

FLAGS IN SPORTS

by W. W. Ridgway

Every nation uses its national flag at sporting events. Banners -- flags based on coats of arms -- were used in medieval days to identify the participants in jousts as well as judges, individual knights, and the house which a herald served. Matadors use bright-colored ribbons and banners as a means of identification, besides using a red "flag" to infuriate the bull. Flags in sports is such a broad subject it is almost impossible to list all the modern games that employ flags in some way.

The most colorful and spectacular use of flags in sports occurs in the Olympic Games. In the beginning of the ceremonies, all the athletes enter the stadium in special uniforms, each group following its national flag with the Olympic Flag leading the way. The Olympic Flag has a white background with, in the center, five interlaced rings of blue, yellow, black, green, and red -- arranged in that order from left to right. The flag of every nation competing in the games has at least one of these colors.

The Olympic Flag was first flown in public at Alexandria, Egypt, in 1914 and made its first appearance at the games of the VIIIth Olympiad at Antwerp in 1920. The Olympic Flag (and symbol) symbolize the union of the five continents and the meeting of athletes from all over the world at the Olympic Games in the spirit of fair and equal competition and good friendship.

In his study of 150 sports played throughout the world, the author found that 48 of the games used flags as a means of conveying a message to the contestants. This study included all 21 summer and seven winter games as currently played in the Olympics. (A sport must be widely popular in at least 40 countries on three continents before it can be considered for the summer Olympic Games. Winter games must have great popularity in 25 countries on two continents.)

Unlike many team flags and banners, the flags that are used in sports events have no logos. Most flags so used are rectangular in shape and plain in color. There are some triangular in shape, however, and also some with many colors -- for example, in car racing, yacht racing, and air racing.

The most widely used color is red, while a close runner-up is white. Plain flags of the following colors are used in sports: red, white, blue, yellow, green, purple, and black. These flags are employed to set boundaries as in football, shot put, discus and hammer, croquet, etc., as well as to mark the course in cross-country running and skiing. The color of the flag identifies the right or left side of the course. Colors also indicate whether it is a course for men or women. Some flags are used for judging and scoring, while others show penalties or fouls.

One interesting use of flags is in karate where four judges -- one at each corner of the mat -- have flags, one red and one white each. They use these flags to show a point scored or a foul or to show their disagreement with the referee's decision. If more than one disagree, they may reverse the referee's call.

Flags above the pool at swimming meets are more than just decoration. They let the contestants of the backstroke competition know when they are 5 m (5'5") away from the end of the pool.

Possibly the most colorful sets of flags in use are found in car racing, air racing, and motorcycle racing. These flags must be 2' or 2'6" (61 x 75 cm). In motorcycle racing in the United States the national flag is used to start the race while the black and white

checkered flag signals the finish of the race. A yellow flag means "danger"; a green flag is "all clear"; a blue flag means "rider behind"; a waving blue flag means "rider behind wishes to pass." The white flag warns of other vehicles or an ambulance on course. A red flag with vertical yellow stripes warns of oil on course.

Air racing is quite similar. Red and white flags signal the start of the race. A white flag is used to show the start of the last lap. A yellow flag signifies an emergency, while a black flag directs one or more aircraft to leave the course. The black and white checkered flag ends the race.

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Business Cards

by David Pawson

The serious vexillologist should obtain a set of business cards. Most of us think of business cards as something for company presidents, salesmen, or doctors; yet they can be useful in other contexts, as well. Like the coats of arms in a bygone era, the business card identifies the individual and names his ties. It also tells the recipient where the bearer can be reached, either in person or by telephone.

My own business card identifies me as a vexillologist. For the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with the word, it also says "Flag Collector." The addition of the word "Consultant" has led to the retention of my name as an information source. As for ties, the card tells people that I am a member of four flag organizations, lending even greater credibility to the preceding claims.

Exactly what doors can a business card open? I have been permitted in the back rooms of numerous shops after having presented a card and informing the proprietor that I am not looking for anything in particular, but would just like to see if they have anything unusual. Previously, I would be told, "Hey, look, if you don't know what you want, we can't help you." I have also been invited in to see otherwise too-busy people for the purpose of gathering information, including township and city officials and a bank president. In my work as a locksmith, I have encountered executives with company flags on their desks and have walked out with those flags after presenting my card and asking how I might obtain a flag for my collection.

The benefits of a business card far outweigh the cost of printing. I highly recommend their purchase to all serious collectors and researchers.