

A CONVENING OF SCHOLARS: REFLECTIONS ON THE IOC'S RECENT LAUSANNE CONFERENCE

*by Robert K. Barney, Ph.D.
Centre for Olympic Studies, University of Western Ontario*

At the invitation of IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, a group of some 25 academic scholars and officials of Olympic and sport-related international societies convened in Lausanne, Switzerland from the evening of 7 April to noon on 10 April for the purpose of "reflection and exchanges of points of view on the themes of the Centennial Olympic Congress in Paris from 29 August to 2 September 1994." Included in the small assembly were ISOH President Ian Buchanan, Secretary-General Bill Mallon, Executive Committee Member Bob Barney, and ISOH Members John Lucas, Jiri Kössl, and Karl Lennartz. Also included in the working group were representatives from International Sports Federations, National Olympic Committees, and certain commissions of the IOC.

The conference, chaired jointly by Nikolaos Filaretos, Chair of the IOC Commission on Education, and François Carrard, IOC Director-General, was opened by the attendance and remarks of President Samaranch (himself an ISOH Member). The President reiterated that the attendees had been called together to help provide individual and collective wisdom on various problems and issues confronting the Olympic Movement as it faces its second century of existence. Many of the issues and problems aired during the three-day, ten-session conference, will be addressed in Paris at the Centennial late this coming summer.

Four general themes were discussed. Theme I, the proceedings of which were chaired by John Lucas of the United States, dealt with "**The Olympic Movement's Contribution to Modern Society.**" Sub-themes of Theme I were: (1) Olympism and its Ethic, the Structures of the Olympic Movement; (2) Sport and the Environment; (3) The Future of the Games and their Program; and (4) The Olympic Movement and International Understanding. Though various points and counterpoints were offered by the participants assembled, some fundamental consensus emerged: (1) that the Olympic Movement be portrayed to be greater than the Olympic Games, (2) that definitions of Olympism be kept elastic in order to appeal to people of different cultures, and (3) that a prime consideration of the Olympic Movement remain the pursuit of a more peaceful and better world through sport, humanistic aspirations, and education.

Theme II, moderated by John MacAloon of the United States, dealt in general with "**The Contemporary Athlete.**" Sub-themes explored were: (1) The Athlete's Development, Place, and Role in Society; (2) High Level Competitive Sport and Its Organization; (3) Sport Science and Modern Training, and (4) Potential Dangers Affecting the Athlete. Various recommendations were formulated, among them: (1) that athletes be vested with more authority to speak on subjects germane to their place in the Modern Olympic Movement; (2) that athletes be considered for places on the IOC's Executive Committee, as well as the Executive Committees of International Federations and National Olympic Committees; (3) that the IOC continually and forcefully advocate to all media the worthiness of presenting Olympic athletes in "holistic" perspective, accentuating their "great" moments, and projecting their positive qualities in role model context; and (4) that the painful but important issues facing athletes in the sportplace be addressed - gender equality, psycho- and physical doping, "balanced excellence" in the face of an Olympic motto which in many ways spurs one towards "unbalanced excellence."

Theme III, the discussions of which were chaired by Jim Parry of Great Britain, focused on "**Sport in Its Social Context.**" Sub-themes explored were: (1) Sport and Politics; (2) Sport and the Economy; (3) Sport for All; and (4) Sport in the Less Advanced Countries.

Following exchanges of points of view, some consensus of feeling emerged on several issues, among them: (1) that sport and politics are not carried out in separate worlds, indeed, the creation of a better world is, in itself, a political task; (2) that the IOC continue to “politicize” outside its Charter; (3) that the IOC energize its efforts to influence the public policy for public good; (4) that the IOC assert an international posture with respect to all parts of its Charter; (5) that care be taken with respect to all parts of its Charter, to maintain and preserve long resident cultural values pertinent to sport and ethical values; and (6) that the various commercial entities allied with the Modern Olympic Movement be strongly encouraged to stress the intrinsic values of the “Olympic Message” in their advertising approaches. In effect, Olympic leaders should consider the adoption of pro-active roles in negotiating the representations of sport with regard to the activities and influences of both political and commercial entities.

Theme IV, moderated by Jacques Marchand of France, visited **“Sport and the Media,”** the sub-themes of which were: (1) The Participation of Mass Media in the Development of the Olympic Movement; (2) The Impact of Sport in the Mass Media; (3) The Evolution of Relations Between Sport and Television and Other Media; and (4) Challenges for the 21st Century. It is recognized by all that the media form the marketplace for influencing public opinion. In regard to that fact, it becomes apparent that the media’s right to Olympic information be protected. At the same time, it is also important that journalists, whether they be print or broadcast types, be educated on matters Olympic. Having said that, television, because of its enormous appeal, provides the best hope in the future for extending consciousness and understanding of the fundamental aims of the Modern Olympic Movement, as well as being the most powerful vehicle in the enlistment of new adherents to its cause. Accordingly, it may be that there is merit in the intervention of scholars and journalists with regard to discourse on Olympic issues and problems.

The conference closed at Sunday noon, 10 April. At the final session, dedicated to an encapsulation of general consensus reached over the preceding two days, President Samaranch spoke briefly, outlining many of his concerns for the Olympic Movement in the future. Those concerns included: (1) the almost total absence on the IOC of representatives from International Sports Federations; (2) the continued struggles against doping in sport; (3) control of the immensity that the Games themselves have taken on; (4) greater enfranchisement for Olympic athletes in various Olympic decision-making processes; and (5) the impact of the Olympic Movement of the future in inverting its priorities in sport participation, that is, from elite performance to sports, health, and fitness for all.

There was one final item of business that transpired in Lausanne during the early April meeting. In a small “rump session” presided over by Dr. Karel Wendl (ISOH Executive Committee Member), recently appointed by President Samaranch as the Director of the IOC Olympic Studies Centre, the organizational structure and list of recommended preliminary initiatives for the new Centre were announced and discussed. The attendees at this session, aside from President Samaranch, were members of Dr. Wendl’s staff and individuals who are associated with or interested in Centres for Olympic Studies as they presently exist or as they are commencing to develop in various locations around the world.

Finally, in closing this brief report, and on behalf of all present in Lausanne during those days in early April, it must be noted that the scholars deeply appreciated the opportunity to provide input on the proceedings of a most important occasion in Olympic history, the upcoming celebration of the Movement’s 100th Anniversary Congress. Indeed, as President Samaranch speculated at the final session, perhaps the events of the Lausanne Scholars’ Conference will stimulate further discourse between socio-cultural academicians and the IOC, a discourse that might in time result in the fondest dream of many of us - the establishment of an IOC Academic Commission.