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Jose' Benjamin Zubiaur: An Argentinean Sport and Physical Education Advocate and the Early Olympic Movement

Argentina participated in the establishment of the first International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894 when Pierre de Coubertin chose José Benjamin Zubiaur as the first Latin American member. Zubiaur remained an IOC member until 1907 when he was dismissed for non-attendance at IOC meetings. Despite his dismissal, he was instrumental in promoting sport throughout Argentina and encouraging Argentinean involvement in the modern Olympic movement. Argentina's first participation in the Olympic Games was in 1908, and its first medal came in 1924. Through the Atlanta games, Argentina had claimed 13 gold medals and a total of 50 Olympic medals.

This paper looks at José Benjamin Zubiaur's connections with Coubertin at a time when there were only sporadic ties in Latin America with the physical education and sport movements in Europe, Great Britain and North America. There is still considerable uncertainty over Zubiaur's involvement with and departure from the Olympic Movement. In this paper I document his career and clarify the connections that allowed him to occupy a place on the first IOC. Special attention is paid to his sporting involvement in Argentina during his "Olympic" years. The ultimate aim is to present a coherent story of his life in relation to education and sport and see how his actions influenced the development of sport in education and Olympic participation in Argentina.

During his career, Zubiaur occupied important positions in the Argentinean Ministry of Education from which he ardently fought for the inclusion of physical education and sport as obligatory subjects in the school curriculum. He traveled to several European countries and North America to familiarize himself with the educational systems there. It

is difficult to find another Argentinean of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries so concerned as he was about physical education and sport. Although individually he did not contribute much over the first years of the IOC, his heart was close to that of Coubertin. Their motives and interests-that is, primarily, educating through sport-were very similar. Zubiatur's effort was crucial to establishing the foundations of an extensive sporting culture in Argentina, a culture that bore rich fruit from the late 1920s through the early 1950s.