



## Samaranch and Olympism

by Fékrou Kidané

Since Juan Antonio Samaranch became President of the IOC, his policy of renewal has completely changed the landscape of the Olympic Movement. It was in 1969, in an article that he published in the periodical *"Deporte 2000"* as President of the Spanish National Olympic Committee, that he first set out his vision for strengthening and renewing the IOC. Large extracts were reproduced in the *"Olympic Review"* in March 1970 under the title "Olympism in the World Today". Juan Antonio Samaranch's thought and analysis left no room for doubt that he would one day embark on this labour of renewal. "The IOC," he said, "which is restricting its activities more to the overall organization of the Games and the problems arising out of them, is becoming more and more remote from the tremendous organization of sport, which is growing larger and larger in all countries, and is also moving away from the many international organizations that have been formed in order to organize competitions between countries."

"Naturally," he added, "it is not the IOC's job to supervise the development and organization of sports in each part of the world. But it is nevertheless up to it to give moral backing [to world sport] and to instil the Olympic ideal into all sports, from the highest level down to the schools and the universities."

As he said, "the IOC's difficult position today does not depend on the whims of a few but on instinctive loy-

alty to ideas capable, today more than ever, of improving society and with it the individual. History will render justice finally to those who were wise and strong enough to maintain this line of conduct true to an ideal."

"However," Samaranch wrote, "the continued implementation of these ideas in structures that were right fifty years ago is debatable today and may lead to a crisis in the Olympic Movement. This is the real problem of modern Olympism which must naturally be tackled by the IOC." On the question of political independence, he expressed the view that it "is one of the best guarantees for the continuity of the IOC. But it is vital for it to look for a solution which combines political independence and real power over bodies, whose national or international authority is as a general rule dependent upon the economic possibilities offered by Governments. This is only one example of the many problems of structural adaptation that the IOC meets in the real running of the Olympic Movement, and, in the long run, of sport throughout the world."

In keeping with his views on the unity of the Olympic Movement, and in the run-up to the Congress of Varna, slated for 1973, Samaranch opined that "it is absolutely indispensable for the National Olympic Committees and the International Federations to make themselves heard at the next Olympic Congress and to bring with them that close, daily and intense contact which they alone are able to





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arouse thanks to their direct relations with the athletes, through the organization of competitions and by their contacts with the public and the mass media.”

“In all countries, sport is developing to culminate in Olympism, the supreme consecration, over and above competition, of its spirit, its essence and its soul. This is why the IOC must make its presence felt in sport throughout the whole world, not by organizing it in detail but by offering advice and laying down the broad outlines. What is important for us who belong to the summit organization of the Olympic Movement is to remember that it is up to it to ensure the continuity of the great work of education that sport has entrusted to us. We believe too that it is its duty to do so if it does not want to run the risk of seeing other bodies emerge, which are only wanting to take its place at the head of sport - which is the position that belongs to the IOC by right and by history, and to it alone.”

Developing this line of thought, he noted that “everywhere in the world, the IOC has aroused admiration, esteem and even veneration. But various important sectors of sport may perhaps no longer see in it, or believe that they no longer see in it, an organization dynamic enough or powerful enough to cope with the question raised by the demographic and sporting explosion of our industrialized age, or to solve the problems raised by new demands and needs, such as the harmonious balance of sport and culture in developing countries. Now in our day, which feels the need of rules for guidance, modern Olympism has become one of the few ways of achieving harmonious social development. As a result of all these factors, the leaders

of Olympism - the IOC - have been, and are continually exposed to the constant pressures caused by changing values and habits.”

In this article, written in 1969, Samaranch refers to many errors of judgement which he goes so far as to describe as serious, and advocates rapprochement among the IOC, the International Federations, and the National Olympic Committees. His campaign for unity within the Olympic Movement is therefore not recent. It is the aim of this synthesis to present the actions he undertook to correct them.

Juan Antonio Samaranch was born in 1920 into a family of industrialists who were also art collectors and who had among their friends such great painters as Salvador Dali. His determination to fulfil the dream of his predecessor and founder of the IOC, Pierre de Coubertin - build an

Olympic Museum, which was inaugurated in 1993 - came no doubt from his family environment. Recipient of the Seoul Peace Prize and many others, he donated the amounts received to the Foundation of the Olympic Museum.

He was still a youngster when his native city of Barcelona first bid to organize the Games of the XI Olympiad in 1936. Attracted by sport and Olympism, he covered the Games of the XV Olympiad in Helsinki in 1952 as a correspondent for “*La Prensa*”, a Barcelona newspaper, and became a member of the Spanish Olympic Committee in 1956. Unfortunately, his country boycotted the Games of the XVI Olympiad in Melbourne in 1956 for political reasons concerning the invasion of Hungary by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Discontented with this boycott



*The IOC Executive Board in Luxembourg in September 1971. (seated, left to right) Herman Van Karnebeek, Lord Killanin, Avery Brundage and Jean de Beaumont. (standing left to right) Juan Antonio Samaranch, Constantin Andrianov, Adetokunbo Ademola, Sylvio de Magalhaes Padilha and Prince Tsuneyoshi Takeda.*



The IOC members at the 83rd IOC Session in Moscow in July 1980.

decreed by General Franco's Government, the Catalan campaigner for Olympism, Juan Antonio Samaranch, organized a demonstration to show his opposition, raising the Olympic flag at the Montjuic Stadium in Barcelona. However, fate had it that in 1977 he was appointed Ambassador of Spain to the USSR by King Juan Carlos who, in December 1991, conferred on him the title of Marques de Samaranch. As early as the fifties, the name of Samaranch was on the list of members to be coopted, but he had to wait until 1966, when, at the age of 46, he became an IOC member at the 65th IOC Session in Rome. In 1967, Juan Antonio Samaranch was elected President of the Spanish Olympic Committee and after occupying several positions of high responsibility, he devoted himself

body and soul to the Olympic Movement. After having received the highest decoration of Spain, the collar of the Order of Isabelle the Catholic, he was admitted, in 1998, to the prestigious San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts as an honorary academician, during a ceremony held in the presence of the King and Queen of Spain. He has also received the gold medal of the city of Barcelona and of Catalonia. By dint of patience and diplomacy and a willingness to listen rather than to talk, he was to follow an instructive course within the Olympic hierarchy before reaching the post of President in 1980: head of protocol (1968-1975 and 1979-1980), member of the Executive Board (1970-1978 and from 1979), IOC vice-president (1974-1978) and chairman and member of

several commissions, among them the mass media Commission. His Olympic journey has enabled him to attend twenty-two editions of the Olympic Games, both summer and winter, and to preside over ten, five Games of the Olympiad and five Olympic Winter Games.

This overview entitled "The Presidency of Juan Antonio Samaranch", prepared as an assessment of the period 1980-2001, with the collaboration of Michelle Irachabal, Sylvie Espagnac, Katia Mascagni and Rachael North from the Department of International Cooperation, will allow you to analyze the renewal and modernization of the Olympic Movement, and the projects carried out under his Presidency. For further information and more detail, I invite you to consult "The modernization of the Olympic Movement" brochure, published in 1998, and the "IOC 2000 - Reforms" supplement of the December 1999/January 2000 issue of the "Olympic Review".

Each member of the IOC will also recognize his or her own particular contribution to the common effort. The experience and expertise of some, the advice and thoughts of others, have been of great value in the steps taken by the President and the Executive Board. Credit is also due to the IFs and the NOCs for their intensive cooperation and their contribution to the success of this undertaking. This preliminary work will certainly be pursued in greater depth, developed and completed by historians and will reflect at its true value the process that has led to the renewal and modernization of the Olympic Movement under the Presidency of Juan Antonio Samaranch.