

# The Modern Olympics: A Struggle for Revival

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For many years we viewed Baron Pierre de Coubertin as the sole founder of our modern Olympic movement. Recently many nineteenth century documents have come to light. They prove that Coubertin was the last, not the first, in a series of men who helped create the modern Olympics. This paper is not intended to discredit Coubertin, but rather to assign due credit to some others who preceded him. They too made vital contributions. The movement which culminated with Coubertin began in 1833. And there were many modern Olympic Games before our Olympiad I, in Athens, 1896.

The Olympic revival idea was first conceived and proposed by a Greek poet, P. Soutsos, in 1833. Later a wealthy Greek, E. Zappas, brought Soutsos' dream to reality by funding the revival. Before the first modern Greek Olympiad took place in Athens, 1859, it came to the attention of Dr. W.P. Brookes in Shropshire, who began Olympics in England. There were nine national Olympic Games in Greece and England from 1859 to 1883. The 1866 London Olympics and the 1870 Athens Olympics are especially noteworthy—highly successful and copiously documented.

Brookes is the important "missing link" between the modern Greek Games and Coubertin. Brookes' British Olympic movement was inspired by and in frequent contact with the Greek Olympic movement. By 1880, however, both national movements verged on collapse, attacked by class-elitist amateurism, which barred working-class entries. Undaunted, Brookes then made the first proposal for International Olympics. He pursued that idea in print and through diplomatic channels, wanting to start international Olympics in Athens. In France, Pierre de Coubertin began to read and quote some of Brookes' writings about physical education. He

visited Brookes in Shropshire, in 1890, to discuss that common interest; he did not yet have any notion of Olympic Games. Brookes, aging and ailing, passed the Olympic torch to Coubertin. He staged a special edition of his local Olympic Games, and told Coubertin all about the modern Greek and British Olympics, and about his own international Olympic dream.

Coubertin liked Brookes' Olympic idea so much that he presented it as his own when he first proposed an Olympic revival in 1892. Coubertin formed the International Olympic Committee in 1894 and, with much Greek help, implemented Brooks' idea of international Olympic Games at Athens in 1896, IOC Olympiad I.

Our Olympic movement is a single, continuous movement—from Soutsos' first poetic idea in 1833 to the Atlanta Games of 1996. Coubertin deserves his title *renovateur*, but perhaps should share it with Soutsos, Zappas and Brookes. To omit any one of them would misrepresent our Olympic roots. Yet Coubertin still merits a unique title, *sauveur*, Savior of the Olympic movement. The work of Soutsos and Brookes might well have come to nothing, if Coubertin had not saved their Olympic ideas by melding them into an even better one, where the Games are passed around the world. *All sports, all nationals, all people*: his formula works with no end in sight.