

Cesar R. Torres

SUNY College at Brockport

**Enlarging the Olympic Map: The 1920s IOC -YMCA  
Partnership in Latin America**

In 1894 Baron Pierre de Coubertin established the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to promote, among other values, international peace and reconciliation. Two years later Coubertin organized in Athens the first modern international Olympic Games. Although the Olympic Games began as an elite European phenomenon, its subsequent survival required not only the consolidation of modern sport, but also international participation and the globalization of Coubertin's project. As the

Olympic Games grew more successful and stable, he shifted his focus to implementing his ideal of universality. By the early 1920s, Coubertin and his IOC associates had embarked on a campaign to expand participation in the Olympic Games and increase representation in the IOC. He was especially interested in promoting his Olympic project in Latin America.

In spite of an increasing interest in modern sport throughout the region during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Latin American participation in the early Olympic Games was sporadic and unofficial. Latin American IOC representation did not fare much better. Indeed, between 1894 and 1922, there was neither visible regional attendance at IOC meetings nor a commitment to establish National Olympic Committees (NOCs). However, the negligible role that athletes and officials from the region had played in the IOC dramatically changed in the early 1920s. Between 1922 and 1924 seven Latin American members joined the IOC and five NOCs were either established or recognized in the region. More importantly, for the 1924 Olympic Games held in Paris, eight Latin American countries sent delegations totaling over 160 athletes. The Latin American teams won seven medals including two gold.

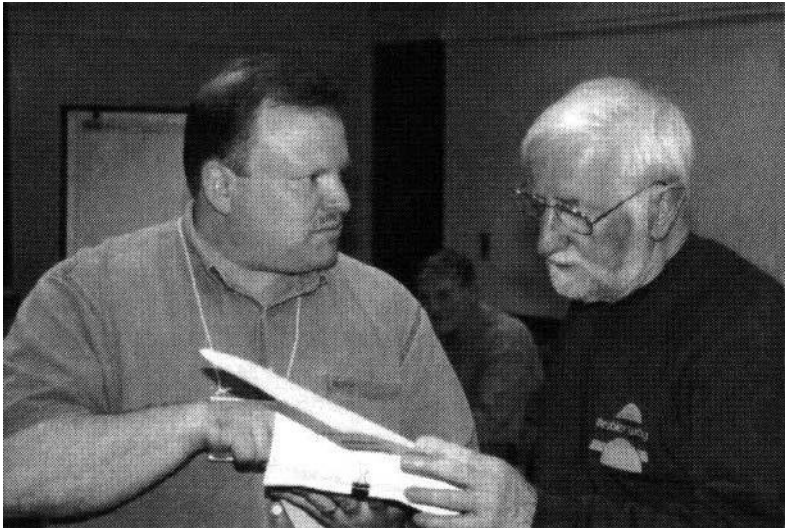
This paper investigates the role that the IOC-YMCA partnership played in the diffusion of Olympism throughout Latin America during the 1920s. Special attention is devoted to the 1922 Latin American Olympics in Brazil. This athletic spectacle was the first project that the IOC and the YMCA undertook together in the region. The Latin American Olympics had both desired and unexpected consequences. Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, IOC vice-president, attended the event. With the help of the YMCA, Baillet-Latour also visited several Latin American countries to further advance the IOC's goals for the region. This paper demonstrates that the YMCA not only played a key role in making the Brazil's Latin American Olympics a reality but was instrumental in supporting the IOC's policy of globalization in the region. Indeed, during the early 1920s the YMCA represented the interests of the IOC. The IOC benefited from the YMCA's wealth of knowledge about the sport situation throughout Latin America, its networking capacity and the influence it exerted in regional sporting circles. A fruitful, and largely ignored, approach to exploring the development of Olympism in Latin America

throughout the 1920s resides in the involvement of the YMCA with Olympic and sport matters in the region.

---



NASSH Publication Board



Scott Martyn & Alan Metcalf