

Winter Olympic Games 1994 : Lausanne out

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Winter Olympic Games 1994

Lausanne Out

The popular verdict of 26 June 1988 in Lausanne fell like the blow of a hammer: 62.3 per cent of the voters rejected the financial responsibility for the Winter Olympics of 1994. The olympic dream «Lausanne-Vaud» was over.

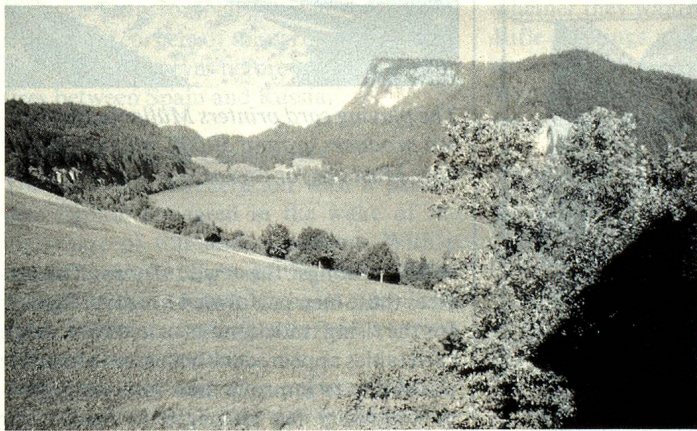
«Triumph over the establishment in politics, economics, trade union and sport» rejoiced Daniel Brélaz, the National Councillor for the Environment, who had joined the opponents after a long period of hesitation. Jost Krippendorf, the Bernese professor of tourism found that it was «good that large events are no longer accepted condition free». Was the «no» a rejection of the enormousness of the Olympic Games as written by the critics?

The supporters were disappointed. Hundreds of volunteers had been working towards the Games for years, preparing and measuring pistes, carefully drawing up do-

we will have difficulty in realising large projects» complained a Social Democrat. Pierre Schwitzguebel, Director of the Lausanne Tourist Office and President of the Organising Committee described the result of the ballot as a shame. Jean-Pascal Delamuraz, the Federal Councillor coming from Lausanne, was furious with the opposers. Never before had a local referendum stirred up the emotions of the guarded people of Vaud to such an extent.

«Ville olympique»

And it had all looked so rosy at the outset. Schwitzguebel and Lausanne's Town Presi-



The Vallée de Joux in Jura had hoped to win tourists through being the location for the nordic disciplines. (Photo: Rolf Stähli)

cumentation, canvassing worldwide for the Games: Many burst into tears when the majority not taken by the Lausanne population became known. Fury raged fiercely in the winter resorts in Vaud, where the majority of the competitions were to have taken place. «A missed opportunity», regretted the Town Council Presidents, who had hoped for modern infrastructure and new hotels for their villages as a result of the Games. Representatives from all the large parties in Lausanne were also disappointed. «Can we no longer organise anything in this city?» was the question posed by a representative from the Lausanne Liberals. «In the future

dent, Paul-René Martin, both protagonists of the Lausanne olympic idea, had taken all the hurdles with ease. Lausanne seemed to be in with a chance and was calling itself «Ville olympique». It was here that the frenchman Baron Pierre de Coubertin had reinstated the Olympic Games. The headquarters of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has been here since 1915. Martin and Schwitzguebel won the support of all the parties (even that of the Green party to start with). The Communists were hoping to realise extravagant projects to improve local traffic, were hoping for an upswing in all sporting activities and an opening

up to the world. The town and canton parliaments approved a budget of millions for the Initiative Committee with no opposition. The partnering communes in the Alps and Jura followed with 100'000 francs each. First surveys showed an enthusiasm which could almost have been described as suspicious for Vaud: 79 per cent of those questioned were in favour of the Games. As many as 91 per cent were in favour in the group aged 15-34.

Not the first time

It was true that many cantons with Olympic ambitions had suffered defeat in recent years: 1963 in Valais, 1969 in Zurich (Winter Games in Hoch-Ybrig), 1980 in Grisons, 1986 in St. Moritz and Davos. However the few decided opposers in Vaud – with the Left-Alternative Anne-Catherine Menétrey at the head – hadn't dared to hope for a successful opposition in the early stages.

After the Federal Council had approved a Swiss candidacy, Lausanne was given preference over the other candidate, the Bernese Oberland, by the Swiss Olympic Committee in January 1987. This was to a certain extent a tactical decision since the consent of the Bernese voters was by no means certain whilst there seemed no question of having to take a public opinion poll in Vaud. Jean-Pascal Delamuraz handed Juan Antonio Samaranch, the President of the IOC, Switzerland's candidature in January 1988 at the olympic headquarters in Lausanne.

Vox populi

However the Town Council of Lausanne demanded insight into the Olympic budget; their approval was subject to the optional referendum. The large number of opposing signatures was disconcerting for the supporters. The environmentalists became more critical and won ground: the financial risks came ever increasingly up for debate. Many feared an escalation in the housing shortage and many just wanted to vent their various pent up frustrations on the town officials. The supporters canvassed for the Games with posters, leaflets and a colourful procession: without success.

On presenting Samaranch with a five volume dossier, Federal Councillor Flavio Cotti had commented, «I can assure you that the Federal Council will do its utmost to ensure the success of the Games, should Lausanne be chosen as the venue...». However the Federal Council was powerless in the face of the Lausanne people. Vox populi...

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