

U.S. black Olympians back protest against Rhodesia

By Monty Hoyt Staff correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

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pg. 1



Keystone

Olympics dilemma

Some 3,000 carrier pigeons rehearse at the Olympic pavilions in Munich, Germany. But with only a few days to go before the official opening of the international games, organizers of a boycott against Rhodesia's entry face a deadline dilemma. They may succeed in forcing Rhodesia's withdrawal — but too late for other African nations participating in the boycott, to get to Munich to take part.

Story: Page 6

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Chicago

With only a few days to go before the official opening of the Olympic Games in Munich, organizers of an international boycott against Rhodesia's entry are faced with a deadline dilemma.

In the United States, several influential sports figures have joined forces in an effort to mobilize American opinion against Rhodesia.

The protest may ultimately succeed in forcing Rhodesia's withdrawal on the eve of the games — but organizers fear it might be too late to allow time for the growing number of African nations observing the boycott to get to Munich to take part.

In Munich, U.S. Olympic team officials have asked Olympic Village organizers to ban newsmen, after reporters had sought interviews with American black athletes who have indicated they would leave the games if Rhodesia is allowed to take part. Lee Evans, world record-holder for the 400-meter run, said Aug. 18 that U.S. black athletes would "stand with our African brothers." Munich officials have indicated that individual press passes to the village would be canceled in cases of misuse.

Brundage on 'interference'

The Rhodesian team is in Munich (with some black members) under the British flag. Avery Brundage, president of the International Olympic Committee, made no direct reference to the controversy in a speech Saturday, though he did say that political interference, as well as commercialism and dishonesty, has tarnished the Olympic image.

Meanwhile, the IOC agreed to send a fact-finding mission to Rhodesia next year, while officials of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa tried to work out a compromise solution with the organization of African Unity which, up to this writing, had rejected formulas advanced.

A string of pullouts

To avoid what they would consider a hollow victory, the International Campaign Against Racism In Sport (ICARIS) has issued an ultimatum to the Munich Olympic organizing committee urging the cancellation of the invitation to the "Rhodesian racists" by Aug. 21 — five days before the games begin — to avoid a withdrawal of most of the African Continent. They are also encouraging the African nations to send their athletes to Munich and to walk out of the games only if Rhodesia is actually allowed to participate.

Seven African nations — Ethiopia, Liberia, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Zambia, and Somalia — have announced their withdrawal. Reports out of Cairo indicate that Egypt, the Sudan, and possibly Uganda will send contingents to the Munich games, but would not take part if Rhodesia is allowed to remain in the games. Kenya, with several gold medal hopes, will also pull out if Rhodesia takes part.

"If ultimately Rhodesia is thrown out, those countries with their teams on the spot will benefit, but those countries which withdraw previously will lose out," states ICARIS chairman Dennis Brutus, explaining the deadline they have given the Munich committee.

Mr. Brundage said on arrival in Munich

last week: "This is politics, pure politics. We are not concerned with politics. All sportsmen will be here."

'The question is settled'

Mr. Brundage said the Rhodesian question was settled by all the national Olympic committees a year ago. "Rhodesia was invited. Rhodesia will participate. We think for the moment that the question is settled."

The 44-member Rhodesian team arrived in Munich last week. The team included seven black athletes and a black trainer. However, the black African nations are protesting the growing apartheid being practiced in sports within the country since the white-ruling minority broke away from its status as a British colony in 1964.

The Union of South Africa was not invited to take part in the Olympics this year, by the agreement of the International Olympic Committee, because of that country's avowed apartheid policies. A similar invitation, the object of great international protest before the 1968 games in Mexico City, was finally rescinded.

A plea to attend

The Supreme Council of Sports in Africa, after an emergency meeting earlier this month, called upon all African countries to go to the games. The Nigerian president of the council, Abraham Ordia, said in Lagos that a boycott would mean that "we shall break faith with the world body and Africa will not be taken seriously again in the future."

However, the Organization of African Unity has sent a request to Germany to cancel the invitation to Rhodesia, and it renewed its call for support of an African boycott.

Elsewhere Jamaica, with two world record-holders, has withdrawn from the games, and Guyana may follow suit, according to ICARIS officials. The protesters also claim to have support among Asian nations, particularly India, Latin America, and members of the Communist bloc.

Protest organizers in the United States say that "if Rhodesia participates, numerous American athletes will be evaluating whether they can participate in good conscience." Jack Scott, past director of the Institute for Study of Sports in Society, and chairman of the physical education department at Oberlin College, stated in a Monitor interview:

"We don't want to see a lot of people with social conscience pull out of the games — and only the Rhodesians and a few other countries take part. We hope that the German Olympic Committee will recognize the situation and what has to be done. But the problem will not be overlooked."

'68 protest veterans

Mr. Scott, Harry Edwards, professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley, and others who organized the U.S. protest against South Africa in 1968 say they will be bringing pressure to bear on American sports organizations to support the boycott.

How many U.S. athletes will take part, they say, depends on the momentum the protest gains in the next week and the resolve of the African nations to stay out.

"Realistically, we can't honestly tell how many people will pull out. It's asking a lot of any athlete. It depends on what the Olympics means to them. In a way, it's like asking a football player to stay out of the Super Bowl," Mr. Scott said.