

# *The Unveiling of de Coubertin's Memorial at the Sorbonne*

On December 1st 1959, an important ceremony took place in the amphitheatre of the Sorbonne in Paris before a large, an impressive audience. Its object was the unveiling of a memorial tablet of pink marble commemorating the events which took place in this very same place, when in June 23rd 1894, Baron de Coubertin's plan to revive the Olympic Games of the modern era was unanimously adopted by the Delegates present at the Congress. After years of unceasing labour and difficulties overcome, Mr. Armand Massard, president of the French Olympic Committee and vice-president of the International Olympic Committee, who launched

the idea of erecting a memorial tablet to the memory of de Coubertin, succeeded in bringing his project to a satisfactory conclusion. At the opening ceremony of the 1955 Session which took place at the Sorbonne, Mr. Avery Brundage reminded Mr. Massard of the task he assumed concerning this matter, and in 1959, Mr. Massard succeeded at last in carrying his project into effect. This tablet inserted above the outside of a door matches exactly a similar tablet placed on the inside of the door, erected to the memory of Pasteur in 1892 in commemoration of his jubilee.

This is the text engraved on the commemorative tablet:

THIS IS THE PLACE, WHERE IN JUNE 23RD 1894,  
BARON  
PIERRE OF COUBERTIN  
HAD HIS PROJECT TO REVIVE  
THE OLYMPIC GAMES UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED  
BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE WORLD

ON DECEMBER 1ST 1959, THE FRENCH OLYMPIC COMMITTEE, THE MUNICIPALITY  
OF PARIS, THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF THE SEINE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS  
COMMEMORATED THIS HISTORICAL DATE BY PLACING THIS MEMORIAL TABLET.

In his inaugural speech, Mr. Armand Massard expressed his thanks to all those who assisted him in his task. Mr. Maurice Herzog, High Commissioner of the youth and sport league, recalled de Coubertin's life-work and added the following comments:

'His revolutionary decision struck reasonable people as that of a fanatic. The die-hards were upset because he held his assizes in the Sorbonne. They felt he had the revolutionary

tendency of a rebel... instead of which this so-called rebellion turned out to be one of the most outstanding realization and achievement of these days. Olympism is based on the sound principles of fair play and stresses the importance of spiritual qualities allied to those of physical endurance and energy.' A distinguished gathering of eminent personalities of the world of sport attended the ceremony. It is impossible for us to quote all their names, but we must mention Mr. F.

Pietri who represented the International Olympic Committee and his colleague Mr. Armand Massard. The Baroness de Coubertin (who lives near Lausanne) was represented at the ceremony by a relative of her family, Madame de Navacelle.

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Herewith are a few particulars recalling how this Congress came to light and how it was constituted on June 23rd 1894:

It was on November 25th 1892, at a meeting arranged by the French Athletic Sport Associations to commemorate the fifth anniversary of its foundation, that Baron de Coubertin first stated that he proposed to revive the cycle of the Olympic Games. Subsequently, he asked the Union to summon an international congress of all the important sport associations of the world. The preparatory work was entrusted to a commission consisting of: Professor W. M. Sloan (United States of America), Mr. M.C. Herbert (Great Britain) and the Baron de Coubertin. Two preliminary meetings took place, one at the University Club of New York, on November 27th 1893 and the other at the Sports Club in London, on February 7th, 1894.

The Congress met for a session of eight days and began its work on June 16th 1894, in Paris.

The meetings were held in the large amphitheatre of the Sorbonne before an audience of 2,000 persons. Senator Baron de Courcel presided. On June 23rd 1894, Baron de Coubertin's plan to revive the Games was unanimously accepted by the representatives of twelve European and American countries in attendance. At the Congress, they nominated the International Olympic Committee which consisted originally of 15 members. The first duty of this Committee was to organize the Games of the First Olympiad of the modern era, which were held in Athens in 1896. The members returned to their countries, helped to organize National Federations where they did not already exist, eventually National Olympic Committees were created and the formation of International Federations was encouraged.

Thus were laid the foundations for the huge structure of international sport which exists today.

INAUGURAL SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR. ARMAND MASSARD, PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

In this very same place, 65 years ago, the Baron Pierre de COUBERTIN succeeded in making the world representatives attending the congress adopt his plan to revive the Olympic Games.

It is somewhat surprising that such a long time elapsed before paying this tribute to the creator of one of the greatest realizations ever achieved in the fields of sport, education and culture. In that time, we have been able to appreciate the prodigious achievements realized in a little more than half a century, by his idea and work, and we can judge the soundness of its founder's views by the structure he gave to the Olympic Movement.

For the last 65 years, the Olympic Games have survived two World Wars and some upheavals unprecedented in the world's history.

After each cataclysm, all the Nations of the world including ex-belligerents met peacefully under the aegis of the five symbolical Olympic rings. Better still, we observe that from Olympiad to Olympiad, the success of the Games is assuming such proportion that their fame and influence are being felt and have reached the remotest corners of the earth.

Raymond BOISSET, great sport's champion and an eminent humanist wrote recently:

'At each Olympiad, one observes that any country, which has just become autonomous, shows the desire to display her newly acquired independence by participating in the Games under her own flag.'

As conceived and decreed by Pierre de COUBERTIN, the aim of the Olympic Games is to bring together all the youths of the world in the Stadium to compete in the Olympic Games. Beside the nations which count numerous sport champions and prodigious record breakers, there are the more modest nations which participate on an equal footing in the Games. A fact, which, in the mind of de Coubertin, gives them equal terms on the human scale with those nations which win the most victories in the Games. Did de Coubertin not proclaimed widely that: 'The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part?'

Throughout the last 65 years, the Olympics of the modern era have been the object of criticisms, sometimes well-founded; their future disappearance has often been predicted. De Coubertin had a ready answer to these disparaging remarks, when he wrote in his memoirs: 'After each Olympiad, I read that it would be the last because... yet each celebration is an emphatic denial to this and is an apotheosis.' This prophetic reply has never been so true as it is today.

On two different occasions, de Coubertin chose the Sorbonne to proclaim to the world his idea for reviving the Games of Ancient Greece, this was in the natural order of things.

By family tradition, he was destined to serve his country by going into the Army or the diplomatic service, he soon gave these up to devote himself entirely to the problems of educational reform which he deemed of

prime importance, this led him to want to work some new system of education. His numerous publications on pedagogy still carry weight in many countries. It was his wish to promote a new formations of the youth of his time which made him realized his glorious scheme of Festival, where youths of all nations were to meet for the sake of sport and brotherhood. Thus it can be said that he accomplished a highly humanitarian and social work.

It is gratifying for us, who remain his fervent followers, to think that the Sorbonne, this well-known and illustrious heritage of France where flourishes French culture and known throughout the world, has been chosen to be the cradle where the idea which would transfigure the world and radically change the education of the young men of the future would come to light.

I offer my grateful thanks to Rector SARRAILH for welcoming us here today as was the case with Pierre de Coubertin 65 years ago, in order to commemorate his memory and his life's work.

The presence of the Minister of National Education who presided this ceremony is a sure proof of the interest he bears to de Coubertin and his work.

I also wish to acknowledge the presence of the High Commissioner Maurice Herzog who, as the leader of sport in France, gives an example to the youth of today of the highest spiritual qualities in men.

I also wish to mention the presence of the President of the National Assembly, the president of the sport group of this Assembly, Mr. Jean-Paul DAVID and the deputy Count Offenbach, the Prefect of the Seine, and the Prefect of the Police who have been kind enough to honour this ceremony by their presence, as well as the President of the National Sport Committee and the Presidents of the Olympic Federations.

To conclude, I wish to express my gratitude to my colleagues at the Conferences in Paris: the Municipal Council represented by the president of its commission for youth and sport, my devoted colleague Aug. MARBŒUF and the General Council of the Seine. My succeeding in bringing to a satisfactory issue this so long cherished project is certainly due to them who made it possible.

I also, on a previous occasion, obtained from the Municipal Council the privilege to create the beautiful sport stadium in Paris which bears the name of the illustrious Renovator.

Pierre de COUBERTIN'S body rests in the cemetery of Bois-de-Vaux at Lausanne while, in accordance with his wish, his heart was buried at Olympia in Greece. It is contained in a marble monument commemorative of the Revival of the Olympic Games. In France, we felt the want of a monument recalling the pedagogic and humanitarian sense and bearing of his great work.

For a long time past, it has been our intention to make good this omission, this is now accomplished.