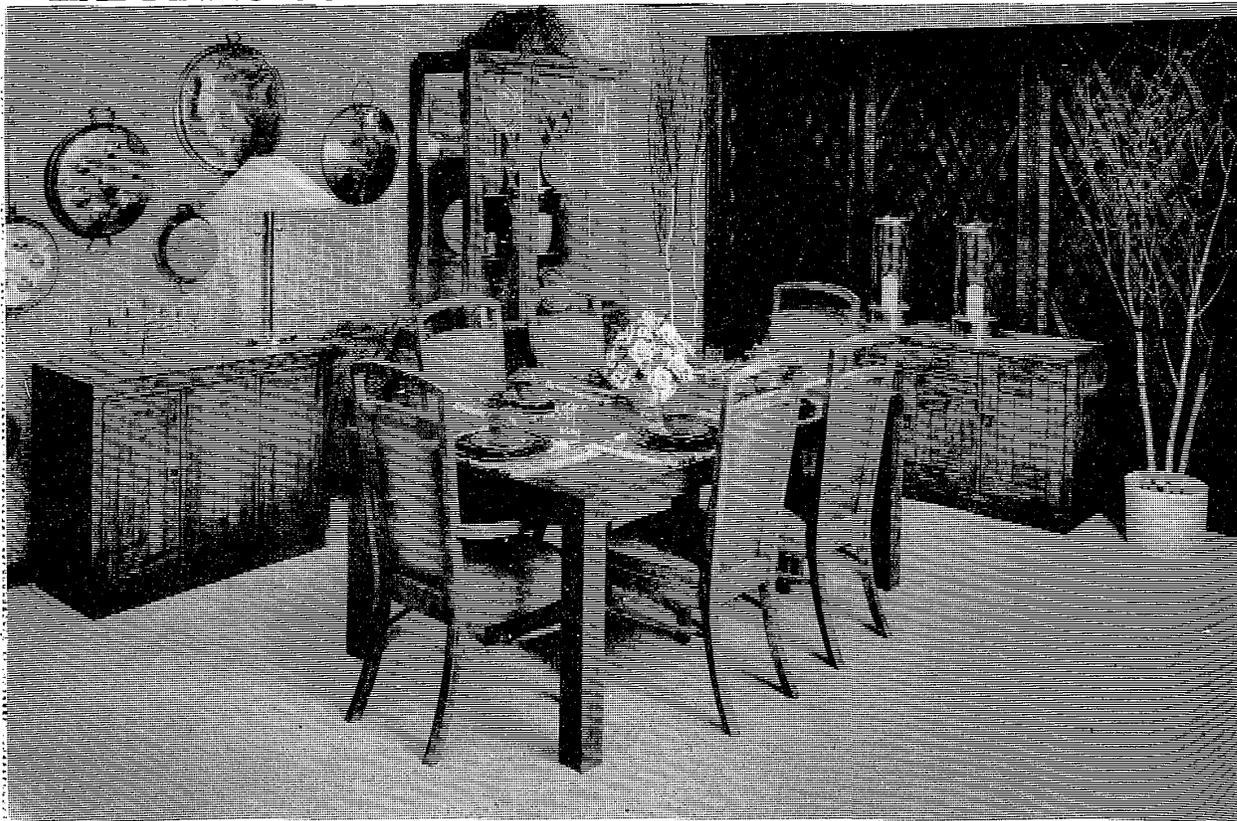
Ward concluded by saying that amateur rules should be changed. He referred to the fact that other nations pay their "amateurs" and that it isn't fair to ask our youth to compete against such odds.

"But don't forget, my country comes first and boycotting or cancelling the games would help to show that we still are leaders."



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