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Looking for Leverage: **The International Sports Federations at the 1921 Olympic Congress**

The decade of the 1920s saw a great deal of development and change within and between the organizations involved in constructing the Modern Olympic Movement. Leaders of the various sports included in the Olympic Games became more vocal about increasing their role and influence. International Sports Federations (IFs) were coming of age and wished to assert themselves as viable organizations. Many of them saw the Olympic Games as the best place to do so. In contrast, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), wished to retain its position as the final authority on all things Olympic. Thus, for the better part of a decade the federations and the IOC struggled to find an equilibrium that would allow all parties to contribute to the construction of the Olympic Games. This paper examines the site of the beginning of that process, the 1921 Olympic Congress in Lausanne.

After the First World War, the International Olympic Committee met for the first time in 1919. Because of the massive changes in Europe since their last meeting, the members decided to hold an Olympic Congress in Lausanne in 1921 that would bring together the members of the IOC, representatives of the numerous National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and the representatives of the IFs to discuss and plan for future Olympic Games. The Congress also became the site for the IFs to assert their growing independence. Several IF leaders spearheaded what they hoped would be a union of federations. This plan fell short of its goal, but the IFs did form a Permanent Bureau of Documentation and Information that presented a semi-united front to the IOC for the first time. The IFs were also able to convince the IOC, despite Pierre de Coubertin's misgivings, that another Congress should be held after the 1924 Olympic Games.

By the 1920s the Olympic Games had reached a sufficient level of complexity that the IOC needed the assistance and expertise of other organizations to ensure their success. The 1921 Lausanne Congress confirmed to the IOC members that the IFs were not simply going to take directives from the IOC. The IFs knew that they were rapidly becoming indispensable and that the IOC would have to figure out some way of accommodating them. The ensuing struggle to create an equilibrium was not a zero-sum game. For neither side possessed enough power to dictate absolutely the terms of any agreement. Hence, a period of bargaining commenced that lasted for the better part of the decade. This process clearly began in earnest at the 1921 Congress.

An examination of the process these organizations began in 1921 benefits from analytical insights provided by literature on international relations. This research often

examines the process by which regulatory regimes arise and one approach argues that bargaining between interested parties is one way that this occurs. Given the activities of the IOC and the IFs towards each other during the 1920s, this perspective seems to offer some explanatory power for examining the process by which they started to move towards agreements that would eventually guide their evolving relationship.