



A Year of Change

by Matt Betts

Friendships born on the field of athletic strife are the real gold of competition. Awards become corroded, friends gather no dust.

— Jesse Owens, commenting after the 1936 Summer Olympic Games

THE minutes of the second meeting of the Council of the EBU on 12 June 1936 concentrate simply on the founding of the new union with a number of famous bridge names attending, including Hubert Phillips and Richard Lederer. Outside their meeting room, however, 1936 was a year of immense change throughout the world.

Year of the Three Kings



In the photo: Prince Albert, Duke of York, acceded to the throne as George VI after Edward VIII's abdication at the end of 1936.

UK events of 1936 have recently been at the forefront of the public's consciousness

thanks to the Oscar winning film, *The King's Speech*, which depicted the Duke of York's struggle with his stutter. This was a very turbulent year for the monarchy, witnessing the very rare occurrence of three kings on the UK throne (George V, Edward VIII and George VI). The year started with the death of George V who had reigned for nearly twenty-six years, and in that time had been a well loved King, though he could not understand why: 'I cannot understand it, after all I am only a very ordinary sort of fellow.'

At the death of George V, his first son became king as Edward VIII but then, only months into his reign, a constitutional crisis arose when he proposed the idea of marriage to an American socialite, Mrs Wallis Simpson. She had divorced her first husband and was seeking a divorce from her second. The UK prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, opposed the idea, arguing that the British people would not accept a divorced woman who had two living ex-husbands. Edward knew that the government would resign if the marriage went ahead, and that would lead to an immediate general election, forever ruining his status as a politically neutral, constitutional monarch. As a result, rather than give up Mrs Simpson, Edward chose to give up the throne. On the night of 11 December 1936, Edward made a radio broadcast to the UK and the Empire, explaining his reasons for abdication: 'I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as king as I would wish to do without the help and support of the woman I love.' His brother, Prince Albert, Duke of York, now acceded to the throne as George VI, and like his father became a well loved and respected king.

The Crystal Palace Fire



On 30th November 1936, the famous Crystal Palace, which had held the Great Exhibition of 1851, was destroyed completely by fire. The glow was visible across eight counties. Winston Churchill, who witnessed it, said: 'This is the end of an age.'

Meanwhile, for the common man the Great Depression (a severe world-wide economic depression), which had started in 1929, continued to be a part of daily life in the UK. Various newspapers reported that an average family needed £6 a week to keep them above the poverty line. One member of the public, Mrs Bertha Blackith, who was 16 in 1936, said of those days: 'I started working at the age of 14 in some

really difficult jobs, just so I could help support my family.'

However, it wasn't all doom and gloom for families: 1936 also marked the appearance of Monopoly and families could at least imagine being richer. In addition, the first Butlins holiday camp was opened in Skegness, 'to provide affordable holidays for ordinary British families.'

Pinewood Studios



Pinewood Studios, which was to provide the set for many James Bond, Harry Potter, and other famous films, opened its doors in 1936.

The dire state of the economy did not stop the UK enjoying some sporting highlights, which included Fred Perry winning the Wimbledon singles for the third year in succession. His full career saw him as an eight-time Slam winner, and he was the last British male player to win any of tennis's Grand Slam events. Also, on 4 January, England celebrated its first ever win over the All Blacks in Rugby Union. It was a particularly famous game, because the 'man of the match', playing for England, was Prince Alexander Sergeevich Obolensky, who had fled from his homeland of Russia after the 1917 revolution. He scored two tries in this game, but it was his first that was regarded as the greatest for a long time, as Obolensky ran three-quarters of the length of the field to score.

The UK also enjoyed a scientific triumph when Sir Henry Hallett Dale shared the 1936 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine with his colleague Otto Loewi for their discoveries relating to chemical transmission of nerve impulses. At the same time, the BBC was setting the pace in communication technology by adding sound to television pictures for the first time; this achievement was slightly marred by reports that their only male announcer 'seemed ill at ease in head-and-shoulder view'.

Gone with the Wind



Margaret Mitchell first published her hugely successful novel, *Gone with the Wind*, in May 1936. It was made into a blockbuster film in 1939.

Outside the UK, 1936 saw the continuation of worrying actions which would eventually culminate in the hostilities of the Second World War. On 7 March, Nazi Germany reoccupied the Rhineland, an action which was in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles where Germany had been forbidden from 'maintaining or constructing any fortification' in that area. This was allowed to happen because many in Europe did not want a return to war and felt that the reoccupation would make little difference. One of these was the playwright George Bernard Shaw, who was quoted as stating that it was no different than if Britain had reoccupied Portsmouth. However, historians now believe that if the UK and France had intervened at that time, it is likely that Nazi Germany would have soon fallen. As Hitler said: '... if [they] had then marched into the Rhineland, we would have had to withdraw with our tails between our legs...' In addition, by May, Italy had invaded and annexed the last remaining independent African country of Ethiopia to add to their African colonies and thus create Italian East Africa. This success led to the formation of an alliance between Nazi Germany and Italy.

Later in the year, an agreement which was alleged to 'protect European culture and civilisation and world peace from the Bolshevik (Russian) menace' was signed by Japan and Germany. However, instead of providing any kind of protection, the alliances meant that Europe and the world would change irrevocably, with the eventual outbreak of hostilities of World War II.

Germany was also the stage for the 1936 Berlin Summer Olympics – well known because, first, they were an opportunity for Nazi Germany to promote themselves and their ideological belief in racial supremacy; and second, American Jesse Owens won four gold medals.

Jesse Owens's participation was controversial because discrimination against black people was still widespread in the US, with racial segregation enforced by the infamous Jim Crow laws. Owens won gold medals in the 100 metres, 200 metres, long jump and 4 x 100 metres relay. Owens later said: 'Hitler didn't snub me – it was FDR who snubbed me. The president didn't even send me a telegram.' Jesse Owens was never invited to the White House nor bestowed honours by the president or his successor during their terms of office.

1936 certainly had its ups and downs and was a year of immense change worldwide. It was also one of great achievement which, of course, included the founding of the EBU. A truly remarkable year. □

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR)



FDR was re-elected to his second term of office in 1936. He was the 32nd President of the USA, and led his country through a time of world-wide economic crisis and the Second World War. FDR dominated the American political system for over twelve years and for decades after his death in office in 1945. He is the only US President to have been elected to more than two terms.