

The 'ration book' Olympics



During and after World War 2 (1939–45), Britain was short of money. To ensure that the food and clothes available were shared fairly, the amounts each person could have, and when these were used, were written in a 'ration book'. This text describes the arrangements for providing food to visiting athletes during the Olympic Games held in London in 1948, when rationing was still in force.

When London hosted the 1948 Olympic Games despite post-war rationing due to food shortages, it became known as the 'austere' or 'ration book' Olympics. British athletes were used to a restricted diet and food substitutes, such as powdered egg and milk. But the Government feared that limiting visiting athletes' diets might have a 'bad psychological effect', so they fed all athletes Category 'A' meal allowances – the equivalent of those provided for heavy workers (coal miners and dockers) but with the additions of two pints of liquid milk per head per day and half a pound of chocolates and sweets per head per week.

After the Olympic Committee warned visiting nations of the daily ration, many competing nations brought large quantities of food to be used by competitors generally: the Argentines, for example, brought 100 tons of meat, Holland promised fruit and vegetables, and Iceland, frozen mutton.

Supplies of food at one of the Olympic Housing Centres in Uxbridge were said to be 'ample', largely owing to the 'munificence of the US team'. Enriched white flour was flown to the camp daily from Los Angeles. But not all competitors were happy. Many of the Mexican Olympic team bought food in town, as they did not like English cooking.

Despite the warning of food shortages, some teams still complained: the Korean team were dissatisfied with their meat allowance; American teams requested supplies of grapefruit and fresh oranges after they complained of 'stomach trouble'. Requests for poultry caused the Government to state that there would be 'trade and consumer repercussions' if supplies were made to Housing Centres from an already 'extremely short' supply.

Despite the restrictions, the Games were a success, with provisions for all. In a press conference the Minister of Food, John Strachey, stated that the estimated increase in consumption by the competitors and officials amounted to 0.16 of 1 per cent, 'a completely insignificant amount'.

Adapted from material supplied by the National Archives of Great Britain

1 Look at the root word (shown in **bold**) and complete this sentence with related words.

A person who **competes** is a _____ who takes part in a _____.

2 marks

2 The word 'austere' means (ring **two**):

sad severe hard-going wartime extreme.

2 marks

3 Which phrase suggests that a restricted diet might make athletes feel miserable and unmotivated?

1 mark

4 Compared with heavy manual workers, visiting athletes were given a diet that was (ring **one**):

smaller exactly the same bigger.

1 mark

5 What food did the Dutch promise to contribute to all competitors?

1 mark

6 Enriched white flour came from (ring **one**):

Mexico America Argentina Iceland.

1 mark

7 Which teams wanted more citrus fruit, and why?

2 marks

8 Who was the Government's Minister for Food in 1948?

1 mark

9 What is the significance of the milk being referred to as 'liquid milk'?

1 mark

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