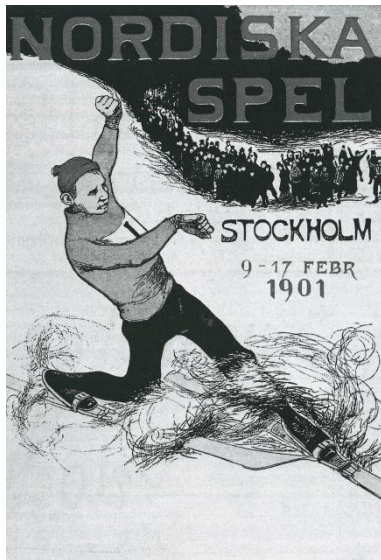


The beginning of the Winter Olympics

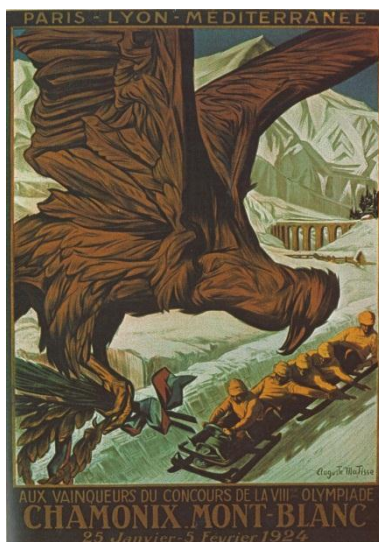


Artificial ice rinks around Europe lead to figure skating being adopted into the Olympic program as early as the first Olympic congress in Paris in 1894. Even so, skating was not included in the games themselves until 1908 in London.

Members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) worked to ensure that Sweden would include winter sports in a program in conjunction with the Olympic summer games in Stockholm in 1912. The Swedes were strongly opposed to this as they had organized the Nordic Games every fourth year since 1901. These games were constituted a set of winter sports, both on skis and skates, and in addition they had skjoring after reindeer and various exercises involving the kick sled.

The Nordic Games never achieved the popularity either home or abroad that the Swedes dreamed about. Nevertheless, they fought tooth and nail against the various attempts to include winter sports in the Olympic program. A key player in this opposition movement was Victor Balck, a man who was the driving force behind the Nordic Games at the same time that he was Vice President of the IOC.

In 1914, the Norwegian Ski Federation (NSF) had a different perspective on the question of winter Olympic Games. Following a request from Germany, the NSF supported the idea of an Olympic winter event in conjunction with the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1916. At the Olympic Congress in Paris in June of 1914, it was Norway that formally proposed that winter Olympic Games be held in Feldberg in the Black Forest (Schwarzwald) the winter before the Berlin games. The Norwegian proposal was accepted by a large margin of votes, and all seemed ready for winter games in Feldberg. Unfortunately the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo just a few days following the IOC-congress caused the onset of World War I. The Olympic Games in Feldberg and Berlin never took place.



Following the war, Norway considered applying to host both the summer and winter Olympic Games for the year 1924, but Norway's national athletic federation took the position that it would demand too much of the athletic community. France, on the other hand, was ready and said yes to Olympic summer games in Paris in 1924. France had arranged skiing competitions in the region of Savoie since the turn of the century, and among others Olav Bjaaland from Morgedal had won honors and prizes in silver at races in Chamonix and the surrounding area. The Club Alpin Francais was well prepared to arrange skiing competitions and they suggested that the first

Olympic winter games be held in Chamonix in the winter of 1924.

The Skiing federation in Norway was now subject to a board that supported the Swedish opposition to the Olympic winter games. To get the dominant skiing nations of the north to join in the games, the French agreed *not* to call the games “Olympic”. Norwegians, Swedes and Finns took the bait, and things were made ready for the first winter Olympic Games. Norway won nearly everything in the skiing events. The newspaper “Sportsmanden” (The Sportsman) wrote that “ We showed them the winter way.”

However, the leaders of the Norwegian skiing federation were not as pleased. The French had naturally called the events ‘Olympic’ in both brochures and in the media, and skiing authorities in Norway were furious. When IOC the following year confirmed that the games in Chamonix really were ‘Olympic’, and that there would be new winter games in St. Moritz in 1928, leaders of the NSF protested vehemently: Norway would not participate in St. Moritz! But the athletes and a ski-happy Norwegian public wanted something else. At the annual meeting of the NSF at Lillehammer in 1927, the ‘angry’ board was voted off, and a more internationally minded one took its place. The new leader was Nikolai Ramm Østgaard. Norway participated with a full team in St. Moritz in 1928. As president of the International Skiing Federation (FIS) during the period 1934 - 1951, Østgaard was one of the most influential leaders in the saga of Norwegian sports.

