A Time of Conflict:

Argentine Sports and the 1924 Olympic Team

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Modern sports were introduced in Argentina early in the nineteenth century. Apparently, the novel practices did not cause immediate admiration. The myth surrounding the development of football, for example, says that the Native population originally referred to the sport as “the game of the crazy Englishmen.” The initial indifference changed to progressive acceptance as the British community made their sports more visible in the newly independent nation by systematizing their practice and establishing clubs. By the turn of the century, modern sport had become an integral part of Argentine culture. Mariano Demaría, a distinguished politician, testified to this in 1907 asserting—not without exaggeration—that “there is no country in the world in which these exercises [sports] have developed with faster pace, intensity and greater success than in ours.”

Despite Demaría’s verbosity, which was intended to emphasize Argentina’s embracing of European cultural precepts, by the early 1900s “frequent sport competitions among national populations, resident foreign communities and visiting European athletes” indeed constituted a visible element in the country’s experience. However, the arrival, progressive acceptance and adaptation of modern sports did not evolve into an immediate development of greater organizational structures and bureaucratic administration such as those established in Europe or the United States. Although a good number of sport clubs were already functioning by the 1900s, most of the National Sport Federations (NSFs) were not organized until the late 1910s or the 1920s. As the NSFs were formed, their administrations slowly progressed toward seeking recognition by and affiliation with their international parent institutions. The rudimentary organizational sophistication and limited experience in international contests of the NSFs and its affiliates, which was a characteristic of the thriving but inchoate Argentine sport structure during the first two decades of the twentieth century, would play a key role in the formation of the first national official delegation to the modern international Olympic Games.

This dynamic period of development of modern sports in Argentina coincided with the efforts made by a group of genteel sportsmen to incorporate the nation into the Olympic Games. In the early 1900s this group started to construct modern sports as a technology that could display, on an international scale, what they considered the leading nation in South America, their own Argentina. This group saw the Olympic Games as a possibility to manifest to the world that Argentina was a vibrant developing nation. After unsuccessful attempts to establish a national Olympic Committee and send Olympic delegations to the Games from 1908 to 1920, this aristocratic group managed to establish the Comité Olímpico Argentino ([COA] Argentine Olympic Committee) late in 1923.

The newly founded COA set up a program intended to select and send the most competitive Olympic delegation to Paris. However, the arrangements for the Olympic debut were full of discrepancies and complications. The construction of the Olympic team brought to the surface many underlying tensions between the COA and the Confederación Argentina de Deportes ([CAD] Argentine Confederation of Sport), an institution established in 1921 to assemble existing NSFs and to provide support for Argentine sport. After stormy negotiations and troubling trials the Argentine Olympic team finally competed in eleven sports—there were disappointing absences but also unexpected impressive performances. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the organization, selection, and funding of the first Argentine Olympic team, the causes that influenced this process, and how the outcome affected the sport structure of the country. The history of the struggle to send a team to Paris occurred during the few months leading to the Olympic Games. In order to explore and illuminate the complexity and significance of the events I must first review the state of Olympism in Argentina during the 1920s and profile its most prominent figures.

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Olympism in 1920s Argentina

The relationship between Argentina and Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the rénovateur of the Olympic Games, anteceded the creation of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Argentina’s first connection with Coubertin occurred in 1889 when José B. Zubiaur, an educator who was impressed by British sports, attended the Paris Universal Exposition that same year. As a result of the encounter, in 1894 Coubertin included the Argentine in the original IOC governing council. However, it was not Zubiaur who would try to incorporate the nation into Coubertin’s international project but rather a group of aristocratic Argentine sportsmen. At the turn of the century, this group considered sports as a unique road to globally advertise a growing Argentina. In spite of their resolution and political networking, for a long period of time the group’s continuous efforts to establish an Olympic structure and participate in the Olympic Games ended up in a series of frustrations. The long awaited prospect of effective incorporation into the Olympic Movement was finally realized in December 1923 when a definitive COA was established.5

The COA was born amidst a long and contentious dispute with the CAD to control sport in the country. Early in 1920 a COA had been founded to send the first official Argentine delegation to the Olympic Games. However, the Committee’s failure to send a team to Antwerp caused despondency in the Argentine sport community. As a consequence of this disappointment, the CAD was founded in September 1921. For several months the two institutions fought to establish themselves as the sole leader of Argentine sports. After vague negotiations the COA was dissolved in 1922. Despite the fact that the CAD had become the supreme sport authority in Argentina, Marcelo T. de Alvear—an IOC member then serving as president of the nation—would soon forcefully change power distribution in Argentina.6

Throughout the first half of 1923 Alvear declared several times to Rafael Cullen, then CAD president, that he supported an Argentine delegation to the Paris Olympics. Moreover, he announced his intention to ask Congress to pass a bill that would finance the delegation. In his August 25 note to Congress, Alvear highlighted the value of participating in the Olympic Games and indicated that the COA, the institution that would be in charge of the delegation, had not yet been created. The CAD panicked with the news and entered into a profound crisis which led to internal disagreement. As a result, by late 1923 the CAD had neither a president nor a secretary. Ricardo C. Aldao, president of the prestigious Club de Gimnasia y Esgrima de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires Gymnastic and Fencing Club), who became an IOC member that year, wrote to Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, then IOC vice-president, that “it seems unquestionable that this organization [CAD] is not yet ready to assume the direction of the preparations relative to the Argentine concurrence to the Paris Olympics.”7 Although the bill did not have good fortune in Congress, Alvear was determined to create the COA and favor long time Olympic supporters.

On New Year’s eve 1923, Alvear established the COA by decree.8 His decision was based on a request made by the leading sport institutions in the country to take the necessary steps to secure a national representation in the upcoming Olympic Games. Aldao’s criticisms to the CAD were not inconsequential, for he arranged with Alvear the creation of the COA. It was, in fact, Aldao who proposed to use a portion of the funds originally allocated by law to his club for the construction of sport facilities, in order to finance the team for Paris.9 Not surprisingly, the decree put Aldao and some of his club associates in charge of the COA, and mandated the novel institution to organize and direct the Olympic delegation. In light of the circumstances, the materialization of the decree’s directives tested the nerves of many sport leaders both in Argentina and Europe.

The 1924 Olympic Team

Under the leadership of Aldao, the COA started the preparations to send the Olympic delegation to Paris. On January 4, 1924 the five-man institution held its first official meeting with the presence of five guest NSFs: boxing, fencing, polo, rowing, and tennis.10 During the meeting these federations were informed of the COA’s purposes and it was decided that they could start trials. The COA, however, reserved for itself the right to approve the list of competitors emerging from the trials and adopted a number of principles inspired in the spirit of the decree to guide such approval. The COA would only authorize participation in the Olympic Games:

of amateur Argentine citizens whose preparation and efficacy in the sport their practice allow the expectation of relative success in their interventions; [and] that for any sport to be represented . . . a selection contest among all suitable candidates regardless of their sport affiliation must be conducted with the goal that the teams constitute the most genuine representation of national sport.11

In the followings days the COA requested the CAD—which was in a state of astonishment due to the vertiginous last developments—and all non-affiliated NSFs to cooperate with its efforts to organize the Olympic delegation.12 The initial steps taken by the COA received mixed reactions from mainstream media. On the one hand, La Nación said that “the first announcements of the Olympic Committee could not have been more commendable” and that the COA wished to make clear that “our sport has a convenient development and that their men initiate a movement of importance in the country.”13 On the other hand, La Prensa, without
opposing sending a delegation to Paris, found in the governmental creation of the COA “a violent alteration of ethical and institutional values and also disregard for the already exiting sport institutions and their federations.” These early and acute comments were a clear indication of the terrain in which the formation of the Olympic team would be contested. The tension would lead to intense rancor that would also jeopardize Argentina’s Olympics plans.

Soon after learning about the existence of the COA, an Argentine in Paris, Aníbal Gamboa offered his assistance in forming a team that would participate in what eventually became known as the first Winter Olympic Games to be hosted in Chamonix, France. He was hoping to compete in ski jumping and bobsleigh, and José Gamboa in speed skating. The former even believed he would be among the top contenders. Their Olympic dreams were shattered. While awaiting permission from Buenos Aires to proceed to Chamonix, they learned that because winter sports were not practiced in Argentina, their offer had been turned down. Despite this decision the NSFs announced their willingness to cooperate with the COA but many also suggested that they would like all preparations concerning their participation to be arranged through the CAD, to which they were affiliated. In the meantime the CAD reorganized itself and reconstructed its executive board—Benito A. Nazar Anchorena, a boxing official and member of the COA, was chosen as the new president. As a consequence of the NSFs pressure, the COA sent a letter to the CAD asking: (a) if there were amateur Argentine citizens able to be successful at the Olympics, (b) if so, to provide their names, and (c) what would be the best practical way to conduct trials independently of sport affiliation.

After two weeks of deliberations, on February 7, the CAD answered that it could be well represented in nine sports. It also noted that the names of the potential athletes would soon be forwarded and, more importantly, that the most appropriate way to conduct trials was to trust them to each NSF affiliated to the CAD. In relation to the last point, the CAD made it explicit that the NSFs would decide whether to include non-affiliated sportmen or not according to their respective constitutions. This was a clear affront to the COA’s precepts. The COA welcomed open trials but emphatically rejected transferring the decision to accept non-affiliated Olympic hopefuls to the NSFs based on their own criteria because it would distort the spirit of the decree by which it had been established. The apparent rationale for this rejection was to provide every interested athlete a fair opportunity to make the Olympic team but an equally important reason was to further challenge the CAD and control the sport scene.

If Argentine sport was still struggling to establish a stable organizational structure in early 1924, the dispute over affiliations proved to be another divisive matter. At that time, the sport picture was complex and blurry, a perfect combination for controversy. The CAD had thirteen affiliated NSFs but only seven were recognized by their respective international governing bodies. In two cases, individual sport clubs rather than NSFs held the international representation. As expected, these clubs were not keen on giving them up nor on affiliating with the CAD. In addition, in four sports there was more than one institution vying for control at the national level. Finally, there were several NSFs neither affiliated to the CAD and/or to their international parent institutions. No wonder, then, that given this situation the COA and the CAD vehemently argued over whose jurisdiction it was to decide whether unrestricted open trials must be conducted. To prevail in this matter meant to no small degree to gain a great share of power.

While the COA and the CAD could not reach an agreement on how to organize trials, their respective position hardened during February making future negotiations more problematic. Much of the problem was due to misinformation about the role, prerogatives and obligations of each institution. After consultations with the IOC, the French Olympic Committee, and several international sport federations, it was determined that all Olympic teams had to be approved by the COA and that when NSFs with international recognition existed, the teams should be limited to athletes from affiliated institutions. Given the situation of Argentine sport described above, this meant that if a beneficial solution to the Olympic imbroglio was to be found, each party’s point of view had to be seriously considered at the negotiation table in order to establish better structured sport institutions and administrations. With the parameters of the different actors clarified, deliberations intensified. Football participation was a highly sensitive issue; it set the tone for the whole Olympic dilemma.

In 1924 Argentine football was in the middle of a serious rift. There were two governing bodies, the Asociación Argentina de Football ([AAF] Argentine Football Association), which was affiliated with the CAD and recognized by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association ([FIFA] International Federation of Association Football) and the Asociación Amateur de Football (Amateurs Football Association), which supported the COA. Their respective presidents were Aldo Cantoni and Adrián Beccar Varela. Throughout January and February, the COA had proposed the formation of a special group “constituted by delegates of the governing bodies and presided by someone who offers the necessary guarantee of capacity and impartiality” to secure the presence of Argentine football in Paris. The CAD did not find the idea compelling. Instead, it decided to send a commission led by Cantoni to negotiate a solution to the selection of athletes with the COA. If the negotiations failed, the commission would seek the intervention of the Minister of Justice and Public Instruction—which the decree designated to arbitrate if problems arose. The two parties met on February 14 but the many hours of talk proved unsuccessful due to the incompatible stances. Nonetheless, the COA promised that it would announce a definitive solution in the following days. That did not happen.

The stalemate was all the CAD’s commission needed to visit the Minister of Justice and Public Instruction, Antonio Sagarna, and submit a letter to him expressing surprise that the government had created the COA, complaining about the COA’s actions and asking Sagarna to intervene in order to find a solution. Aldo replied to the CAD’s visit to the Minister by personally informing
Alvear about the divergences between the COA and the CAD.\textsuperscript{24} Apparently Alvear told Aldao to put an end to the disagreement, for on February 20, the COA requested the AAF to organize and supervise the football selection process. It also asked the CAD to conduct public trials open to all sportsmen in the remaining sports through its NSFs. The CAD felt exuberant about the news, which spread quickly.\textsuperscript{25}

Unfortunately, the agreement did not last long for the CAD’s reluctance to withdraw its letter to the Minister, prompted the COA to answer it. The letter, which basically questioned the CAD’s alleged attempt to monopolize sports, caused great shock in the CAD.\textsuperscript{26} A week later, after Nazar Anchorena had resigned his posts in both the CAD and the COA, the former wrote back to the Minister accusing the COA of intransigence and clarifying that it was willing to find a solution to the Olympic representation. Despite the letters and the mutual accusations, Alvear, in response to the CAD’s last note, issued a decree establishing that the dispute was closed in what concerned the government and encouraged “everybody to have a spirit of cooperation and concord for the best success of the Argentine participation in the world championship.”\textsuperscript{27} Alvear’s words, however, did not appease the contending spirits.

The conflict escalated as the AAF insisted that all footballers had to be officially signed with it to be considered for the trials. After numerous telegrams between Buenos Aires and Paris, the Organizing Committee concluded that if a football agreement was not possible, the only solution would be for Argentina to refrain from sending a team.\textsuperscript{28} On March 24 the CAD accused the COA of authoritarianism and made a radical decision: it cabled the IOC denouncing the constitution of the COA and requested to be recognized as the sole Olympic authority in Argentina.\textsuperscript{29} Hoping that the CAD would obtain IOC recognition, the AAF organized a trial game on March 31. At kick-off time the teams were not complete and overall the game was a failure.\textsuperscript{30} However, the COA was not tormented by the last developments for it had received the support of the IOC. In the end, sending a team to Paris proved impossible. Many were frustrated by the Argentine inability to find a solution to the football discord. Baillet-Latour, foreseeing more complications, warned Aldao and Alvear that “we have thought that it is necessary for you to prevent further similar difficulties.”\textsuperscript{31} His warning arrived too late, for the bellicose climate had already spread to other NSFs.

Late in January, the Federación Argentina de Esgrima (FAE) Argentine Fencing Federation), communicated to the CAD that its Olympic delegation would be formed taking into account the results of its November 1923 tournament, which for the CAD was “the most serious, most severe and most complete celebrated until now,”\textsuperscript{32} as final. The FAE, following its rules, established that all Olympic fencers had to be native Argentines. Given its insistence on the last point, the COA recognized in March that the “designated fencers meet all necessary qualifications to be a part of the Olympic team” but in light of the implicit exclusion of naturalized Argentines, it announced the “definitive resolution to not accept the selection.”\textsuperscript{33} In a letter to Baillet-Latour, Aldao explained that the COA would not change its mind “unless the federation modifies its attitude, which is absurd.”\textsuperscript{34} The FAE announced that it did not need naturalized citizens to form its team. Seeing a possibility to challenge the COA, a group of NSFs stood firmly behind the FAE.\textsuperscript{35}

The fencing squabble escalated when the CAD decided to request IOC recognition. Worried that it would be seen as responsible for the possible schism, the FAE sent a commission to negotiate a way out of the problem with the COA. Fencing officials also realized that excluding naturalized Argentines from the trials was against the rights granted to them by the National Constitution. The FAE’s commission and the COA agreed to organize supplementary trials open to both naturalized and native citizens. Although this decision was fought by many FAE’s affiliates, the agreement was endorsed. The turn out for the late April supplementary trials was disappointingly low. But the mission had been accomplished, for on April 25 the COA approved the list of fencers qualified through the FAE’s trials. With the fencing Olympic team designated and getting ready for competition, a huge hurdle has been cleared.\textsuperscript{36}

The fact that a major conflict had been solved did not mean that problems of a different nature would not emerge. Around mid March, the Asociacion Argentina de Remeros Aficionados (AARA) Argentine Association of Amateur Rowers) designated a commission to select the Olympic rowers. This commission closely monitored the Tigre international regattas organized on March 30 and 31 and chose a group of rowers for further inspection. To that end, the commission organized a series of training and testing events. After long deliberations, the commission selected those who would compete in Paris. The announcement caused a bitter response from the Club de Regatas de San Nicolás (San Nicolás’ Regattas Club). According to the club, its rowers had been unfairly neglected even after having demonstrated their athletic superiority on the course. The AARA was unperturbed by this reaction, backed up the commission’s work, and disciplined the club’s delegate for the negative publicity generated.\textsuperscript{37}

If rowing and Olympic officials were concerned about public perception of the matter, they must have witnessed the response of the city of San Nicolás, located 230 km from Buenos Aires and hometown of the club, with astonishment. After the AARA disregarded the complaints, the club, albeit disappointed, considered the issue closed. But that was not the case with the city’s population who gathered in a popular assembly to manifest their discontent. It was decided to empower the city’s mayor to negotiate with the COA the realization of a contest between the designated rowers and the club’s because “it is the most secure way to determine which are the best.”\textsuperscript{38} On May 1, the delegates of the popular assembly met with Aldao and he agreed to pass on their petition to the AARA. Although the Olympic rowers were willing to accept the San Nicolás challenge, the AARA stood by its original
decision and the commission's report. Popular demands might have been legitimate but the COA, which needed support from the NSFs and had been already sufficiently exposed, was ready to accept the list of approved rowers and add them to the Olympic delegation.39

In its struggle to enlarge the Olympic delegation the COA had to find a balance between its principles and the reality of Argentine sport. Consistency of action was sometimes difficult to achieve as shown in the equestrian and gymnastics cases. By late April, registrations for the gymnastics trials were in single digits. Consequently, a team—not to mention a competitive team—could not be formed, and so the COA chose, without hesitation, not to send a gymnastics representation. The equestrian situation also called for a decision in terms of the number of entries for the trials and the potential quality of participation but the COA's behavior differed markedly from the gymnastics resolution.40

Although the Club Hipico Argentino ([CHA] Argentine Equestrian Club, in accord with the COA, announced its trials in February, they were not organized until much later. After being rained out, and in the presence of Aldao, the jury of selection designated for the occasion chose the team on March 28 among a mere five contenders. However, due to the fact that the Olympic team had to have four members and the jury was satisfied with only two of the selected riders, it recommended the organization of a new trial so the competitors could train and use better horses. The subsequent trial did not satisfy the jury either and they suggested that it was not possible to form the team. The media and the riders lobbied the COA for a third round of trials. Unlike the rowing situation, this time the COA was willing to help the athletes. The CHA considered the COA's request and accepted the petition; enraged, the president of the jury, an army man, resigned. Before the trials were held, the Minister of War twisted the arm of the COA announcing that it would not authorize the two riders in question, also army men, to make the Olympic team because they were not sufficiently ready. In some matters, the expertise of the army was not to be disputed. Moreover, the Minister's action reminded the COA that relative success in Paris had been one of its founding principles.41

Not all sports presented such a challenging situation as those described above for the COA. Even though it had to intervene in the selection process of other sports, in the majority of the disciplines the COA just supervised and approved teams. The case of shooting, a sport in which one of the two rival NSFs had the international recognition, is a good example of cooperation between the COA and the NSFs. After the COA secured the formation of a commission composed by a delegate of each shooting federation and presided by an impartial member, the trials were relatively free of problems. Without the need of special arrangements, other NSFs followed in the organization of smooth trials. Of course, all of them had their peculiarities and own stories. The yachting, weightlifting, and cycling selection processes were short, and teams were expediently chosen. In polo and swimming the respective federations nominated teams not through trials but by giving careful consideration to the recent athletic biography of their potential Olympians. In the case of swimming, after disagreements arose, partial trials were needed to solve some disputes. The athletics (track and field) athletes were chosen using the results from the South American championships, held in Buenos Aires during March of 1924. Finally, the boxing and tennis trials included a comprehensive but extenuating marathon of events.42

As the trials were progressing, with successes and failures, the COA also dealt with a whole array of issues for which it was not always ready. It negotiated with the Minister of War licenses for the Olympians who were conscripts, decided on the many NSFs petitions to include coaches, trainers, and officials on the teams, registered entries with the Paris Organizing Committee, communicated with its delegates in France, designated a physician, issued strict rules for athletes and officials, and secured seats for the Olympic delegation in commercial steamers among many others chores. All of these issues took a great deal of time and whatever the decision made, usually someone was dissatisfied. For example, Román Lopez, president of the FAE, complained in relation to one of the steamer's facilities that “to travel in a vessel like the ‘Vasari’ one needs to be a true patriot.”43 However, the departure of the swimmers, the last team to leave Buenos Aires, on June 2 must have been a great relief for the five-man COA, for it meant that despite the many challenges offered by the sport situation in the country, the first official Argentine delegation would finally participate in Olympic arenas.

Conclusions

After a hectic and tiring five month period of preparations, which was characterized by stormy negotiations with the CAD and the NSFs in which its authority was severely questioned, the COA managed to accomplish what its foundation decree mandated, shipping the first Argentine official delegation to the Paris Olympic Games. In total, the delegation included representatives in eleven sports.44 Despite the absence of football, Argentina's most popular sport, and the fact that experienced local observers did not expect superior Argentine athletic performance in more than a couple of sports, the Olympic excursion generated a great deal of expectation among the sport community and beyond. After all it was the growing nation that was being put on the global Olympic map.

Space does not allow me to explore the fate of the delegation but it is worth noting that the COA and the athletes had to endure logistic inconveniences, training problems, injuries, and questionable referees' calls among other tribulations while in the French capital. Nonetheless many Olympic dreams were fulfilled as Argentine athletes won six medals including the country's first
gold—in polo. Although the masses were not familiar with polo, this victory produced an unexpected reaction in Argentina. After receiving a congratulatory telegram from Alvear stating that “you have represented Argentine sport with dignity,”
the team enjoyed a massive welcome in Buenos Aires. Most probably, the polo medal received special attention after Uruguay, a longtime Argentine football rival, had triumphed in the people’s game in Paris. It is no coincidence that Alvear’s words did not specifically refer to polo but, more broadly, to Argentine sport.

The formation and participation of the Argentine delegation in the 1924 Paris Olympics marked a crucial moment in the development of Olympism and sport in the country. On the one hand, it represents the first articulated state attempt to directly exercise influence on these matters. By decreeing the establishment of the COA and sponsoring participation in Paris, Alvear inaugurated a state policy of intervention in Olympic and sport structures and practices. The timing of the state discovery of the benefits of influencing these phenomena is not coincidental as during the 1920s the state played an increasing central role in Argentine society and economy, political patronage escalated, and sport was increasingly accepted as a technology able to showcase national progress. Although, for some, the method followed to create the COA had been, at best, controversial and at worst illegitimate, the majority within the sport community tended to favor the state action. This sentiment was well expressed by an editorial in La Nación. In a critical tone, it stated that “given the way in which our representation was sent, we could not ask for better results than those obtained” but approvingly it stated that “never, or almost never, before have they [the state] given support to the best sport institutions and practices, and only now, with a president that has been and is a sportsman, can it be said that the government has taken on board these responsibilities.”

Unquestionably, Alvear’s policy deeply affected the organization and functioning of sport in Argentina by altering the distribution of power.

On the other hand, the hostility between the COA and the CAD that was brought about by the creation of the former, as well as the arrangement of the Olympic team and their turbulent history, served as a sign of the organizational state of sport in Argentina. It also functioned as a call for reform. Argentine sport was not a model of peaceful coexistence and organizational maturity. Much of Argentine sport was in the middle of internecine fights whilst international recognition was a matter of dispute and some disciplines did not show any interest in belonging to an encompassing representational structure. Clearly, Argentine sport structures were in a rudimentary phase of development. When complemented with the results of the Olympic excursion, this picture convinced sport administrators of the need to create more sophisticated administrative/support structures and bureaucracies at the national level and of the convenience of inclusion in international arenas. The strengthening of the NSFs and their full insertion into the life of their parent institution throughout the rest of the 1920s is a direct consequence of the local response to the 1924 Olympic affair. By 1925, Argentina had eleven NSFs internationally recognized, two more than the year before, and by 1930 the number increased to seventeen. The time for full international inclusion had definitively arrived.

Argentina’s presence at the Paris Games had one final major consequence. Throughout the dispute between the COA and the CAD, the IOC had complained through Baillet-Latour that many of the problems had their origin in the way in which the COA was created.

Aldao recognized in several letters to Baillet-Latour that the COA had not been established as the IOC bylaws stipulated but defended the government action based on the problems plaguing the organization of national sport. He also emphasized that the governmental decree specified that as soon as the NSFs regularized their function, they would reorganize the COA in conformity with their resolutions. Reporting to the IOC session held during the Games Aldao insisted on his version of the events. It can only be speculated whether Aldao would have soon considered the NSFs’ constitution regularized or not but it is safe to argue that the pressure mounted by the IOC accelerated the reshuffling of the COA with the mandate of the NSFs. This happened in 1927. According to Aldao, it was he himself who provided the leadership for the reorganization process. Unsurprisingly, it was another of Alvear’s decree which rearranged the COA and provided the CAD with the same functions. It was also not surprising that any decision taken by the new COA in regard to international competitions, including the Olympics, had to be approved by the Argentine IOC members. Alvear and Aldao were in fact members of the IOC. Nonetheless, intentionally or serendipitously, the 1924 Argentine Olympic team provided vigor and created spaces for the democratization of sport in the country.

In the meantime, Coubertin, who was well aware of the conflict surrounding the Olympic team, reminded the Argentine public in a newspaper interview, that governments should not interfere with the organization and supervision of the Olympic Games. It was a clear message to all sport administrators to find a definitive solution to the squabble and to better serve sport and Olympism. In the Argentina of that era, sport continued to prosper and athletes managed to flourish despite the struggles at the administrative level and the frequent lack of support. Invited to visit the country, Coubertin answered that “if nothing prevents me, I will have a true pleasure in going to Buenos Aires ... [to] appreciate from a short distance the magnificent sport progresses of the Argentine people.”

Although the visit never happened, Argentina did make some progress throughout the remaining years of the 1920s thanks to both the planned and unexpected outcomes of the troubled first Olympic delegation. The long standing tension between the COA and the CAD diminished, more stable and experienced sport structures and administrative apparatuses developed, popular sport participation continued to grow, and involvement in international contests increased. The 1924 Argentine Olympic delegation marked the effective incorporation of the country into Coubertin’s international project and provided a forum for the discussion of
the kind of sport structure the country needed and deserved. With all its shortcomings, the success of the delegation gave a novel impetus to what Aldao considered, with a similar excess than that used by deputy Demaria in 1907, as “the love for sport [that] has wonderfully germinated in the virgin soil of Argentina.”

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Endnotes


6 Ibid.


8 A copy of the decree can be found in “Jeux Régionaux. Correspondance, conférences et documents. 1924-1928” File, IOC archives, Lausanne, Switzerland.

9 The regulation in question was law 11064. For an account of how this law was approved see Jorge Alemandri, Cincuentenario del Club de Gimnasia y Esgrima, 1880-1930 (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1931).

10 The members of the COA were Ricardo C. Aldao, Benito A. Nazar Anchorena, Francisco J. Beazley, Arturo Goyeneche, and Carlos J. Martínez. In 1923 Aldao and Goyeneche were president and vice-president of the Club de Gimnasia y Esgrima de Buenos Aires respectively. Nazar Anchorena had served the executive board of the club in the past. Alvear had presided over the club in the year 1900. Except for Martínez, who was a general in the army, all of the Committee’s members had a close association with the Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union)—Alvear’s ruling party. See Alemandri, Cincuentenario del Club de Gimnasia y Esgrima, 1880-1930.

11 La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 13 January 1924, 20:2.

12 La Nación (Buenos Aires), 5 January 1924, 8:7; 13 January, 1924, Sect. 2, 4:5-6 and La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 13 January 1924, 20:2.


14 La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 8 January 1924, 29:1.
The sports were: athletics (track and field), boxing, cycling, fencing, football, shooting, swimming, tennis, and weightlifting.

The NSFs affiliated to the CAD were: Federación Argentina de Basket-Ball (Argentine Basketball Federation), Federación Argentina de Balón (Argentine Balón Federation), Federación Motociclista Argentina (Argentine Motorcyclist Federation), Federación Atlética Argentina (Argentine Athletics [Track and Field] Federation), Federación Argentina de Yachting (Argentine Yachting Federation), Confederación Nacional de Tiro (National Shooting Confederation), Federación Argentina de Natación (Argentine Swimming Federation), Asociación Argentina de Basketball, Federación Argentina de Balón, Federación Argentina de Box, Federación Ciclista Argentina, Federación Argentina de Esgrima (Argentine Fencing Federation), Federación Argentina de Pesas (Argentine Weightlifting Federation) and Asociación Argentina de Football (Argentine Football Association). The swimming, tennis, boxing, cycling, fencing, weightlifting, and football national federations enjoyed recognition by their international counterparts. The yachting and shooting international representations had been granted to the Yacht Club Argentino (Argentine Yacht Club) and Tiro Federal Argentino (Argentine Federal Shooting) respectively. Yachting, athletics (track and field), shooting, and football were the sports with more than one institutions claiming national representation. The second athletics (track and field) and football federations were Asociación Atlética Argentina (Argentine athletics [Track and Field] Association) and the Asociación Amateurs de Football (Amateurs Football Association). Some of the NSF's neither affiliated to the CAD and/or to their international governing bodies were the Asociación Argentina de Polo (Argentine Polo Association), the Asociación Argentina de Remeros Aficionados (Argentine Association of Amateur Rowers) and the Club Hípico Argentino (Argentine Equestrian Club). See La Nación (Buenos Aires), 22 February 1924, 9:4-6 and 29 February, 9:1-3. The above information regarding NSF's with international recognition agrees with the June 1924 publication of the Bureau Permanent des Fédérations Internationales Sportives (Permanent Bureau of International Sport Federations) except for the swimming federation. According to this institution the Federación Argentina de Natación was not affiliated to the Fédération Internationale de Natation Amateur (International Amateur Swimming Federation) and the Aero Club Argentino (Argentine Air Club) was affiliated to the Fédération Aéronautique (Aeronautic Federation). See Bulletin Officiel du Bureau Permanent des Fédérations Internationales Sportives, 4e Année – No 4, Juin 1924, “Général. Correspondance Générale. 1924-1928” File, IOC archives, Lausanne, Switzerland.


La Nación (Buenos Aires), 8 February 1924, 7:3-4; 9 February 1924, 7:1; 13 February 1924, 6:4 and La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 8 February 1924, 15:6-7; 13 February 1924, 16:3.

32 La Nación (Buenos Aires), 29 February 1924, 9:5.

33 La Nación (Buenos Aires), 13 March 1924, 9:1-2.


36 La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 28 February 1924, 16:5; 3 April 1924, 16:6-7; 12 April 1924, 14:5; 24 April 1924, 16:5; 26 April 1924, 15:6.

37 La Nación (Buenos Aires), 16 March 1924, Sect. 2, 5:1-2 and La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 16 March 1924, 22:7; 31 March 1924, 15:2; 5 April 1924, 16:1, 7 April 1924, 14:2; 8 April, 17:7; 9 April 1924, 20:4; 13 April, 22:4, 16 April, 16:1; 21 April, 12:6; 30 April 1924, 15:6-7.

38 La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 2 May 1924, 15:3.

39 La Nación (Buenos Aires), 16 May 1924, 9:3 and La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 1 May 1924, 12:6-7; 2 May 1924, 15:3-4; 6 May 1924, 12:2.

40 La Nación (Buenos Aires), 15 March 1924, 10:1 and La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 15 March 1924, 15:6; 23 March 1924, 14:3.

41 La Nación (Buenos Aires), 16 February 1924, 6:2-3; 28 February 1924, 9:4; 28 March 1924, 10:4; 29 March 1924, 9:3-4 and La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 15 February 1924, 16:4; 24 March 1924, 13:7; 27 March 1924, 14:6; 29 March 1924, 15:5-6; 9 April 1924, 20:2-3; 11 April 1924, 16:5; 16 April 1924, 15:6 and 16:1; 24 April 1924, 16:5.

42 The newspaper reports about these selection processes are numerous and detailed. The following is a brief selection of the rich daily coverage. La Nación (Buenos Aires), 13 March 1924, 9:3; 21 March 1924, 10:3; 21 April 1924, 12:5-7; 25 April 1924, 15:5; 30 April 1924, 15:6; 13 May 1924, 9:3; 21 May 1924, 11:2; 24 May 1924, 10:2 and 11:1; 25 May 1924, Sect. 2, 1:8 and 2:1; 29 May 1924, 9:6-7 and La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 27 February 1924, 15:6; 26 March 1924, 16:6; 28 March 1924, 16:6-7; 1 April 1924, 19:4; 5 April 1924, 16:1; 6 April 1924, 24:3-7; 9 April 1924, 20:3; 19 April 1924, 13:6; 26 April 1924, 15:6; 8 May 1924, 16:1-2; 12 May 1924, 14:1-2; 20 May 1924, 10:1-2.

43 La Prensa (Buenos Aires), 13 May 1924, 13:5.

44 The sports were: athletics (track and field), boxing, cycling, fencing, polo, rowing, shooting, swimming, tennis, weightlifting, and yachting.

45 La Nación (Buenos Aires), 13 July 1924, 3:3.

46 For an account of the relevance that the 1924 polo Olympic gold medal had on the construction of national masculinity, see Eduardo Archetti, Masculinities: Football, Polo and Tango in Argentina (London: Berg, 1999).

47 La Nación (Buenos Aires), 14 July 1924, Sect. 2, 2:3-8.


51 See *La Participación de los Atletas Argentinos en los Torneos de la VIII Olimpiada* (Buenos Aires: Comité Olímpico Argentino, 1924), 7.

