

Mexico 1926: The Regional Olympics— Birth of the Oldest Child.

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From October 12 to November 2 of 1926 Mexico City hosted the “First Central American Games,” the first regional sport competition in the Americas to be recognized by the International Olympic Committee. The movement toward establishing a series of regional games in the Western Hemisphere had started with Count Baillet-Latour’s visit to the South American Games held as part of Brazil’s independence centennial celebration in 1922. Baillet-Latour, who was vice president of the IOC at the time, visited Mexico early in 1923 to encourage the formation of sport federations and the national committee needed for Mexico’s participation in the next Olympics and their hosting of Central American Games in 1926. During the 1924 Paris Olympics, meetings with representatives of the mid-America region were held for the planning of the 1926 games.

Two of the Mexican organizers travelled throughout the region in June-July of 1926 for the purposes of promoting the Games and encouraging and aiding the formation of national Olympic committees in each country. It was originally hoped that 8-14 countries would participate, but only Cuba, Guatemala and Mexico actually sent teams. Guatemala’s participation was token, as its delegation consisted of only 16 persons, compared to 145 from Cuba and 228 from Mexico. However, without Guatemala there would have been no official competition, as the founding charter required the participation of at least three countries.

Cuba dominated baseball and fencing and was competitive in the other five events. Mexico totaled most points in pistol shooting, losing only one of the three categories to Cuba, and also won basketball, track and field, swimming and tennis. Competition in rifle shooting was held apart from the official events, and the Cubans won the cup offered by their President Machado. After the games were over there was a 100 km exhibition race by three Tarahumara Indians.

Most of the activities were well attended by enthusiastic, and sometimes rowdy, Mexican fans. Although beset by many difficulties, including poor organization due to lack of experience and the failure of most countries of the region to show up, the festival could be considered a success. It was followed by better attended games in Cuba in 1930, El Salvador in 1935 and Panama in 1938. In 1938, the series changed its name to the Central American & Caribbean Games. It is the oldest continuing multisport competition in the Americas and was held most recently in Mexico City in 1990.