



Protocol and Olympism

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To consider the protocol of the Olympic Games is to pay tribute once again with admiration and respect to the reviver of the Games, Baron de Coubertin.

While Coubertin was farsighted enough to sense just how much society at the end of the 19th century longed to see sport evolve along the lines and according to the ethics of Olympism, it was his panoramic vision of the world that enabled him to conceive the Olympic Games in their entirety. Thus, without omitting a single detail, he drew up not only the Statutes of the International Olympic Committee, but also the regulations governing the Games, as well as the protocol according to which they should take place.

It was in 1889, at the age of 26, that Baron de Coubertin first conceived the idea of reviving the Olympic Games, which had been abolished in the year 394 of our era. Everything seemed to indicate that this abolition was to be definitive, and that the healthy concept of sport which had triumphed at Olympia would never be seen again.

And yet Coubertin was indefatigable in his efforts, working unceasingly for four years to prepare public opinion in England, the United States, France and the other countries that he visited with a view to this revival. Thus on 25th November 1892, after a break of fifteen centuries, Baron de

Coubertin proposed the revival of the Olympic Games in a modern, international form. With this end in mind, he submitted to the Congress, which he himself had convened in Paris for 1894, the proposal to give the four-yearly Games a solemn, sporting and strict protocol aimed at preventing them from falling into the disorder and anarchy that characterised the sports events of the period.

Coubertin wanted the Olympic Games to be marked with dignity and decorum. For this, it

the following description, in the delightful language of the period :

"These five rings-blue, yellow, green, red and black-represent the five parts of the world, henceforth united in Olympism and ready to compete in fruitful rivalry. In addition, by including the white background, the six colours together represent those of all nations, without exception".

Coubertin hastened to have the first Olympic flag made, and it was presented and approved at the 16th Session of the

The Olympic protocol was drawn up by the Baron Pierre de Coubertin

was indispensable to plan their organisation down to the last detail.

He conceived and drew up the protocol, giving it a precise structure designed to ensure that the great Olympic festival would indeed be worthy of the noble ideas inspiring it.

This meticulous sense of detail led Baron de Coubertin to draw up—and have approved—the Olympic charter, the Olympic protocol and the athletes' oath, writing them out in his own hand, just as he organised the procedure governing the opening and closing ceremonies of the Games.

But de Coubertin did not simply trace out the broad outlines of the Games : with his

International Olympic Committee, held in Paris in 1914 on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the revival of the Olympic Games.

It was at Alexandria in 1914 that the flag was raised for the first time, to fly over the Pan-Egyptian Games, and next in California, on 18th March 1915, over the stand of honour at the San Francisco Exhibition, then later in Lausanne on the occasion of the IOC Session in 1919.

This flag then remained in the possession of the Greek member of the IOC, Angelo Bolonaki, who returned it to the Olympic Chancellery in 1959. It is at present housed in the Olympic Museum at Mon Repos in Lausanne, which unfortunately remains

The symbolism and protocol of other sports events must be renewed

constant search for perfection, he succeeded in coming up with the ideas and finer details required for every occasion.

After the first five Olympic Games, with their train of anxieties, joys, disappointments and moments of triumph, Coubertin had the idea of creating an Olympic flag.

He designed it himself in 1913, seeing it as a symbol in which all athletes, all countries, all continents and all races of mankind would be able to rediscover their identity. He gave

closed to the public for reasons beyond the control of the IOC.

After the 1914-1918 war, when the Olympic Games were first held again in 1920 at Antwerp, Baron de Coubertin composed the text of the Olympic oath taken by athletes before the opening of the Olympic competitions.

Another modification to the Olympic protocol consisted in introducing the symbolism of the Olympic flame. Although in 1934 he no longer presided over the destiny of the



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IOC, Baron de Coubertin approved Dr. Theodore Lewald's idea of using the rays of the sun to light a flame at Olympia which would be carried from hand to hand by a succession of athletes all the way from the ruins of the sacred precincts in Greece to the place where the Olympic Games were to be held, and where it would burn continuously throughout their duration. This gesture was meant to symbolise the vivacity and warmth of the meeting of athletes of the whole world, inspired by the brilliance and vitality of the Olympic flame.

It was during its 32nd Session at Athens in 1934 that the IOC approved the proposal put forward by the Organising Committee of the XIth Olympiad to include in the Olympic protocol the symbol of the flame lighted in the ruins of Olympia.

The IOC has always made a point of preserving the Olympic protocol as originally conceived by Baron de Coubertin and, whatever the modifications made to this protocol (oath taken by judges and referees, parade of the teams, closing ceremony, route taken by the Olympic flame, etc.), it has endeavoured to remain faithful to the spirit and philosophy that inspired Baron de Coubertin when he drew up the original.

It is to be regretted that the major sports events held at regular intervals have not been able to find an original and authentic ceremonial of their own. Most of them, not to say all, slavishly follow the acts and ceremonies of the Olympic protocol. The flame, the oath, the torch, the podium and

the other symbols that characterise the image of the Olympic Games are repeated so identically that the sports meetings which adopt them end up by losing all value and authenticity.

This is why we are so pleased when a sports event finds a new symbol, a different image, truly authentic acts, more fitting to the significance of the event or the competition in question.

We therefore have nothing but praise for the Mediterranean Games. Over a quarter of a century ago, these Games discovered the symbolism of water, inspired by the Mediterranean Sea—a truer reflection in fact of the philosophy of these Games. Although Greece is a full member of the Mediterranean Games, the Olympic flame has been replaced by the water of the Mediterranean, which each country taking part collects directly and brings with its team in an amphora typical of the country from which it comes.

Another symbol of the greatest importance was unveiled on the occasion of the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. The two hills that overlook the Olympic stadium were embellished by the ecological contribution of the various participating countries, each of which planted a tree from their respective country. By this act, each country taking part contributed something alive, authentic, lasting, and suitably representative which, as it grows, will gradually in the course of the years convert these hills into an international park where different types of trees from all over the world will live side by side, in the same harmony as that in which the Olympic athletes live, and in which all human beings should live.

As this example shows, there are a multitude of forms of symbolism, each more beautiful and more evocative than the next, capable of being adapted perfectly to the various sports events. However we must succeed in distinguishing clearly between the protocol of the Olympic Games and that of the other great world events.

It is obvious that the Regional Games patronised by the IOC are entitled to make use of certain specific symbols of Olympism, but it would be preferable for them to exercise their imagination in order to innovate a little in this field.

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