



**MEMORIAS OLÍMPICAS**  
by Juan Antonio Samaranch; with the assistance by journalist Pedro Palacios; published by Editorial Planeta S.A. 2002, Diagonal 662-664, 08034 Barcelona, Spain: [www.editorial.planeta.es](http://www.editorial.planeta.es) ISBN: 84-04476-1; 439 pages in Spanish (English and French editions to follow later). Reviewed by Wolf Lyberg.

There can be no doubt that this book will give many readers a completely new view, not only on the International Olympic Committee (IOC), but above all on the author himself, the Past President.

I could not stop reading – even though I knew a great many details – the book fascinated me through the compassion which was shown quite often, the perseverance of this President, and especially what a wise and clever tactician and strategist he has been over those twenty-one years of his Presidency.

Many of our readers will wonder if this reviewer really understands the Spanish language well enough to read such a book in a few days. The answer is: "yes", as I once studied (and read) Spanish. At meetings where Spanish was spoken I could understand everything without ever using an interpreter.

There are hundreds of interesting observations in this book, which looks 'massive', but which still is quite easy to read.

It is evident that Juan Antonio SAMARANCH has good roots as a statistician; there are many examples in the book to show this. He starts with informing the readers that his presidency lasted 7,306 days – and he then gives an astonishing number of examples showing the importance the figure 7 always had for him personally. He mentions the seven wonders of the "world" and the exploits of Hercules.....

When I now make a summary of what has been accomplished during his years as IOC President, I wish to give him the title: "The Olympic Hercules" and continuing in the same style I can make another resemblance with ancient times: "*The Cleaning of the Augias Stable.*" [If you as our readers permit me such a metaphor for the Salt Lake City Scandal].

Allow me to just give you a few of his exploits, without using any specific order:

- The Unity within the Olympic Movement;
- The abolition of the amateur-athlete;
- The return of China into the Olympic Family;
- The abolition of apartheid in South-Africa and the return of that country in the Olympic Family.
- Making the IOC independent from political pressures;
- Making politics part of the world of sports;
- Making an almost bankrupt IOC, on the basis of good economical grounds and with the aid of the TOP-program, into a financial healthy organization;
- Building a fabulously beautiful Olympic Museum; with an Olympic Studies Centre and an important Olympic Archive and Library.
- The fight against doping, for the health of the athletes;
- Olympic Solidarity;
- Better protection of the environment;
- Much improved role of women in sport;
- The reorganisation of the International Olympic Committee.

Before anybody accuses me for 'idolizing' an old friend, let me assure you that SAMARANCH in no way tries to take the full honours for all these things. He is very careful to pay his respects to his many co-operators: the members of the IOC, NOC-, or IF-officials, or the members of the IOC staff.

SAMARANCH himself wrote: "*Nobody is, or has been, more critical about my person than myself. I never was onehundred percent satisfied and wished to do even better all the time.*"

He did not spare himself either. Reading about his 35 hours flight from Lome in Togo to Madrid is almost incredible – and we should not forget his 35,000 kilometres flight from Sydney to Barcelona and back, during the Olympic Games in Sydney in September 2000, when his wife Bibis passed

away; a drama never to be forgotten, as it is described in his day-by-day Olympic Diary.

This diary, from the period covering his ten Olympic Games as IOC President, shows with how much insight in sports IOC officials are equipped. The many dangers and problems which could occur unexpectedly, but for which the IOC anyhow needed to be prepared, were to be taken in consideration. Reading about these careful plannings made this old Olympian with 27 Olympics under his belt, feel very small and insignificant.

The twenty years of the SAMARANCH presidential period have certainly not been without problems. Leading the IOC not only meant eating rich food, but sometimes also water and bread.

Many tough fights had to be fought.

Do not think that the President of the IOC just liked sitting in a plane, on his way to meet another "Head of State", and being received, honoured and pampered like one. SAMARANCH grew up as an athlete and he always especially felt at ease among the athletes. He certainly is not the vain man as described by many of his critics.

He always speak eloquent of many of these athletes; such as ZATPEK, KILLY, Cassius CLAY, INDURAIN, Sebastian COE, Fanny BLANKERS-KOEN and perhaps above all Sergei BUBKA. He even boasts that already in Helsinki in 1952 as a boxing-reporter, he predicted that Floyd PATTERSON would become a world champion!

One of SAMARANCH'S most important views is that the athlete has been – and should be – the core of the Olympic movement and deserves the protection of the IOC. This is in order to have them, when they end their sports career, continue to serve the Olympic Family of which they have been an integral part.

Looking back on what happened to the position of the Olympic athletes over the last ten years, we must conclude that thanks to Samaranch, the position of athletes from all over the world has been dramatically improved. Samaranch himself writes about this saying that: *"when conflicts occur, it is for their rights to compete in the Olympic Games, that sometimes we have to fight the politicians"*.

He also wrote:

*"We must never forget that the IOC is at the service of the athletes. It is our duty to help them. If we wish to gain their respect we must show us worthy of their confidence. Therefore we have to take care of their health. We must also see that every athlete has the same chance, independent of political and economical system in his/her country. We have to help them in their evolution as athletes and as human beings, and have to fight every sort of discrimination which could endanger him/her from*

*becoming free and respected citizens in our society."*

SAMARANCH reveals at least something new in his book – the voting figures when he was elected President of the IOC in Moscow in 1980. In the minutes of the Session, as usual in those days, was stated that the vote was "unanimous". However, the real figures for the five candidates were:

• Samaranch	44
• Hodler	21
• Worrall	6
• Daume	5
• Void	1

Another interesting note came to light: IOC President KILLANIN proceeded after this with the announcing of the second round of voting to be made. The Tunisian IOC member Mohamed MZALI however then pointed out: *"Please, Mr. President, there is already one candidate with the absolute majority needed"*.

As to his election in Moscow in 1980, it came as a big surprise for many people. SAMARANCH was not – then – wellknown in international sport and many people foresaw a 'disaster' for the IOC during his presidency. Now the results speak for themselves. He left an IOC unified and strengthened, and nowadays accepted as the real force behind the Olympic Movement.

After his election, one of the African members, Keba MBAYE from Senegal, came to congratulate him, but in the same discussion informed SAMARANCH that he had been a member for seven years and that in his ideas nor he and nor the IOC had managed to accomplish anything of what had been planned. He felt to be without any utility for the IOC, and wanted to inform the new President that he had the intention to quit as a member of the IOC. He even had already written his letter of resignation.

This did not surprise SAMARANCH, because it had seemed to him that the general situation among the members of the IOC was rather negative. His impression of MBAYE had been positive, and SAMARANCH asked him to postpone sending the resignation letter.

SAMARANCH had promised to come back to MBAYE with suggestions, and at the IOC Congress of 1981 in Baden-Baden, he came up with the proposal to have a special *Arbitration Court for Sport (C.A.S.)* with Keba MBAYE (a lawyer who officiated in the International Court of Justice at The Hague) to lead it. MBAYE accepted and from that moment – but not without difficulties – the C.A.S. is now generally accepted as some sort of "The Hague Tribunal". SAMARANCH explicitly stated in his book that the honour for the success of the C.A.S. is due to MBAYE'S work.

Through the presidencies of Avery BRUNDAGE and Lord Michael KILLANIN – both staying 'at home' in Chicago and in Dublin, the IOC offices had been managed by Monique BERLIOUX, an Olympic backstroke swimmer (semifinals in London in 1948). She served first as press attaché; and later succeeded to the post of director of the IOC. She was extremely efficient, but also had her own way of doing things and her own way of leadership. She had no intention to give up her position.

When SAMARANCH decided to become a full-time president and live in Lausanne as a consequence, everything changed. Hard internal "fights" broke out and already in 1981 a 'divorce' of the two parties was close. IOC member SIPERCO managed to find a compromise, but a shortlived one, because in 1985 BERLIOUX left the IOC.

Another hard battle, mostly unknown to "outsiders" was the one with the International Federations. Because I myself worked in the *Swedish Olympic Committee* during these years, I remember the hard fight between BRUNDAGE and the National Olympic Committees and International Federations, who wished to form their own organisations. Only the International Federations then succeeded in establishing the AGFI under FISA President Thomas KELLER, a Swiss lawyer. In every way possible, he opposed the IOC and made its work difficult.

KELLER attacked SAMARANCH with the help of certain German newspapers. Why this hate? The reason is said to be that BRUNDAGE once promised KELLER to co-opt him as a member of the IOC when a place would come free. But when the occasion was there, the IOC co-opted Raymond GAFNER instead.

In fact the IOC was very lucky, because Marc HODLER – the President of the *International Ski Federation* – started the Winter Sports IF organisation, which met with much success; so much success that the Summer Sports International Federations started their own one, and managed to vote in NEBIOLO as its President. KELLER'S days were numbered!

The author speaks rather freely about his two predecessors. It is evident that he admired both of them as private persons, but he writes in his book that BRUNDAGE "*battled for something that really never existed (the amateur athlete) or at least disappeared a long time ago*".

BRUNDAGE was patriarchal and he tried every possible means to have the Olympic Winter Games cancelled, as he was opposed to – and recognized the emerging commercialism in sports, and above all, in the sport of skiing.

It was a pity – wrote SAMARANCH – that this man, who from nothing made himself a selfmade

millionaire [with three bankruptcies] had to end his Olympic career with the Munich-chaos in 1972. But BRUNDAGE showed his personal strength by stubbornly refusing to interrupt the 1972 Olympics.

His ideas to make the IOC completely independent from politics and political pressure, while stating that "sports and politics do not belong together" was completely the opposite from Samaranch's ideas about this. SAMARANCH thinks – and rightly so in my opinion – that politics are involved in everything in our modern society. We have to live with it and make our voice heard.

History shows that politics have been involved with the Games since 1894. It could not have been anything else! We have, since many decades, heard that it is impossible to mix politics and sports. For some people these things are like water and fire – they do not mix. And in fact nothing is so far from reality! Sports is an universal language – or global as we say nowadays. It now more unites than divides people. Sport is a school in democracy and peace, and a pedagogical instrument for mutual understanding.

Marat GRAMOV – the USSR Minister for Sports – assured SAMARANCH during the inauguration of the Spartakiad in July 1983, that the word 'boycott' was unknown in the Soviet Union, and that they never mixed sports and politics.

While visiting President Ronald REAGAN in Washington, it was discussed how to prevent the almost certain boycott of the USSR and its vassal states. REAGAN then came up with the idea:

*"What if I write a personal letter to Tchevtchenko and invite him to sit with me on the grandstands-of-honour during the Opening Ceremony?"*

SAMARANCH saw a possible way out of the dilemma and immediately offered to take the letter to Moscow and personally hand it over to TCHEVTCHENKO.

However, George SCHULTZ – Secretary of State – advised REAGAN to study this suggestion carefully – and then everything seemed to be lost. REAGAN and SAMARANCH talked about many other things, and before he left, SAMARANCH reminded REAGAN, saying: *"Mr. President, may I remind you about my offer to take your invitation to Moscow.*

REAGAN said nothing – he just smiled his Hollywood smile, and SAMARANCH then understood that REAGAN'S staff and political advisors did not like the idea.

I had to smile when I found the quote made by Avery BRUNDAGE during the Cortina d'Ampezzo 1956 Session, as was mentioned in the minutes, saying: *"the IOC has managed without television for sixty years and will do it for sixty more years"*. Had they really? But perhaps BRUNDAGE was not so "hopelessly oldfashioned" as another quote

from him says: *"Times have changed, they will change even more – but the Olympic ideals must be kept unaltered"*.

The KILLANIN years were just an interregnum. They served to calm a few, but did not solve the existing problems.

KILLANIN had not much luck during his eight years as President of the IOC. He had to cope with two boycott's, of which the one in Montreal in 1976 was a completely unnecessary, even absurd one. The reason was above all the fact that there seemed to be a barrier between the African leadership and himself. Furthermore, all contacts between the Canadian Prime Minister Pierre TRUDEAU and KILLANIN *"were stopped by persons within the IOC"*.

SAMARANCH describes many highs and lows during the course of his career. Especially IOC's acting in South Africa and the final solution of the apartheid problem in sports seems to be among the very best. *"We were the first to close the door for South Africa, but also the first to open it"*.

But SAMARANCH was shocked – he reveals – when the first discussions with the new Prime Minister of South Africa Nelson MANDELA showed that they would come to the Olympics in Barcelona in 1992 with an all-white team. And – as usual – he managed to find a solution – as like in most of the times when dealing with Africa through veteran IOC member in Senegal Keba MBAYE.

About Seoul, SAMARANCH reports on a demonstration of students, which he witnessed from his hotel *Shilla*. The students had gathered for one of the demonstrations, which television corporations like to put on air, as usually these demonstrations are very aggressive and a big police force then intervenes.

In thirty minutes this particular demonstration, which was said to be against the organizing of the Olympic Games in Seoul, continued with fights in close combat. The cameramen walked in the midst of the 'battle', talking with both sides. After half an hour – as if somebody had given a command – the battle ended. The students went north, the police south and a few minutes later a group of streetcleaners appeared and cleaned up all rubbish. Ten minutes later nobody could see that something had happened. This was a splendid example on how the 'media' can manipulate stories about students being against the Games.

Because your reviewer himself witnessed this scene from his own hotelroom, he corroborates the story as told by SAMARANCH.

Written in connection with the doubt expressed by many, that Seoul would not be able

to organize the Games because of the communist countries opposing the South Korean regime, and after a speech by the President of the French NOC in which he suggested to move the Games to Barcelona: SAMARANCH wrote: *"The Games will take place in Seoul – or not at all!"*

And when both the USSR and China had announced their participation: *"Seoul will be the most secure city in the world"*.

When the Seoul Games started, during the first couple of days, there were few spectators in the Olympic Stadium during the track-and-field events. The reason probably being that Korea itself had no top-athletes. SAMARANCH remarked this one moment to the Korean president Roh-Tae Wo - and the following and remaining days of the athletic programme every seat in the Stadium was occupied. SAMARANCH still does not understand how they managed this in such a short time!

From 1984 came another recollection about the fact that the IOC member from Kenya, Reginald ALEXANDER had requested to be allowed to hand out the medals for the 3000 metres race for women. ALEXANDER happened to be one of the staunchest supporters of the apartheid-regime in South Africa.

SIPERCO from Romania warned SAMARANCH that this might not be a good and wise decision. SAMARANCH wrote:

*"I had not thought about the fact that Zola Budd, originally from South Africa, but now representing Great Britain, participated in this race. So, we changed the schedule and Alexander was not allowed to hand out the medals for this event. Just think about the headlines in the newspapers, if she would have won. However, she came in seventh place."*

Through the Olympic Solidarity program millions have been distributed during the last ten years to NOC's, officials and athletes for training, for Olympic starts, for equipment, etc. However, it should be recognized that these millions "belonged to the NOC's" – as they were the one-third part of the TV-money. But the IOC was reluctant to let so much money go free in different countries, and they were afraid that the money would be of little use, or would be wasted on wrong purposes.

In this case the author himself revealed his ingenious idea: *"Do not give them a fish – but learn them to fish instead!"*

It is true that the IOC is keeping the Olympic Arena's free from commercial publicity. This has been decided to create the original "Look of the Games", that is to make publicity for the Games themselves. This has become a new way of publicity, which now is growing stronger and stronger!

The Salt Lake City-affair is described as the

worst thing that happened to SAMARANCH during his career as IOC President. However, it also made it possible for him to re-organize the whole structure of the IOC. Something that would not have been possible without what happened in Salt Lake City.

When *Samaranch* was asked to come to Washington to be questioned by the US Congress, the media were very tough on him and they wrote many columns about his years with Spanish dictator FRANCO.

Sometimes, he wrote, *"it was as if I had been the only Spaniard Franco had ever used"*.

After one of these attacks, SAMARANCH showed them a photograph of General FRANCO embracing General EISENHOWER in 1959, when Spain and the United States had just signed an agreement to allow the USA to have military bases in Spain. After this nobody anymore accused him for having "collaborated" with Franco.

SAMARANCH has had dreams to have all the Presidents of the International Federations as members of the IOC. That seems to be utopic, as the IOC already has 130 members today.

But then remember that way back, in 1951, Soviet member ANDRIANOV suggested that the IOC should have 150 members, including all NOC and IF presidents.

The IOC Session of 1951 completely disagreed, but it seems that soon we will be up to this level of IOC members!

SAMARANCH started his famous stamp collection

in 1945, specializing in Olympic stamps in blocks of four stamps. The first stamps from Athens 1896 (extremely rare ones in blocks) had been a gift from his father. SAMARANCH in 1989 donated his fabulous collection to the *Olympic Museum*. Its philatelic value is said to be over one million dollars.

Writing about the election of his successor:

*"Rogge is a person without any shadows behind himself- it was impossible to find weak points. He is a man of compromise and independence. He is a man of the seas and as a yachtsman he learned how to fight external factors. As for the other candidates I have nothing more to say, but it showed from their declarations after the elections that they perhaps had not been ideal as presidents of the IOC."*

Allow me to end this long review by stating that SAMARANCH has been a good captain of his crew – and its passengers. I can understand that he still thinks that for him as a Catalan, the Olympic Games in Barcelona "were the very best ever" – even if he – by right? – is very careful to express these words.

And let me finish with a few Royal Words, spoken by H.R.H. King Juan CARLOS of Spain, spoken to SAMARANCH in the beginning of the 1970's, when the democratic process in Spain was in full swing:

*"Juan Antonio [the king said] – leave politics and use what you are best at – sports and the Olympic Movement!"*