

“Avery Brundage and the Internationalization of the Olympic Games”

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From 1889 to 1925, Baron Pierre de Coubertin sought to implement his plan “to bring about friendly intercourse between the nations” through athletic competitions. His “revival” of the ancient Olympic Games occurred in an era of fervent nationalism. It was also a time when the first steps were taken to form international organizations, such as the Postal Convention of 1875, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 1899, and the League of Nations in 1919. Major powers also staged international exhibitions or world fairs to celebrate cultural and technological achievements. Olympism, or the modern Olympic movement was founded in 1893 by an organizing committee that included a Frenchman - de Coubertin, an Englishman - C. Herbert, and an American - William M. Sloane. As the guiding spirit, de Coubertin believed that the revival of the ancient games would bring “representatives of the nations...face to face” and that “their peaceful...contests would constitute the best of internationalisms.” For him, internationalism was “a movement which arose from the great need for peace and brotherhood...” Easier communications and international exhibitions and conferences had created possibilities and precedents for sport to “become more international.” He thought that the I.O.C. would balance the “national and technical interests” of the national Olympic committees and international sporting federations by providing “a fitting internationalism and eclecticism.” In his 1925 valedictory address as I.O.C. president, de Coubertin declared that “all nations must be admitted” to the worldwide Olympic games and deplored the trend to celebrate a sports “fair” and neglect a pedagogic “temple”. In 1932, he hailed the I.O.C. as “a college of disinterested priests” untroubled by “sordid preoccupation with material profit” and an unrealistic assessment of its own value. He welcomed the increasing participation of Asians in the Olympics and celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the Olympic movement by proclaiming that “the whole planet would be its domain.” In 1934, he named internationalism and democracy as the bases of the new human

society...among civilized nations.” As the threat of international conflicts grew in 1936, he urged the necessity of “universal history...as...the only general foundation for a genuine peace” and called for mutual respect among the peoples of the world.¹

Global communications, economic depressions and international conflicts have provided a severe test for the international idealism of the Olympics. The five rings on the Olympic flag symbolized the linking of the five continents or “parts of the world.” While the rings were of equal size, there were great variations between the involvement of the peoples of the world in their control of and participation in the Olympics, and their interest in the concept of peaceful athletic competition. The internationalism of the Olympics may be measured by the International Olympic Committee’s choice of sites for competitions and meetings; its membership, participation and leadership; the athletes who have competed; and the spectators who have viewed the games in person or through the print and electronic media.

Nineteen of the twenty three modern Olympic games have been celebrated in Europe, the United States and Canada. Three of the four games held in other “parts of the world” occurred during the IOC presidency of Avery Brundage. Of the seventeen winter Olympics, the only games held in other “parts of the world” were also held in Brundage’s presidency.

Driven by the concept that the Olympics were “a great festival of the youth of the world organized to promote international amity, mutual understanding, peace and good will,” Brundage took the International Olympic Committee’s message to the world. The first forty-seven I.O.C. sessions were held in Europe, with the exception of a 1938 excursion from Paris to Cairo. From 1953 to 1972, under President Avery Brundage, the I.O.C. held twenty-six sessions. Eighteen were in Europe and eight were distributed to Asia, Latin America, Australia and the United States. In 1968, the I.O.C. published a collection of twenty of Brundage’s speeches at I.O.C. sessions. In them he recorded the growth of national Olympic committees from eighty in 1952 to 120 in 1966. He paid tribute to host countries and listed the heads of state in attendance, (e.g. Emperor Hirohito, the Shah of Iran, Leonid Brezhnev, Francisco Franco, Greece’s King Paul II and Crown

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Prince Constantine, the presidents of Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Mexico, Australian prime minister Gordon Menzies and Governor Pat Brown of California). Brundage condemned politics, defended amateurism and boasted of the spread of the Olympic Movement throughout the world. As the first Olympic meeting in Latin America, the 1953 Mexico City session was a "milestone." He hailed the Tokyo meeting in 1958 for closing the gap by bringing the I.O.C. to Asia, "the fifth continent represented by the Olympic circles." At San Francisco in 1960, the only meeting in the United States, Brundage advocated the replacement of national flags by the Olympic flag and celebratory national anthems by trumpet fanfares. He travelled thousands of miles to champion the Olympic movement. His fellow I.O.C. members enjoyed participation in the annual festivities that were made possible by his global contacts and the increased revenue from the modern games.²

The Paris conference of 1894 provided for an international committee to "restore" and "carry out" the Olympic games. International Olympic Committee members became responsible for writing and enforcing the rules governing the games. I.O.C. Rule 10 stated that the committee will select its members, who will be "representatives of the Committee in their countries and not delegates of their country to the Committee." They were forbidden to accept instructions "from the Governments of their countries, or from any organization or individual" that would "bind them or interfere with the independence of their vote." Of the 189 individuals elected to the International Olympic Committee between 1894 and 1939, 62% were Europeans. Twenty eight of the thirty three members who attended the April 22, 1927 Monaco meeting were Europeans. Twenty six of the thirty who attended the June 17, 1933 Vienna meeting were Europeans. Economic conditions were a factor in increasing absenteeism from 37% in 1927 to 46% in 1933. A 1928 listing of sixty two IOC members included thirty seven Europeans, eight expatriates and four diplomats serving in Europe. From 1894 to 1930, all ten Olympic congresses were held in Europe. In the 1926-33 period, the IOC's Executive Committee included five or six Europeans and one American.³

Leaders of the Olympic movement have placed an emphasis on the number of nations and athletes

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participating in the games. The first Olympic games attracted 294 participants from eleven nations. 91% were Europeans. In 1912, the fifth Olympiad in Stockholm had 3,525 participants. 92% were Europeans. The Berlin games of 1936 included 4,070 athletes from 49 nations. 73% were Europeans. The Munich games of 1972 included 7,894 competitors from 127 nations.⁴

The internationalization of the Olympic movement involved the spectators or non-participants. The 1912 Stockholm games reported 327,288 "paying visitors" and 259 journalists from other countries. The 1932 Los Angeles games were the first to exceed a million spectators and employed teletype machines for the rapid reporting of results to the press. The 1952 Helsinki games issued 1,848 press passes. From 1952 to 1960, television coverage was limited as networks negotiated with Olympic committees for coverage rights. The 1964 Tokyo games drew more than two million spectators. The television rights for the 1972 Munich games yielded \$17,790,000. Worldwide television coverage brought Olympic performances and pageantry to huge viewer markets, especially in the United States, Europe and Japan. Brundage observed that what millions of television viewers "absorb depends largely on the degree of awareness of the commentators of the real objectives of the Olympic Movement."⁵

Avery Brundage's participation in the Stockholm Olympics of 1912 and a subsequent European tour kindled an interest in the Olympic Movement as a force to counter the death and destruction of World War I. As president of the American Olympic Committee in 1932, he welcomed teams from forty countries to the first truly international Olympic Games held in America. Twenty-four European and nine American nations participated. Brundage's experience as a participant (1912), spectator (1924, 1928) and organizer (1932) of the Olympic games (all related to) his devotion to the Olympic movement and the views of Pierre de Coubertin. In 1934-36, he led the campaign for American participation in the Berlin Olympics. He was selected for IOC membership in 1936 and remained a major force in its affairs until he relinquished the presidency in 1972. Sigfrid Edstrom urged him to attend the 1937 IOC meeting in Warsaw as he might be a candidate for vice-president. While

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the rapid promotion did not occur, Brundage participated in drafting a statement endorsing “comprehensive national programs of recreation and athletic training for the purpose of betterment of the physical condition of the nation”, provided they were not ‘artificial political programs prepared chiefly for national aggrandizement.’ In 1940, he accepted the chairmanship of the Citizens Keep America Out of War Committee in Chicago. In introducing Charles A. Lindbergh at an August 4 rally, he blamed “the stupid, dishonest and criminal politics” for the war and opposed correcting the worlds evils by force. Pleading for “a moral and spiritual regeneration and a return to Christian principles and the Golden Rule,” he declared that he believed “in the non-interference by America in the internal affairs of Europe” and that it was “of the utmost importance for us to cooperate with Europe in our relationships with the other peoples of the earth.” During World War II, Brundage responded to a British proposal that the Olympic Games be “deferred for 25 years,” because they created “trouble instead of international goodwill.” He suggested that religion, which had failed “to prevent war for thousands of years,” might also be abolished and that “international incidents” at the Games were so rare that they had “more news value” than positive events. He also favored acceptance of the Soviet Union as a member of the international athletic federations and the I.O.C. if they “agree to all of the rules and regulations and leave their politics at home.”⁶

With the death of Count Henri Baillet-Latour during World War II, Vice President Sigfrid Edstrom became acting I.O.C. president. In 1945, Brundage became Vice President and continued to work closely with Edstrom to replace members and revive the games after a twelve year interruption. Between 1945 and 1952, they secured the election of forty-eight new members, sought to reconcile sportsmen in the postwar nations, and encouraged the formation of national Olympic committees. From 1945 to 1972, the percentage of Europeans and North Americans elected to IOC membership declined by 13.8%. The percentage of Africans and South Americans increased by 11.3%. In April 1950, Brundage gave a dinner party for ten I.O.C. members in Buenos Aires, including six from Latin America. Edstrom admired Brundage’s work “in bringing the Spanish American countries into the Olympic family.” In 1951, he promised to do his best

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to have Brundage appointed as IOC president, but warned that “they will resist an American” and that Swiss Chancellor Otto Mayer “will become more independent.” Brundage responded that, if elected, he would “have to spend more time in Europe.” Upon Mayer’s resignation in 1964, Brundage lived in California, kept his Olympic files in Chicago and delegated the responsibility for running the Lausanne office to Monique Berlioux.⁷

Brundage became I.O.C. president in 1952 at the age of 65 and served until 1972 when he was 85. The Olympic Games also “aged” from 56 to 76. In both cases, aging brought accommodation to changing conditions. Only the land areas of the “five parts” of the Olympic world remained the same. A Eurocentric festival had become a global media event. Proponents of the modern games had witnessed the spread of international athletic competition and global enthusiasm for sports and physical fitness. Their lives had also been interrupted by the nationalistic turmoil of two world wars and dozens of colonial conflicts, wars of national liberation, police actions and ethnic “cleansings.” While the number of sovereign states had increased from about fifty-four in 1896 to about 146 in 1972, the number of nations appearing in the Olympic games increased from eleven to 127. In 1960 alone, seventeen new nations emerged in Africa. Brundage presided over the first Olympic games in Australia, Asia and Latin America, played a major role in establishing the Pan-American Games, and attended the first African Games. His strong stand for amateurism and internationalism brought severe criticism from the entertainment and news media and sports federations in the developed countries.

The death of his old friends Sigfrid Edstrom and Karl von Halt in 1964 and the mixture of personal rapport and organizational rivalry between Brundage and David Cecil, Marquess of Exeter and Edstrom’s successor as President of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, changed Brundage’s relationships with European I.O.C. members. He cultivated new members in Germany and eastern Europe and was particularly active in strengthening the Olympic movement in Latin America and the Far East.

Prewar efforts to establish the Pan-American Games and Oriental art collecting coupled with a readiness to

avoid political problems enabled Brundage to bring Latin America and Japan into the Olympic movement and led to awarding the 1964 games to Tokyo and the 1968 games to Mexico City. In both cases, he combined a shrewd ability to select effective I.O.C. members with personal visits to develop interest in Olympism. By 1950, only one of two surviving Japanese members was able to attend the I.O.C. meeting in Copenhagen. Shingoro Takaishi of the Mainichi Newspapers was willing, but the American military occupation did not permit him to leave the country. Brundage's predecessor as American Olympic Association president, General Douglas MacArthur, suggested Ryotaro Azuma, president of the Japanese Olympic Committee, as an alternative. Azuma, who became mayor of Tokyo, provided valuable service in staging the 1964 Olympic games. Takaishi was able to rejoin his colleagues before the Tokyo games.⁸

In 1946, Brundage visited Mexico City and Acapulco. His host was General José Clark Flores, an engineer and president of the Mexican Sports Federation. Clark came to Chicago in 1949 and obtained Brundage's assistance in reorganizing Mexican sports, preparing Mexican teams for international games, and supporting Mexico City's invitation to host the 1952 I.O.C. meeting. Clark travelled throughout Latin America to promote amateur sports and functioned as Brundage's agent, emissary and deputy. Brundage worked for more recognition for Latin America in international sports organizations. In October 1950, Clark addressed Brundage as "the Perfect Amateur of our Continent and our genuine leader." The cordial relationship continued after Clark was selected for I.O.C. membership in 1952. It was reflected in April 7, 1962 advice that though El Salvador's decree goes against Olympic ideas, "it is advisable to take them as a more natural thing in Latin American countries, since their governments are those that sustain sports." They are "firm" and one should "spend the money that is delivered for sport."⁹

Avery Brundage's proposals to eliminate such nationalistic aspects of Olympic competition as point scores, national anthems and flag ceremonies were unsuccessful. His devotion to the concept of reverse representation in the I.O.C. recognized its value as a weapon in the defense of international sports competition. Brundage was aware of the market

potential of the Olympics, but his personal commitment to Olympic ideals that had been formed in his youth, forged in the 1935-52 period and implemented in his presidency, did not enable him to become an enthusiastic participant in the commercialization and marketing of the modern Olympics. Six of the seven I.O.C. presidents have been Europeans. The only exception, Avery Brundage, was the most successful in extending the concept of international games throughout the world.¹⁰

Endnotes

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8. Brundage to MacArthur, Feb. 18, 1950; Brundage to Takaishi, April 15, 1950; Takaishi to Brundage, April 23, 1964. All from Box 64, ABC.

9. Brundage to Clark, Dec. 16, 1949, Jan. 5, 1950, Aug. 2, 1962, Nov. 12, 1963, July 1, 1964; Clark to Brundage, March 27 and March 30, 1950, Oct. 14, 1950, Nov. 28, 1952, March 3, 1959, April 7, 1962. All from Box 62, ABC.

10. Brundage to Clark, Sept. 22, 1962, Box 62, ABC; Speeches of Avery Brundage, 48; "Manuscript: Brundage Autobiography," Introduction:2, 2: 10- 11, Box 330, ABC.

