The Olympic Congresses in Lausanne

The V Olympic Congress: The Sciences and the Olympic Movement

From 8 to 10 May 1913, the Palais de Rumine in Lausanne hosted some 100 persons from 9 countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, Switzerland and the United States of America) who were participating in the Congress, for which the selected theme was sport psychology and physiology. Under the patronage of the Swiss Federal Council, the Congress had as chairpersons State Councillor Chuard (honorary chairman), and Professor Maurice Millioud, who presided the proceedings. Dr. Max Auckenthaler took over as head of the organizing committee following the death of Dr. Jean Morax in January 1913.

Argument about “excess” in performance sport

The Olympic Congress of 1913 took place at a moment when the Olympic Movement had reached an unexpected climax with the Games of the V Olympiad in Stockholm in 1912. But the international comparison of physical performance, an essential part of the Olympic ideal, created a range of new problems which Coubertin had become aware of as early as in 1900. He described them in the following way:

“Sport moves towards excess. In the first place, this is its psychological character. It demands ever higher speed, greater height and ever more strength. [...] Admittedly, [...] that is the core of the problem but at the same time it is its nobility and even its poetic charm.”

There was criticism, even in the areas of school sport and sport for all. The results were suggestions, such as that of holding gymnastics competitions without a competitive aspect. This attitude was promoted particularly by the Gymnastic Institution of Stockholm. Physicians also expressed criticism. They acknowledged the need for school sport but they argued against forms of training which they considered excessive. Coubertin saw these attacks as a danger to modern sport and tried to direct the attention of medical circles to the psychological questions of modern physical exercise. A discussion of these psychological aspects was part of the programme of the Congress in Le Havre in 1897. Then, the term used was “psychology of physical exercise”; in Lausanne, the topic was dubbed “sports psychology”, although the expression did not have the meaning it has acquired today. What was at issue were questions concerning sports education as documented in 32 contributions collected in a volume that Coubertin published under the title *Essais de Psychologie sportive* while preparing the 1913 Congress. Once again, the Congress fulfilled the educational intentions of its promoter.

Invitation to Lausanne

Coubertin chose the city of Lausanne because he wanted to create a stronger interest in the work of the Olympic Movement in Switzerland. During a visit in the autumn of 1910, he gained the support of leading authorities in the canton of Vaud and at Lausanne University, where the Congress was to take place. Because a similar event was being organized during the Hygiene Exhibition at Dresden in 1911, however, the IOC postponed the Lausanne meeting until 1913. The Olympic Congress held its proceedings from 8 to 10 May 1913 in the main hall of the university. On the two days before the Congress, the annual IOC Session was held. Fourteen of the 44 IOC members were present. They showed little interest in the Congress, although it was their President who had sent out invitations on behalf of the Committee. The minutes of the
Congress indicate that most of the IOC members had left after the opening ceremony. Apart from Coubertin, only the Count d’Usseaux (Italy) and the Baron de Blonay (Switzerland) were present. If the IOC is considered to be the organizer of this Olympic Congress, it is thanks primarily to Coubertin.

The population of Lausanne, however, took great interest in the Congress because many important people from the city, the university, and the country as a whole were present. In contrast to previous Olympic Congresses, participation was open to all, as is the tradition with scientific congresses. Experts in the audience were asked to present the results of their own investigations in short reports.

Four hundred people attended the opening ceremony in the main lecture hall of the university, but on average there were only 75 participants at the meetings. A list of participants is not available and conclusions can only be drawn from the requests for the floor recorded during the working meetings. It is suggested that international participation was very limited, and indeed, apart from the IOC members mentioned above, there were approximately 30 people from eight different countries, the majority of them from France.

**Analysis of the proceedings**

The subjects of discussion described in the announcement were:

1. Origin of sporting activity: natural aptitude, sporting instinct, imitation, the effect of willpower.
2. Continuity and methods: creation of need (muscular training, desire for fresh air, ambition), physiological and psychological characteristics of physical exercise, intellectual and moral qualities of each sport (solitude, comradeship, independence, cooperation).
3. Results: conditions for achievement in sport, basic training rules (fatigue, resistance), effects (moral progress, self-confidence, mental health), physical activity as the core of a practical philosophy of life.

A full review of the Congress’s technical proceedings can be made by drawing upon the comprehensive reports published in the two daily newspapers in Lausanne, the *Gazette de Lausanne* and the *Feuille d’Avis de Lausanne*, and the detailed report containing all the lectures, short papers and contributions to the discussions. The previous congresses were analysed on the basis of recommendations passed. For the Lausanne Congress, we must analyse the contents of the contributions.

The opportunity to present individual research reports was taken up enthusiastically. Altogether 37 reports were submitted and the five half-day meetings were used to full advantage. Many scientists from abroad submitted written presentations which were published in the Congress report.

The Italian historian Ferrero gave the opening lecture “The limits of sport”, in which he considered sport as a form of compensation for the nervous stress of his contemporaries. Sport was “a way of counterbalancing the intellectual excesses of a sedentary, nervous society”. Nevertheless, he warned against expecting modern sport to be a panacea for all problems. The example of ancient times, when the decline of society brought on the decline of athletics, supported his statement. Any opportunity to revitalize mankind should be seized. Sport, and the Congress of Lausanne, could make an essential contribution.

The research reports submitted were presented during the meetings according to the three main topics. The first working meeting on the origin of sporting activity started with the reading of a paper by former United States President Theodore Roosevelt. Coubertin had maintained a lively correspondence with him on the pedagogical value of modern sport. In 1889, they had met in the US, and later in Paris in 1909. Roosevelt’s report might be described as his athletic autobiography. It explains
how he developed from a weak and feeble boy to a self-confident man by practising sport, in particular by riding and boxing. The moral values of physical activity considerably influenced his attitude and his career. His idea of sport is best captured in the following statement: “To develop one’s physical strength is a propitious means to obtain moral strength, the first being worth nothing without the latter.”

While Roosevelt’s report revealed personal feelings, other speakers presented scientific reports. The physician Larguier from Lausanne showed children learned sporting behaviour through play. With the introduction of set rules, children reached a higher level of physical activity. All human beings possessed a sporting instinct, which generally became obvious at an early stage. In some cases, however, it developed later on. Children should be encouraged to play at their own pace without interference. The Dutch researcher van Blijenburgh reaffirmed this theory in his own report. On the one hand, sporting instinct was generated by natural laws of physics, on the other hand, it was animated on an emotional level by the permanent quest for diversity. In addition, humans had a natural desire to excel over others.

There were 15 reports on the subject of continuity and forms of realization, as well as numerous supplemental statements from the audience. In some cases lively discussions ensued. A large number of contributions described physical activity as a specifically personal experience, as in mountaineering, shooting, flying, and hunting. The speakers underlined the special physical value of individual sports, drawing from their personal experience. Dedet’s lecture “The Team” merits more detailed examination, since many called it the highlight of the Congress. He outlined the team as a social group which comes into being as a unit, develops, is successful, and then dissolves. Within the team a number of relevant social processes take place, requiring the high-
Rousseau suggested that high-performance athletes had to practise “autosuggestion” even when training in order to overcome fatigue and to better handle certain emotional situations. He described his own experience and knowledge of similar situations for top athletes in other sports. The discussion that followed his lecture could have been word for word that of a sports congress in the 1990s. Many members of the audience asked for the floor. The issue of the quest for records and the way it reduced sport to mere show was of prime interest. The audience expressed the opinion that it was precisely the Olympic Games that encouraged this development, and that medals should perhaps instead be awarded for past performances. Coubertin rejected these views. He emphasized the invariably competitive character of the Olympic Games, where the best competitor won. Other contributions expressed the opinion that records were a necessary incentive for achievement in sports. This lively discussion emerged from Rousseau’s description of a practice-orientated approach, which attracted the attention of the less scientifically-minded audience members.
The third topic - Results - sought an answer to the question of whether physical activity could be the core of a practical philosophy of life. Reiss, a criminologist from Lausanne, emphasized in his report on crime and sport that, in sharp contrast to the many positive effects presented at the Congress, physical activity in many cases coincided with crime. Boxing in particular was not, as Roosevelt had suggested, a means to avoid crime. Reiss went as far as to demand a more moderate advertisement of sport events. Gymnastics was preferable since it required discipline. Surprisingly, he presented his paper without arousing any particular contradiction from his listeners.

Of the many contributions on the topic of results, the final speech by French government representative G. Letainturier-Fradin deserves mention. He discussed the main topic of the Congress, namely whether physical activity could become the core of a practical philosophy of life. Starting with the ancient model, he demonstrated that philosophers and pedagogues of all ages had considered physical culture as an essential element in improving health and moral values. It therefore constituted a crime for people deliberately to harm their health. The relation between body and soul was so close that every accomplishment or setback had consequences for both. Sport deserved special attention. It created feelings of joy, diminished fatigue, and increased contentment. People should practise sport as long as possible in order to maintain their physical and moral vitality.

Evaluation of the Congress
In three days, the Congress completed a comprehensive programme. The large number of reports limited the time available for discussion. It was requested that the contributions be closely related to the topics listed in the announcement, but many speakers ignored this. Reports and statements made during discussion revealed the different points of view of the scientists present, in particular those of the physicians, and of those participants who were more practice-orientated.

The previous Olympic Congresses had been characterized mainly by debates in the commissions and by the recommendations presented. The success of the 1913 Congress in Lausanne is based on a few exceptional speeches. The presence of several professors from different disciplines also enhanced the intellectual level of the Congress. The work of Dr. Maurice Millioud, a professor of philosophy at Lausanne, should be mentioned. He presided over the meetings and directed the discussions to a great extent. Several times during the debates, participants objected to the lack of practical experiments on the psychological and physiological effects of physical activity, adding that the results of scientific investigations should have been presented to support statements. This view, shared by many scientists, might explain why no resolutions were adopted at this Congress.

In his assessment of the experts' work, Coubertin glosses over the issue of the seriousness of the scientific discussion. In his view, "many [of the lectures] are interesting but bear witness to a certain difficulty in keeping strictly to the subject. Roosevelt's autobiography was a striking example for all." Coubertin objected that most of the participants lacked practical experience in physical education. He doubted the Congress had any real interest for the IOC, but he did not forget the prestige the IOC could gain through events of this kind. In later years, Coubertin repeatedly said that the Congress of Lausanne had been the "birth of the psychology of sport" and that it was a credit to the IOC to have initiated it. These statements, however, are only true if considered within the framework of the theoretical scientific knowledge of the time. The most important achievement is that the Congress...
Summary of the congress in the 9 May 1913 issue of the Nouvelliste Vaudois.
approached the notion of pedagogical psychology of sport from various perspectives. Clearly, Coubertin's evaluation was based on his own insufficient scientific knowledge and on tactical considerations. The 1913 Congress certainly reflected a much higher level of expertise than the Congresses of Le Havre or Brussels. Coubertin seemed to acknowledge this fact, at least in later years, because he frequently referred to the Lausanne Congress.

On 18 May 1913, Professor Millioud published a final evaluation of the Congress in the Gazette de Lausanne newspaper. He observed that the IOC's - and especially Coubertin's - efforts to achieve a union of the International Federations affirmed that intellectual activity still held the main role at a time of great enthusiasm for physical strength. Millioud wrote: “The achievement of the Congress of Lausanne was to define intellect. Do we regret not having found a universally valid definition? Not all questions could be answered, this was to be expected, but many have been asked and they cannot be forgotten. An idealization of sport as well as its propagation are indispensable and are increasingly becoming the subject of growing public attention.”

There were many festivities and sporting events, and these lasted until 12 May. They culminated in an international soccer tournament with teams from Switzerland, France, and Germany.

Then came World War I, and for many years the topics discussed during the Congress were left unattended. Looking back, this Congress and the debate it opened on sport psychology can be considered a pioneering endeavour in the theoretical foundations of sport.

The VII Olympic Congress: The role of the International Federations

From 2 to 7 June 1921, at the Montbenon Casino in Lausanne, 78 participants from 23 countries considered the topic of change in the Olympic programme and the conditions for participation. Under the patronage of the Swiss Federal Council, this Congress was chaired by Sigrid Edström, then president of the IAAF, who was assisted by vice chairmen Gustavus Kirby, Paul Rousseau, and Douglas and Meyer de Stadelhofen, who represented the NOCs and the IFS. Eugène Monod was appointed Congress commissioner. Three commissions met on the questions of amateurism (chaired by G.T. Kirby), organizational aspects of the Olympic Games (chaired by F. Reichel), and the Olympic gymnastic programmes (chaired by A.-J. Cupus).

The situation after World War I

In June 1919, the IOC members met in Lausanne for their first Session since the end of the war. In 1915, Coubertin had transferred the IOC headquarters to Lausanne because of Switzerland's neutrality. During the Session, the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the IOC was celebrated.

At that time the future of the Olympic Movement and of international sports competitions was uncertain. Nevertheless, the IOC hoped to fully resume its work with the Games of the VII Olympiad in Antwerp in 1920. It was not expected to carry out the complete programme approved in Paris, and there was a plan to assemble the representatives of the NOCs at an Olympic Congress in Lausanne in 1921 after Antwerp in order to verify and complete the resolutions.

Coubertin proposed that representatives of large workers' unions should be invited to a congress on popular sport, in Lausanne in the same year. The contribution of physical exercise to the strength and development of young people was to be investigated. Immediately after the war, Coubertin wanted, on the one hand, to lead the Olympic Movement in its special task of carrying out Olympic Games and, on the other, to demonstrate the benefits of sport for socially disadvantaged groups and as a contribution to social peace. Unfortunately, in its Session in Antwerp in 1920 the IOC decided against a congress on popular sport. It considered questions of internationalism in sport and the organization of the Olympic Games to be more important. The guidelines adopted at the Congress of Paris in 1914 were hence followed.

Cover of the 1921 Congress programme.
A voice for the IFs

In Antwerp, representatives of the national and International Federations expressed their dissatisfaction with the IOC’s cooperation. They demanded more co-determination. The International Cycling Union (UCI) expressed this most clearly and suggested the foundation of a union of International sports Federations. Coubertin was open to such demands, and in Antwerp he indicated that the Movement’s hopes for the future lay in democratic development. In 1914, the IOC itself had called for the foundation of International Federations. Now, the 19 Federations which were recognized by the IOC expressed their own views, which the IOC had to take into account. The Congress of Lausanne offered a good opportunity to do so.

Procedure

The Congress met from 2 to 7 June 1921, with the IOC holding its annual Session at the same time. These events were preceded by the announced conference of the International sports Federations and by three advisory conferences on winter sport, mountaineering and riding convened by the IOC. Each conference was directed to produce a model Olympic programme for its respective sport, which would then be presented to the Congress. At the conference of the International Federations, leading IOC members, as representatives of the IFs, were present and managed to avoid an imminent confrontation. In the end, the conference established a coordination office with its headquarters in Paris.

Seventy-eight people from 23 countries, including 24 IOC members, took part in the Congress. Fifteen of the 19 recognized IFs were represented, and delegates of 22 NOCs were present. The nations defeated in World War I were not invited.
Programme

The Congress had to fulfil the tasks of updating the resolutions adopted in Paris in 1914 and deciding on a number of motions concerning the exclusion of certain sports or individual disciplines. In its Session in Antwerp, the IOC had worked out a plan to drastically reduce the Olympic programme. Track cycling, shooting, sailing, tennis, soccer, and the optional sports determined in Paris were slated to be cancelled. Three commissions were formed for amateurism, general questions on the organization of Olympic Games, and for the Olympic gymnastic programme. The commissions worked on possible solutions. The rest of the motions were discussed and passed in the plenary session.

Resolutions adopted in Lausanne

The Congress could not bring about a more concise programme of competi-
tion. The Federations present invoked to their right to set the competition programme themselves. The IOC was forced to realize that it had underestimated the self-confidence of the IFs and their consequent resistance against cancellations. If the IFs themselves proposed modifications, such as the cancellation of the tug-of-war event or the 3,000m walk, naturally there were no objections. No decision was made against the will of a single Federation.

Resolutions which differed fundamentally from those adopted in Paris in 1914 were as follows:
- The categories of mandatory and optional sports were abolished. Field hockey, archery, and golf were cancelled.
- In gymnastics the introduction of an “octathlon”, still carried out today, was agreed upon. Compulsory and optional exercises for individual and team competitions were also passed. Group gymnastics for men and women were to be maintained as demonstration events.
- There was a supplement to the amateur rule of 1914. The national federation concerned had to guarantee the amateur status of each competitor in a written form according to its amateur rules, which had to include the same considerations as the international rules. The declarations had to be signed by the respective NOC.
- General rules on the organization of Olympic Games were phrased and passed as 23 individual items, according to the draft produced by the commission in charge. Apart from the competition programme and the new amateur rules, they comprised technical aspects such as entry of participants, composition of panels of judges, authorized authorities in the event of disagreement, etc.

**Discussion of the Olympic Winter Games**
The Congress decided not to introduce the Olympic Winter Games as an independent part of the Olympic Games. Behind this decision was the Scandinavians’ justified fear that their Nordic Games would lose their prominent position. The host country of the Olympic Games was allowed to stage competitions in winter sports under the auspices of the IOC, assuming that the country met adequate landscaping and organizational criteria. France as the host of the Olympic Games 1924 was the first to have the chance of staging Olympic Weeks of Winter Sports.

**Future Olympic Congresses**
It was expected that some people would demand regular congresses of this kind in Lausanne because it was considered necessary to discuss existing problems after the Games of the VIII Olympiad in Paris in 1924. Coubertin strongly rejected this view. He thought that, since the Lausanne Congress had been expected to bring about a programme which was valid for future Olympic Games, another congress would imply that the delegates in Lausanne had performed poorly. The occasionally heated discussion of this topic was again a sign of IOC’s fear of losing its authority and the International Federations’ demand for more co-determination. IOC members immediately discussed the matter during a meeting, and Edström announced on the same day: “The IOC has no objections whatsoever to future congresses, as has already been declared by its President, Baron de Coubertin. Similarly, it has no objections to calling a congress in 1925 if the various IFs think it necessary after the Olympic Games of 1924.” At a critical phase, the IOC had made concessions. Coubertin’s opposing point of view was, verbally at least, revised.

**New trends after Lausanne**
The following discussions of the Olympic Congress of Lausanne demonstrated that the International Federations were now prepared to take an active part in shaping the Olympic Movement. At first, this was restricted to technical aspects. The IOC had gained a serious partner, perhaps an opponent. A new situation had developed in Lausanne, one which has not changed much to this day. The fact that the intended grouping of the International Federations into a world sport union had not occurred, was in fact a sign of loyalty to the IOC.

In 1920, Sigfrid Edström of Sweden, apparently the most prominent representative of the International Federations as president of the IAAF, was appointed a member of the IOC. With great intelligence, he presided over the Congress meetings, and for decades he was the mediator between the IOC and the International Federations.

Coubertin was hardly satisfied with the results of the Lausanne Congress, as he wrote in *Olympic Memoirs*. He criticized the provisional solutions and the expressions of nationalism, which he considered a consequence of the war, and which had arisen on the slightest provocation. By contrast, he considered the constructiveness of the Congress’s work to be evidence that the misunderstandings between the IOC and the IFs had emerged in Antwerp, had been overcome. The resolutions taken in Lausanne, however, were further proof that technical questions had taken absolute priority in the Olympic Movement. This gave Coubertin yet another reason to pursue through other methods the pedagogical goals he had originally set for the Olympic Congresses. In a speech in Lausanne, he expressly pointed out that all federations involved in sport had a duty to give the disadvantaged an opportunity to take part in sports on equal terms. Coubertin said that if all young people performed the same sports and got to know each other better, this would make an essential contribution to social peace.

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