

THE UNITED STATES WITHIN THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

There are historians who have labelled the 20th Century as the 'American Century' in that the United States started its rise to world prominence just before those particular hundred years began. At almost the same time, the modern Olympic Movement began with the formation of the International Olympic Committee in 1894, and the occurrence of the first Olympic Games of the modern era in 1896. Thereby, thus North American nation and Olympism as a philosophy and movement came to world prominence along parallel lines.

Baron Pierre de Coubertin had come to the United States in 1889, then again in 1893 to introduce and to lobby for his proposed modern Olympic Games based on the ancient Greek and sportsmanlike philosophy we now call Olympism. Only 26 years old in 1889, Coubertin stayed in the United States for seven months, travelling and conferring with American sporting officials such as James E. Sullivan who had only recently created the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). However, American responses to his proposal for a renewed Olympics were given only a lukewarm reception. For example, Sullivan listened to Coubertin's proposal for a new and international Olympic Games but was not impressed. However, after seeing the overwhelming success of the nine American track athletes at the original 'modern' Olympics in Athens in 1896, Sullivan supported the Games, an important factor in that so many of the USA's national governing bodies for the growing number of Olympic sports were administered by the AAU.

by Herb Weinberg*



Within his continuing effort to further enlist American sporting officials, Coubertin returned to America in 1893, this time conferring with William Milligan Sloane, a Princeton University professor of French history, known for his multi-volume biography of Napoleon Bonaparte. He was immediately favorable to de Coubertin's proposal, serving as the Baron's advocate and in fact Sloane



Sandra Baldwin, USOC president.

became one of the original 15 founding members of the IOC, serving on the Committee for 30 years.

Through these two visits, Coubertin achieved his purpose of bringing the United States into the Olympic Movement as a charter member. However and ironically, the Baron, although he lived until 1937 never again came to the USA once the modern Olympic Movement had been established. As President of the IOC he was scheduled to attend the 1904 Olympics; however he was offended by Theodore 'Teddy' Roosevelt's influence in having those Games transferred from Chicago to St Louis to enhance St Louis' World's Fair of that year. Therefore, he deigned not to attend. He also did not attend the 1932 Winter and Summer Olympics held in Lake Placid and Los Angeles respectively.

The official records of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) list Sloane as the President of the American Olympic Committee (AOC), formed in 1894, the year the IOC was established. However, words such as 'President' or 'Committee' are misnomers in that this conglomeration of Olympically-interested men under Sloane's guidance was little more than a social club, a gathering of men with nothing more to bind them than this common sporting interest. There was no gavel, no rules nor any vote within the AOC, just plenty of cigars. Things remained that way for another quarter-century,

That is until 1921, when the American Olympic Association (AOA) was formed under the presidency of Gustavus Town Kirby, with a constitution, laws and bye-laws in realising

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some sort of formal organisation was needed to gather and train athletes for the growing success of these growing Olympic Games. Thereafter the AOA experienced several name changes such as the United States of America Sports Foundation (1940), and the United States Olympic Association (1945) which was granted a United States Congressional charter allowing non-profit, fundraising activities as of 1950. Finally, in 1961, at a time of major constitutional changes, the Committee adopted the name it now bears: the United States Olympic Committee (USOC).

The formal investment of the AOA in 1921 occurred three years after the conclusion of the First World War as the USA was emerging into the affluent Roaring Twenties when sport became overwhelmingly popular. After the Games of the VII Olympiad in Antwerp in 1920, great American sports heroes emerged such as Babe Ruth (baseball), Bill Tilden (tennis), Jack Dempsey (boxing), red Grange (American football), and Bobby Jones (golf). Prominence was also achieved by Olympic gold medal winners such as swimmers Johnny Weissmuller (1924 and 1928) and Clarence 'Buster' Crabbe (1932) both of whom went on to portray Tarzan, the Ape Man in motion pictures. Collegiate sports also became more prominent in the 20's along with the emergence of professional sports leagues in baseball, football and ice hockey.

United States teams have participated in every Olympic Games, save for the Games of the XXII Olympiad in Moscow in 1980. That year President Jimmy Carter was running for re-election against Ronald Reagan and he seized upon the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic's invasion of Afghanistan during the last few days of 1979. Carter realised the USOC was in the process of preparing ath-



Avery Brundage, president of USOC (1930-1953) and the IOC (1952-1972).

letes for the upcoming Moscow Games declaring it would be unpatriotic and immoral for American athletes to compete within an invading nation. Carter, making it a vote-seeking issue, pressured American athletes into a vote of non-participation. William E. Simon, USOC president at the time, several years after his service as United States Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. opposed Carter both politically and philosophically: Simon was a Republican conservative, Carter a Democratic moderate. Simon strongly opposed the boycott; however when Carter called it a matter of national security, Simon's patriotism required him to forfeit his pride and he asked American athletes to comply with Carter's request. However, he did so with a sorrowful and heavy heart. (Reagan won the election).

The boycott was hurtful in that it interrupted a proud tradition wherein United States Olympic teams have provided an athlete for every eligible position within every sport for every

Olympic Games. Of course history finds the United States weak in certain sports, those athletes having little or no chance of winning an Olympic medal. No matter: every position, individual or team. is filled with the understanding that, medals notwithstanding and despite the cost involved, the USOC gives as many athletes as possible an Olympic experience: memories that last a lifetime. For example, the USOC took 602 athletes to the Games of the XXVII Olympiad in Sydney in 2000, once again the movement's largest Olympic squad.

In 1912. Avery Brundage competed in the pentathlon and decathlon athletic events in Stockholm. He did not win a medal, finishing well behind his American teammate, Jim Thorpe, who won the gold medal in both events. Brundage went on to become a Chicago millionaire in the construction business and continuing his Olympic interest served as the USOC President (1930-1953), becoming the symbol of puritan amateurism within the Movement. He continued that tradition as the fifth IOC President (1952-1972). Thorpe whose Olympic medals had made him a national hero had less good fortune. Shortly after those 1912 Games it was revealed Thorpe, had received twenty-five dollars a week as a professional minor league baseball player several years before his Olympic victories. Upon such discovery Thorpe was declared a professional and required to return his medals. He later appealed for their restoration in light of the relatively small payment he had received as a baseball player, but the AAU as the governing body refused to rehabilitate Thorpe and it was not until 1983, after appeals by Bill Simon and the USOC that the IOC restored the medals to Thorpe's family and restored his name to the Olympic record book.

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Controversy enveloped Brundage and the United States Olympic Association prior to the Games of the XI Olympiad in Berlin in 1936, inherited by Adolf Hitler. Because of the overt racism and anti-semitism in Germany at that time there was a movement within the USA to boycott those Games, to send no American team to Berlin. In fact, the IOC President, Henri de Baillet-Latour, had warned Hitler against any demonstration of prejudice during those Games. Brundage went to Germany and returned declaring his faith in the Nazi regime's promise to uphold the Olympic spirit. Although the controversy remained heated in the United States, Brundage prevailed and an American team went to Germany.

Then, in Berlin, two American sprinters, Martin Glickman and Sam Stoller, both Jewish, were unexpectedly removed from the 4 x 100 metres race on the evening before the competition. The African-American sprinter, Jesse Owens, had already won three gold medals and was not scheduled for the relay. Because of Hitler's racist beliefs it was assumed Owens had embarrassed Hitler who considered blacks to be an inferior race. Would the winning of more gold by two Jewish sprinters further increase the Fuhrer's embarrassment? In any case, Glickman and Stoller were replaced. Owens protested the move but followed orders to run and won his fourth gold medal. Avery Brundage supported the coaches, denying any charge of antisemitism. As an Olympic purist, at the conclusion of his IOC presidency Brundage in 1972 had despaired about the continuation of the Olympic Games as he saw the coming eligibility of professionals. That belief seemed prophetic as circumstances found cities indicating less interest in serving as Olympic hosts. Were the Olympic Games los-



William E. Simon, USOC president (1981-1985).

ing their cachet? A poll was cast by the fact that the Games of the XXI Olympiad in Montreal in 1976 had a cost overrun of approximately one billion dollars which according to the Olympic contract had to be paid by the Montreal Government, although payment was eventually shared by the city, provincial and federal governments. Therefore, prospects of Olympic debt seemed to have dissuaded potential cities from applying for the Games. Moscow, Los Angeles and Montreal had been the only bidders for those '76 summer Games; Moscow was the only serious bidder for the '80 Games; and Los Angeles the only bidder for the '84 Olympics. And only Nagoya and Seoul bid for the '88 Games. The boycott of the '80 Games in Moscow also placed the future of the Movement somewhat in doubt (only 85 nations competed in Moscow, while 27 withdrew and twenty-nine others did not reply by the invitational deadline). The socialist eastern-European bloc retaliated by boycotting the '84 Olympics in Los Angeles; however the over-

whelming financial success of those Los Angeles Olympics restored international confidence in the Movement, inspiring 13 municipal bidders to come forth to bid for the '92 Olympics: seven winter and six summer.

Prior to those Los Angeles Olympics both the USOC and the IOC were in monetary straits, the financial health of both committees being restored by the American merchandising and television contracts of those Games. In fact profits from those 1984 Summer Games established the United States Olympic Foundation which helps finance USOC national governing bodies, and also endowed the Amateur Athletic Foundation in Los Angeles, presided now by Anita L. DeFrantz, IOC member, and which has an outstanding Olympic library and provides grants to amateur sporting programs in that area.

Within the United States great emphasis is placed on university and college sports teams which started at about the time when the modern Olympics were initiated. Therefore, after James E. Sullivan created the AAU in order to organise amateur sport in the nation, it was not uncommon for many athletes who had been trained by university coaches to also compete under the aegis of the AAU for other national and international competitions. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) had been created after the turn of the century in response to a demand from Teddy Roosevelt who had been appalled by the several deaths that had occurred during collegiate (American) football games. Clearly, the game had become too violent and institutional rules changes were needed. Thereafter, however, the NCAA and AAU came into conflict in that universities and colleges had assumed the expense of training their athletes and resented having to hand over those

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Opening ceremony of the Atlanta Games in 1996.

athletes to the AAU, within which they had no representation, particularly for international competitions. The NCAA demanded influence within the AAU which for the most part was denied. Each of the organisations rules of eligibility were often in conflict, sometimes punitive against the other group, making athletes the victims, particularly since the AAU controlled nine Olympic NGBs including athletics, boxing, basketball, swimming and gymnastics. The NCAA controlled none.

Their battles lasted for decades. General Douglas MacArthur was appointed to organise the 1928 Olympic team, his efforts made more difficult because of these continuing NCAA-AAU confrontations. He resolved to settle the problem but he failed and the war between them continued to rage, until in 1976 President Gerald Ford created the President's Council on Olympic Sport which brought the combatants to hearings was the inspiration for the creation of the '1978 Sports Act' which overwhelmingly empowered the USOC as the dominant amateur sporting body within the United States.

The Act eliminated the NCAA-AAU controversy with a stroke of the Congressional pen, removing any significant Olympic influence by either of the two organisations. The Committee not only was given control over Olympic issues, but also over all international multi-sport events in which United States teams took part. The legislation was vital in that until that time the USOC for all practical purpose was little more than a 'travel agency', their primary function being little more than gathering athletes from the various NGBs and feeding and clothing them before transporting them to and from each Olympic Games. Today, however, primary power lies in the hands of the USOC. Of course elements of power still reside within each NGB. but by law no organisation may control more than one Olympic NGB.

In light of these facts it remains important to emphasise that although it was a branch of Government. Congress, that resolved the conflict, by no means is there any Government involvement in Olympic sports within the United States, including any

means of financing, not one cent. The USOC'S proud slogan states "America does not send its athletes to the Olympic Games: Americans do", emphasizing the USOC as a totally self financed organisation, funded by television and merchandising contracts and by private and corporate contributions. Thusly the USOC continues to guard its sense of independence, including from Government.

The Committee's current quadriennial budget is approximately one-half billion dollars, 84 percent of that amount going directly to athlete training. There are 30 major corporate sponsors including Coca Cola, Kodak Film, Visa Credit cards and Seiko timing, in addition to other suppliers, licensees and contributors. There are funds from Olympic Solidarity and the USOC receives a proportion of IOC contracts with American television broadcasters and other merchandisers, all of whom have certain privileges in using the Olympic five-rings within their advertising and marketing.

Therefore history has brought them to this place and time.

Does an examination of who they are and their sense of Olympic spirit justify the remark of former IOC President, Juan Antonio Samaranch, who called the Committee the 'flagship NOC' of the Olympic Movement. The Committee is headquartered at the United States Olympic Training Centre (USOTC) in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where elite athletes are in residence either temporarily or permanently within pleasant dormitories. Almost half the 39 NGBs are headquartered either on the USOTC campus or within Colorado Springs; two are located at the USOC's winter sports training facility at Lake Placid, New York, the others located around the nation. The Committee's third major training site is the huge ARCO

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Training Centre at Chula Vista, California, near San Diego, which includes a 2,000-metre rowing venue. Resident athletes at each training facility have the availability of local educational programs ranging from lower school levels to university programs. Other athletes pursue professional goals in local industry while training, supporting families by means of their NGB stipends and earned income.

Training and supportive programmes at the various Training Centres include sport psychology, sports medicine, and performance enhancement programs using science and technology including advanced computer analy-



The Olympic Training Centre in Lake Placid.

ses. There are state-of-the-art programs in biomechanics, weight training, rehabilitation and athlete nutrition. The United States Swimming Federation in Colorado Springs has its own research and laboratory facil-

ity including a flume wherein swimmers can swim in place through flowing water, even at world record speeds, observed by coaches, scientists, computers and film. The hyperbaric chamber there can simulate altitudes of up to 7,000 feet and the Aquatics Centre within the same building includes a 50 by 20-metre pool with movable bulkheads and overhead catwalks, one of the most computerised facilities in the world for athlete development. And there are the preventive and watchdog programs of the United States Anti-Doping Agency.

There is the Olympic Shooting Centre, the largest in the western



USOC headquarters and the Olympic Training Centre in Colorado Springs

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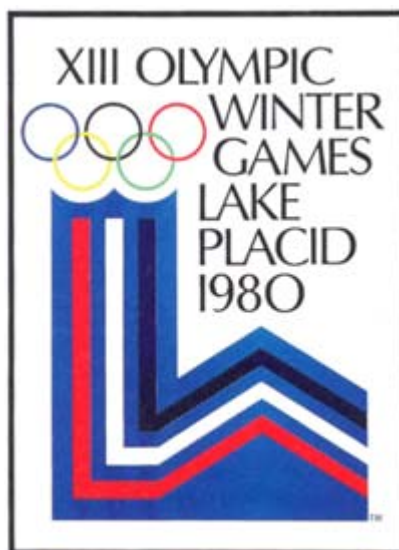


Medal ceremony for the 20 km walk in Los Angeles in 1984.

hemisphere; and the cycling velodrome is located within a nearby park, ideal for those seeking high-altitude training in that Colorado Springs is 6,000 feet above sea level. There are also separate training facilities for sailing in Miami, Florida; a 400-metre speedskating oval and two ice rinks in Milwaukee (Wisconsin); and an equestrian centre in Gladstone, New Jersey. And there is an affiliation with Northern Michigan University where amateur boxers train while acquiring baccalaureate degrees.

Of course these facilities host endless series of courses and seminars for athletes, coaches, officials and administrators. The Committee also encourages NGBs to create grass-roots programmes for Olympic and non-Olympic sports looking toward the development of the nation's future athletes. The Centres also serve as sites for national and international competitions, with programmes that encourage foreign athletes to come to the USA to train, to take advantage of what these programmes have to offer.

The USOC Information Resource Centre on campus is one of the finest libraries of its kind in the world, connected by computerised and other means to whatever information is available around the globe, disseminating as well as gathering and storing information. Of the approximately 300 members of the International Society of Olympic Historians, 70 of



these are United States citizens indicating the wealth of interest in Olympic scholarship within the nation. The USOC Media and Public Affairs Division informs print and broadcast media on a national and international level as to the Committee issues, policies and decisions. At each Olympic Games the USOC Media Centre is considered the international model for the instant communication of facts, results and human interest stories, having pioneered the means for the quickest, most efficient journalistic contact with athletes and officials. By these and other means the USOC sees itself as educator as well as organiser, an attitude that is further reflected within the USOC intern program which attracts university graduates for school credits within every phase of the Olympic spectrum, from the pure sciences through the Olympic arts. After all, Pierre de Coubertin considered himself to be an educator.

Although the word 'Olympic' is dominant, the USOC also prepares international teams for the Panamerican Games held in North or South America during the year preceding each edition of the Games of the Olympiad. Teams are also sent to the University Games and to the World Youth Games in addition to fielding teams for the Paralympic Games.

The Committee hosts and helps support the 39 NGBs of the international Olympic sports federations and as the centre of the American amateur sporting universe is also affiliated with the NGBs of non-Olympic sports such as racquetball, bowling, roller skating and rugby, among others, including associations with the Paralympic Games and other sports for the disabled. There are associations with the AAU, the NCAA and sports within the armed forces and religious organisations.

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As to the Committee's most important element, the athletes. it is not only a matter of sustaining and encouraging them on fields and on courts so much as athletes are incorporated into the decision-making process of the USOC. The Sports Act requires that within all councils and committees of the USOC a minimum of 20 percent of the composition and voting power must be held by recent and active athletes.

For more than the past century a total of 23 Americans have served on the IOC including the four that currently serve: Anita L. DeFrantz, a former Olympic rower and bronze medal winner in Montreal in 1976; William J. Hybl, the immediate past USOC President; James L. Easton, President of the International Archery Federation and Robert Ctvrtlik, a former Olympic volleyball player, a gold medallist in Seoul in 1988.

The XIX Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City represent the eighth Games held in the United States. Games of the Olympiad were held in St Louis (1904), in Los Angeles (1932 and 1984) and in Atlanta (1996); and winter Games in Lake Placid (1932 and 1980) and in Squaw Valley (1960). And even now the Committee is in preliminary preparations to bid for the Games of the XXX Olympiad in 2012. In fact a handful of American cities have already been reviewed and recommended as bid cities, all of which reflects the Committee's traditional attitude toward growth, particularly under the guidance of their newly-elected President, Sandra Baldwin, a Phoenix businesswoman, and under their newly-appointed Executive Director, Lloyd Ward, a success in the corporate world. They administer almost 500 employees, further aided by the volunteers within each NGB.

The USOC Visitor Centre on the campus of the United States Olympic

Training Centre in Colorado Springs, is designed to attract its constituency, the American public, providing free tours and exhibitions as the USOC's means of saying "This is 'your' place. Our Olympic dreams start here. Thank you for your loyalty, your inter-

est, and your contributions that have made all that you see here possible." Again, America does not send its athletes to the Olympic Games, Americans do.

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