

ROLLER HOCKEY



THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE, JOAN ANTONI SAMARANCH, HAS SEEN A DREAM COME TRUE WITH THE OPENING OF THE OLYMPIC DOORS TO THE SPORT OF HIS YOUTH — HE USED TO PLAY IN GOAL —, WHICH HE STARTED TO ENCOURAGE MANY YEARS AGO.

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Roller hockey is an attractive but little-known sport; one of the so-called “minority” sports, which lacks the international popularity of other events —surprising, if we stop to make comparisons. But let’s leave other sports to one side and focus on the one under discussion, with its stick and its skates, its padding and ball, its little goals and the pitch, which is generally forty metres long and twenty wide. In the top category, the “Honours Division”, the pitch has to be covered.

These are the main ingredients of hockey on skates, to which we have to add the five players per side — goalkeeper, two

defenders and two forwards — and the public: the final touch. At present, the first places in the Spanish state league are held by Liceo, from Corunna, Noia, from Sant Sadurní, Reus Esportiu, Igualada and Barcelona. In this short list we at once see that the Catalan presence in this sport is overwhelming. Roller hockey first came to Catalonia, grew, and then spread to all the rest of the Spanish state. Certainly, there are very few places outside Catalonia where it has become established. In Galicia it enjoys a certain popularity, though mainly concentrated in Corunna. The Catalan teams at present playing in the “Honours Divi-

sion” are Barcelona, Reus Esportiu, Noia, Igualada, Voltregà, Tordera, Mollet, Piera and Lloret. These are the sport’s nine strongholds, though it also has a good following in other places such as Vic, Cerdanyola, Ripoll, Ripollet, Sentmenat, Maçanet, Calafell, Arenys, Vilanova, Vilafranca, Vendrell, Terrassa, Molins de Rei, to name only a few.

At the 1992 Olympic Games, roller hockey will be present as an exhibition sport, alongside the Basque *Pelota*, and matches will be held in Barcelona, Reus, Sant Sadurní d’Anoia or Vic. There will be no lack of possible locations: there are



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some three hundred pitches in Catalonia, many of them capable of putting on important events. The president of the International Olympic Committee, Joan Antoni Samaranch, has seen a dream come true with the opening of the Olympic doors to the sport of his youth — he used to play in goal —, which he started to encourage many years ago. It was he who introduced the ball to replace the disk that was used before and, as president of the Spanish Federation, gave the sport its definitive character. As Samaranch later remarked, the presentation before the IOC was not as successful as it might have been, because the artistic skating and the racing events, also organized by Skating Federations, were given more importance than the hockey itself. Fortunately, however, this slip-up came to nothing and roller hockey could be a fully-fledged Olympic sport by 1996.

If any sport can guarantee us an Olympic

medal, won almost exclusively by Catalan players, this is it. Catalan participation has always stood out at European and at world level. Barcelona, Reus Esportiu and Voltregà — recently joined by Liceo, from Corunna — lead the field as regards collecting titles of all kinds and the Spanish team is largely made up of Catalan players. There is a lot of local talent to be found in the teams of Tordera and Voltregà, though Catalans from many different places have contributed to the glory of roller hockey. Of the 9,500 federation licences in Spain, 6,000 are from Catalonia and 4,500 of these from Barcelona province. Of the 982 teams in Spain, 629 are Catalan. This explains the established Catalan domination.

The Spanish team's trainer is the Catalan Carles Trullols, considered the best goalkeeper in the world in his day, star of Espanyol, Vilanova and, later, Barcelona. His latest selection makes up a representative cross-section of the best players

of the present moment: from Barcelona, Josep Llonch (goal), Hèctor Venteo (defence), Antoni Carafi (defence), Joan Ayats (forward) and Joaquim Pauls (forward); originally from Tordera but now playing for Noia, the brothers Josep Enric and Joan Torner (defence and forward, respectively); Jordi Hom, a Noia defence player who started out with Voltregà; and the Liceo defence players Francesc Alabart, originally from Reus, and Ferran Pujalte, from Barcelona. Other first-class players are Carles Folguera, the Igualada goalkeeper, Joan Carles, from the same team, Àlex Ferrer and Antoni Miró, from Piera, Buxaderas, from Voltregà and Reus Esportiu's Ventura and Zabalía. Luckily for roller hockey, there seems to be an endless supply of local talent. This guarantees a long life to this wheeled sport — if someone will only take the trouble to give it the boost it has needed for some years. ■