

THE GAMES AFTER SIXTY-SIX YEARS' WAIT

by *JORDI MERCADER*



It was in 1920 that Barcelona for the first time entered its candidacy to host the Olympic Games. On that occasion it opted for the Olympic Games of 1924. During this promotional campaign, in the course of which Barcelona converted its sixty-six years of Olympic stubbornness into one of its principal arguments, it was discovered that in reality not four, but five attempts had been made. Slightly more than one year ago, it became known that the city had also submitted its candidacy for 1940.

The Olympic idea first took hold in Barcelona during the period of large-scale exhibitions in the form of a project to supplement the spectacular initiatives taken by the city at that time. No sooner had the Universal Exhibition of 1888 closed its doors than the citizens of Barcelona were laying plans to hold another event of equal size. On 19th May 1929, King Alfonso XIII inaugurated the International Exhibition. On 18th August 1920, the Barcelona Municipal Council under Antonio Martínez Domingo, the mayor, decided to support Olympic candidacy for 1924. The only Spanish member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was at that time Count de Mejerada del Campo. Baron de Güell presided over the Spanish Olympic Committee (COE).

the Lausanne meeting, in which he requested that his country be chosen to organize the Olympic Games at which the thirtieth anniversary of the Restoration would be celebrated. Paris was chosen for the eighth summer Olympic Games and Amsterdam was chosen for the 1928 Olympic Games.

Eleven years ago, when Barcelona was hoping to be chosen as the seat of the Olympic Games, 19 of the 67 members of the International Olympic Committee met at the city's Ritz Hotel under their President, Count Henri de Baillet-Latour of Belgium, to initiate the work of the Committee's thirtieth session. At that time, the other principal candidate was Berlin, which had been chosen as the official seat of the 1916



*Baron de Güell,
IOC member from
1922 to 1954.*

THE IOC IN BARCELONA

The IOC decided at that time, upon the proposal of the Marquis de Polignac, that the designation of the seats for 1924 and 1928 would be voted upon together. The cities having the best chances were Amsterdam, Havana, Rome, Los Angeles, Prague, Barcelona and Paris.

The news commentaries placed Paris last among the favourites in view of the very bad results of the Games in 1900. Pierre de Coubertin, a Frenchman, who had been President of the IOC since 1896, announced at these sessions that he would retire after the 1924 Games were held. Not being satisfied with that, he addressed a letter to his colleagues, 24 of whom were attending

Olympic Games and which had been unable to hold them because of the First World War. Rome, Budapest, Alexandria, Buenos Aires, Cologne, Dublin, Frankfurt, Helsinki and Nuremberg were the other competitors on the overall list, which was finally reduced to Barcelona, Berlin, Budapest and Rome.

The candidacy had been formalised in 1929. One of its moving spirits was Baron Santiago de Güell, President of the Spanish Olympic Committee and member of the IOC. The candidacy was transformed into a municipal initiative with some private support. The Montjuïc Stadium, the cornerstone of which had been laid by Baillet-Latour himself on 5th April 1928, as well as the con-

struction of a 50-metre swimming pool and several basketball courts constituted the basis upon which the Barcelona sports aspirations rested.

The *Olympic Family* which included one marquis and five counts, arrived in Barcelona ten days following proclamation of the Republic, in an atmosphere of popular enthusiasm for the new regime. Both the Mayor, Jaume Aiguadé, and the President of the Catalan legislative assembly, Francesco Macià, did their best to please the illustrious visitors so that they would obtain a good impression of the city.



The seat of the "Generalitat" of Catalonia

The sessions were held, observing the usual secrecy of the IOC. Due to the sparse attendance at the Barcelona session, the Committee members decided to postpone designation of the seat, hoping to obtain the votes of absent members by mail. Later on, it was learned that the Italians had decided not to submit the Roman aspiration to a vote and that Hungary was with-

drawing the candidacy of Budapest in favour of that of Berlin.

Baillet-Latour appeared to encourage hopes that nothing would be lost by declaring that the absence of IOC members "might be motivated by erroneous information which had been circulated concerning the real overall situation in this beautiful country, which had set an admirable example of good citizenship".

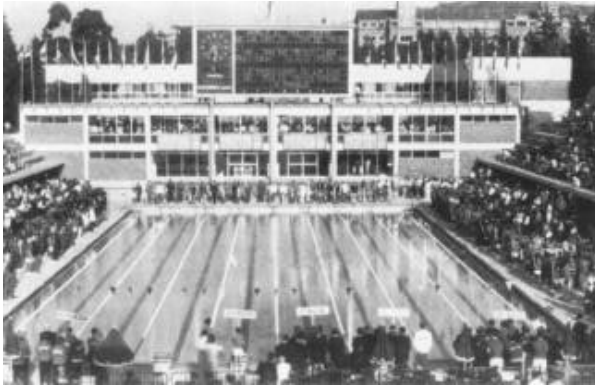
On 30th May 1931, the results of the first vote by mail held by the IOC became known. Berlin obtained 43 votes, and Barcelona, 16. There were eight abstentions.

THE "FORGOTTEN" ATTEMPT

Five years following this decision, on 19 July 1936, the Mayor, Carles Pi i Sunyer welcomed 5,000 athletes and 2,000 members of folk groups, all of them participants in the Barcelona Popular Olympiad. Only seven days later, the International Olympic Committee knew of a new request from Barcelona.

On 26th July 1936, a candidacy was formalized which for decades remained the secret of a few. Scarcely one year ago, members of the International Relations Team of the Governing Council for the present candidacy, came to know about the short history of the third assault on Mount Olympus. The political circumstances of that time, accompanied by the military uprising of 18th July, caused the project to be relegated to circles directly interested in it. The Spanish delegation, together with the President of the Spanish Olympic Committee, headed by August Pi i Sunyer, were unable to go to the Berlin meeting to defend the interest of their city. These circumstances, in addition to the fact that the 1940 Olympic Games, assigned to Helsinki, could not be held because of the Second World War, are the reasons why the promoters of "Barcelona 92", mentioned this third attempt only on rare occasions.

In mid October 1965, the intention of the Municipal Government to present the city's candidacy as seat of the 1972 Olympic Games was made known through an article in the Barcelona newspapers. The attempt was made under the pressure of time. Only one and a half months remained in which the Spanish Olympic Committee could present the Spanish candidacy to the IOC, which was scheduled to meet in Rome



Picornell Swimming Pool

between 25th to 28th June 1966 to designate the seat.

The Barcelona promoters, Pau Negre (member of the Spanish Olympic Committee and future Councillor for Sports), Alberto Assalit (Negre's predecessor in the Municipal Sports Commission), Francisco Platón (future provincial sports delegate) and Fernando Riba, among others, undertook in haste the presentation of a report which made an inventory of the available installations in the city as well as projects to be presented to the Spanish Olympic Committee. Juan Antonio Samaranch, the Catalanian representative of the Spanish National Physical Education and Sports Delegation, was the main ally of the project's promoters, who intended to establish the Olympic Village on Montjuic Mountain.

According to the document presented to the Spanish Olympic Committee (COE), the 1972 Olympic Games opened up a perspective of large-scale sports construction projects, some of which, such as the 50 x 25 metre swimming pool, bearing the name of *Picornell* in honour of the founder of the Barcelona Swimming Club and member of the COE who had died in 1970, materialized within a few years. Others are to this day still in the planning stage.

A few days before Christmas, Pau Negre received a telegram from the COE at his house in Puigerdà, inviting him to attend a meeting on 24th December. Over the telephone, Negre showed interest in the agenda. A voice which his son, Leandro, witness to the conversation, could not identify, said to his father: "It is not important ; it is to close the accounts". Samaranch was in Melbourne with the Spanish Davis Cup team. Isidro Oliveras de la Riva, another Catalan member of the COE, was also on a trip. Pau Negre, reassured by the telephone conversation, did not attend.

On 28th December, a letter from José Antonio Elola Olaso, national delegate for Physical Education and Sports and President of the COE, to Avery Brundage, President of the IOC, confirmed Madrid's candidacy as well as the holding of the aquatic trials in Barcelona. On the following day, the candidacy of Munich and Paris were officially confirmed whereas Sidney and Vienna announced their withdrawal.

"In those days the man from El Pardo was still alive", say some supporters of the controversial decision, offering no other explanation. Some downgrade the dispute by stating that the candidacy of Barcelona was in a very preliminary stage. Others maintain that the decision of the COE "had been taken in view of a complete report from Barcelona as against a telegram from the Mayor of Madrid at that time, Carlos Arias Navarro".

The International Olympic Committee met between 25th to 28th June 1966 in Rome at the Hotel Excelsior. The city candidates were Detroit, Montreal, Munich and Madrid. On 26th June, Prince Alexandre de Merode announced the decision to the effect that the 1972 Summer Games would be held in Munich.



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