

“SPREADING THE OLYMPIC IDEA” TO LATIN AMERICA: THE IOC-YMCA PARTNERSHIP AND THE 1922 LATIN AMERICAN GAMES

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Two decades after being established by Baron Pierre de Coubertin in the mid 1890s, the modern international Olympic Games started to gain prominence. By then the Olympic Games were increasingly considered a promising cultural phenomenon rather than a *fin de siècle* curiosity confined to be an accessory of universal expositions. However, the vagaries of World War I brought to a standstill their uneven yet continual growth. During the war, Coubertin was worried about the future of the Olympic Movement and

worked at keeping it alive. For instance, in 1917 he created a Latin American Olympic Propaganda Committee that two years later he judged, either insincerely or mistakenly, to have “been effective in spreading the Olympic idea in Spanish-speaking countries.”¹

All through World War I it became evident in Olympic circles that if the Olympic Games were not only to survive the conflict but also make the transition from an event of regional allure to one of global proportions, international participation beyond Europe and a handful of other countries had to be increased. Shortly after the war, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) convened and decided to organize the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp. While this decision was made before the IOC had developed a plan to promote the Olympic project in regions of the world where it had not yet generated much interest, misunderstanding over the unexpected organization of the Inter-Allied Games, a sport festival for the allied troops orchestrated by the United States military with the assistance of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), sparked such a plan soon after the IOC’s decision to resume Olympic competition in Antwerp. By the 1920s Coubertin and his IOC associates had embarked on an ambitious campaign that would eventually expand international participation in the Olympic Movement. Startlingly, the work was neither carried out nor directly supervised by the IOC. Regardless of Coubertin’s interest in promoting Olympism in Latin America, it was not his design that transformed the region into the IOC’s first globalization target.²

Worried about the future of his Olympic Games and troubled by the forthcoming Inter-Allied Games, popularly known as a “Military Olympics,” Coubertin contacted the YMCA to discuss what he considered an intrusion in Olympic affairs.³ On January 25, 1919 Coubertin wrote to Elwood S. Brown, an American who at the time



Fencing officials and competitors during a break of the 1922 Latin American Games fencing competitions. Courtesy Archivo General de la Nación, Dto. Doc. Fotográficos, Argentina

was athletic director for both the American Expeditionary Force and the International Committee of the YMCA, protesting against the “action of the YMCA in deciding to hold Olympics in France in 1919.”⁴ Growing impatient, less than a week later, Coubertin published a letter in *La Gazette de Lausanne* complaining that the YMCA “is talking about a ‘Super-Olympiad’ to be held this spring in the Paris area” and derisively asking, “What on earth is a ‘Super-Olympiad’?”⁵ Brown answered within days; the American assured Coubertin that the Inter-Allied Games “is not a rival of the Olympic Games in any sense” and explained that the “use of the word [Olympic] is entirely unofficial and unauthorized so far as either the American Army or the YMCA is concerned.”⁶ Brown’s words had a soothing effect on the worried Coubertin.

Brown’s reply began a relationship that eventually led to a formal cooperation agreement between the institutions these two men were devoted to. The evidence indicates that it was Brown who envisioned the YMCA as the executive force for the “Olympization,” to use Coubertin’s neologism,⁷ of new countries and, ultimately, to combine efforts in order for the two institutions to spread their goals. Referring to the YMCA’s achievements and progress in regards to the organization of regional Games, in early 1920 Brown called to the attention of Coubertin “that the plans which I outlined to you in Paris are definitely maturing” and added that “I am sure that you agree with me that it would be a calamity if these development projects were not soon linked up with the Olympic games movement. They are all contributory and not rival efforts.”⁸ For Brown it was obvious that the two institutions could complement one another.

Brown’s scheme, which was presented, discussed, and approved by the IOC in its August 1920 session, focused around mutual assistance. It emphasized that the IOC and the YMCA pursued similar goals, underlined

the YMCA's extensive worldwide structure, and claimed that the IOC goals could be further advanced through the organization of regional Games such as the Far Eastern Games that the YMCA had launched in 1913, as well as the YMCA's proposed Indian Empire Games and South American Games.⁹ In return for its offer, the YMCA simply asked the IOC to grant official recognition to and encouragement for the regional Games it organized.¹⁰ In this way the YMCA would legitimize its work and secure its mission in different regions of the world. Brown testified to this goal in a YMCA memorandum stating that his appearance before the IOC "constitutes a recognition of the Association as a world force in physical training that is both logical and significant and of extreme value to our physical directors everywhere."¹¹

With the partnership endorsed, the IOC and the YMCA embarked on the first project the YMCA had in store, the 1922 South American Games, an athletic spectacle conceived as part of Brazil's centennial celebrations. Brown had traveled to the region before the IOC session to, among other things, "conduct the preliminary negotiations and to make the basic arrangements for the South American Games in 1922, on the occasion of Brazil's Centenary Fiesta."¹² In this regard, Brown confidently wrote to Coubertin that he was "greatly encouraged over the whole situation in South America."¹³ YMCA officials were so keen on their work in the region that they believed "Conditions are very ripe there for promotion of a great continental play plan,"¹⁴ which, of course, encompassed the celebration of the Games. Even though the YMCA thought it had prepared the terrain for the task, few imagined the challenges lying ahead.

The Preparations for the 1922

Latin American Games

The early proposals to celebrate Brazil's centenary in September 1922 made reference to a series of sport events that were national in scope. For example, in his 1919 project Nestor Ascoli, a prominent public figure, proposed to have "Brazilian championships of Olympic Games" organized by the *Confederação Brasileira de Desportos* (Brazilian Confederation of Sports).¹⁵ Rio de Janeiro's Fluminense Football Club had also indicated interest in organizing the event. It has been assumed that Brazilian officials were responsible for the internationalization of the sport events based upon the Olympic Games model. However, the evidence suggests that the internationalization of the sport events within the centennial celebrations was a YMCA initiative. Elwood S. Brown mentioned several times to Coubertin in early 1920 that he was going to Brazil to promote the South American international Games.¹⁶ More important, while in Rio de Janeiro, then Brazil's capital, Brown wrote that he had proposed to the Confederação that "Brazil immediately extend an invitation to Peru, Chile, Argentina and Uruguay to enter South American games."¹⁷

The scheme gained momentum on August 27, 1920,

a few days after the IOC-YMCA agreement had been signed, when Roberto Trompowsky Jr., *chef de mission* of the Brazilian delegation to the Antwerp Olympic Games, offered a banquet to Coubertin and Brown. During the banquet the IOC announced that it gave support to the 1922 international Games to be organized in Rio de Janeiro.¹⁸ This endorsement did not mean that Coubertin was convinced about the success of the enterprise or that he trusted the Brazilian rhetoric. Foreseeing difficulties, Brown wrote to Coubertin in December 1920 that he was "fully conscious of the ever present danger which you speak of—that is, the tendency or rather habit of overstatement, hasty unsound plans."¹⁹ However, Brown thought that the YMCA officials in South America would be able to help to stage a successful Games. His optimism seemed not based on the situation but rather on his intent of obtaining the full trust of the IOC. Whether Brown was overconfident or ingenious, the preparations for the South American Games tested the nerves, capacity, and influence of the YMCA.

Difficulties in staging the contests soon appeared. The first was Brazilian inaction. In late May 1921, Jess T. Hopkins, secretary for physical education of the South American Federation of YMCAs, wrote to Coubertin explaining that "things are moving slowly in Brazil for the 1922 games."²⁰ This description—a glaring understatement, for things were hardly moving at all—was intended to convey what was happening to Coubertin without alarming him too much. Nonetheless, Hopkins was more straightforward with Brown and as early as January 1921 informed him that "frankly, the outlook is not good."²¹ The situation worsened to such an extent that by mid May Hopkins was "compelled to recommend that we [the YMCA] withdraw our recommendation for the recognition of the South American games in 1922 from the International Olympic Committee."²² Brown's response was to explain that these kinds of projects always encountered obstacles and to encourage that with effort everything would turn out as planned.²³ However, Brown's overlooking of Hopkins' continuous warnings of the situation in Brazil caused some resentment between them.²⁴ Hopkins thought that there would be Games in Rio de Janeiro in 1922 but that its disorganization would hurt the YMCA's reputation. Hopkins' position was only partially premonitory.

In spite of this state of affairs Brown reported to the June 1921 IOC session held in Lausanne that the preparations for the 1922 South American Games were proceeding smoothly. Moreover, arguing that Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Mexico would be encouraged to participate in the Games, he proposed to rename the event the Latin American Games—a move that provided a greater international flavor to the festival. The IOC agreed to the change while Coubertin profusely thanked Brown for his devotion to the Olympic cause.²⁵ Brown also managed to convince the IOC to issue credentials for YMCA officials stating that "muscular Christians" represented not

only their organization but the IOC as well. The credentials were intended, and used, as a mean to legitimate the YMCA authority in the region.²⁶ Brown later recollected that he eased off his push for the Latin America Games in the June 1921 IOC session but these developments suggest otherwise.²⁷

Backed by the IOC, the YMCA continued its efforts in Brazil. A serious economic crisis forced the Brazilian government to reconsider the entire centennial celebrations.²⁸ Although the government decided that some sort of international Games would be organized, the chance that the events would be downgraded even to a small athletic festival was ever present.²⁹ Under the circumstances, the Confederação Brasileira de Desportos had not received funds from the government and consequently the preparations of the Games were paralyzed. In addition, the Confederação had changed officials, who according to the YMCA were much less experienced than the preceding ones, which made things worse.³⁰ At this point the IOC and the YMCA were concerned about whether or not the official Olympic recognition of the Games should be withdrawn.³¹

Unsurprisingly, while the Brazilians wanted to retain such recognition, the IOC did not see any reason to honor its commitment if the Games were not truly international. In mid January 1922, Hopkins met with the *Confederação Brasileira de Desportos* and presented a plan to settle the issue. The new scheme stipulated a number of requirements to be met if the Games were to continue enjoying IOC support. The plan required that the *Confederação* secure governmental recognition of its Organizing Committee, that the government second the invitation to other countries, that Coubertin be invited, and that all technical matters be presented to the IOC technical representatives. The deadline to approve the plan was January 30, 1922.³² Although it was not made public, the YMCA had elaborated a contingency plan in case the Brazilians failed to meet its conditions; it would organize the first Latin American Games in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1923.³³ The IOC would not be disappointed.

Henry J. Sims, YMCA physical secretary director in Rio de Janeiro, met with the Brazilian Organizing Committee on January 30. The latter believed that the situation merited, and so it requested, a deadline extension. The parties agreed on an extension to March 15.³⁴ Hopkins cabled Coubertin at once with the news.³⁵ Given that the matter had drifted on so long Coubertin and Brown thought that it was worthwhile to wait.³⁶ Yet, once again, the Brazilians failed to answer. Although in early January the YMCA did not deem it appropriate to contact either Brazilian President Epitacio da Silva Pessoa or any other government official to pressure the *Confederação Brasileira de Desportos*, its view had changed after the second deadline passed.³⁷ It was then that Sims took the matter up directly with government officials, hoping to save the whole enterprise. The YMCA could afford neither the collapse of the Games nor the withdrawal of IOC

recognition. In either case, the YMCA risked losing the trust of Brazilian leaders, the IOC headquarters, and its credibility in South America.

In several meetings with Carlos Cesar de Oliveira Sampaio, Mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Sims explained the urgency of the situation and clarified that the IOC recognition of the Games would have to be withdrawn “unless its success is guaranteed by the Supreme Government of Brazil, which, in this way will be in charge of its organization and direction.”³⁸ The YMCA move proved effective. After conversations with federal authorities Sampaio assured Sims “that the Government wanted Olympic patronage and recognition and would take the necessary steps to insure such an outcome.”³⁹ Sampaio also formed a new Organizing Committee, secured the funds necessary for the Games, and asked the Fluminense Football Club to play a prominent role in the athletic events.⁴⁰ By May, it seemed that the preparations for the 1922 Latin American Games were finally underway. Armed with the good news, Brown requested that Coubertin provide approval at once. The baron, however, preferred to postpone the decision until the June 1922 IOC session to be held in Paris.⁴¹

The renewed sense of confidence reigning in Brazil rapidly reached other potential participating countries. For example, late in July, sport enthusiasts in Argentina could read in the sport magazine *El Gráfico* a thorough report written by journalist Aníbal Vigil from Rio de Janeiro a month earlier. Vigil was astonished with what he experienced at the Fluminense Football Club. In addition to the luxury and the amenities of the club, he reported that its stadium was being rebuilt to accommodate 40,000 spectators and that “work is being done day and night, without stopping a single instant.”⁴² Vigil informed his readers that the Brazilian government was footing the bill for the Games and that “it shows special interest in that it [the Olympiad] be realized with the pomp and importance traditional to these grand fiestas.”⁴³ Vigil emphasized that if everything went as desired, the 1922 Latin American Games would be one of the most effective programs organized to date in favor of South American brotherhood.⁴⁴

Vigil admitted in his article that he was informed about the progress of the preparations for the Games and shown the Fluminense Football Club by F. C. Brown, a man with ties to the YMCA, whom at the time was employed by the club to advise in track and field matters.⁴⁵ Whether the Argentine journalist’s optimism about the precipitous developments was unjustified or his perception was excessively influenced by a man too close to the YMCA and the Brazilian organizers, with the intervention of Sampaio, the Games appeared as a real possibility. Perhaps what Vigil did not know, or was not briefed about, was that with the recent developments, especially the formation of a new Organizing Committee, the power of the *Confederação Brasileira de Desportos* was severely limited.



The Argentine delegation parading during the opening ceremony of the 1922 Latin American Games. Courtesy of *El Gráfico* (Buenos Aires), 30 September 1922, p. 12

While preparations for the Games intensified, Elwood S. Brown appeared at the June 1922 IOC session to secure the committee's recognition of the 1922 Latin American Games. He explained the difficulties encountered in the preparations for the Games but emphasized that all obstacles had been cleared. Brown insisted that IOC recognition would guarantee the success of the Games. After Brown's presentation, IOC member Henri de Baillet-Latour bluntly asked whether or not the IOC would continue to recognize the Latin American Games as part of the Olympic Movement. Coubertin agreed that the official recognition of the project granted to the Brazilian government more than a year earlier would not be withdrawn. After an intense debate, the IOC kept its support to the Games. Coubertin also noted that it would not be possible for him to honor the invitation forwarded by the Brazilian organizers and proposed Baillet-Latour to replace him as IOC representative.⁴⁶

The 1922 Latin American Games

Brazilian President Epitacio da Silva Pessoa officially opened the 1922 Latin American Games on September 13. Governmental officials, diplomats, and sport dignitaries joined him for the opening ceremony. Henri de Baillet-Latour and Elwood S. Brown must have been ecstatic witnessing the Olympic-like pageant. The marching of the participating nations into the renovated Fluminense Football Club's stadium represented the looming prospect of Olympic expansion. Argentine athletes led the parade of nations while the local delegation closed it. According to the media, athletes from Chile and Uruguay along with American, English, and Japanese sailors marched in the stadium.⁴⁷ The inclusion of the sailors in the opening ceremony undoubtedly gave it an increased sense of internationalism but since these were the Latin

American Games their parading is confusing.

Most probably, the sailors' presence in the opening ceremony's parade was due to the Organizing Commission of the Centenary Sport Festivities' responsibility to administer three different sets of competitions that constituted the Centenary Sport Festivities: the Latin American Games, the International Sports Championships, and the International Military Games.⁴⁸ The specific list of sports included in each of the first two events remains unclear. According to the Organizing Commission's re-

port, the Latin American Games included competitions in basketball, boxing, diving, equestrian, fencing, football, rowing, shooting, swimming, tennis, track and field, and water polo.⁴⁹ This leaves the International Sports Championships empty. Sport historian Lamartine P. DaCosta has argued that the football tournament was not associated with the Latin American Games.⁵⁰ This corresponds with *Uruguay Sport*, the official publication of Uruguay's National Commission for Physical Education, which did not include football among the results of the Latin American Games, and *El Gráfico*, the Argentine sport magazine.⁵¹ Although the report sent by Jess T. Hopkins to Coubertin did not discriminate sports by sets of competitions, the South American media coverage of the centennial festivities strongly suggests that the football tournament was independent of the Latin American Games.⁵²

However, the South American media's earnestness in the entire athletic festival does not fully clarify which sports corresponded to either the Latin American Games or the International Sports Championships. The reports are contradictory. While the Brazilian daily *O Estado de São Paulo* referred to, for example, the basketball, boxing, fencing, tennis, and track and field competitions as the sports' respective Latin American Championships, the Chilean *El Mercurio* and the Uruguayan *El Día* treated these competitions as part of the Latin American Games.⁵³ Notwithstanding Coubertin's concern about the misuse of the word Olympic, the Games were usually typified as the Latin American Olympic Games, Brazilian Olympics, or simply Olympic Games. Indeed, the word Olympic was everywhere even to the point of identifying winners as Olympic champions.⁵⁴ Whatever the details of the organizational structure, five South American countries sent athletes to Rio de Janeiro.⁵⁵ None of the countries whose invitation

warranted the renaming of the Games from South American Games to Latin American Games made it to Brazil.

Organizers could display some impressive numbers in relation to the centennial sport spectacle. According to the YMCA, the number of entries amounted to 1,200 while “In the Latin American games alone there were more than 500 different entries.”⁵⁶ All of these entries were men. Women were not invited to compete in the inaugural Latin American Games. In spite of the female absence, the Brazilian public massively attended the sport spectacle celebrated from August 27 to October 15.⁵⁷

Competition developed as scheduled although there were organizational problems and objections to refereeing standards, all of which prompted protests by participating nations. For instance, after what was considered arbitrary decisions in solving some disputes, the Chilean track and field delegation abandoned the competition.⁵⁸ Similarly, following several refereeing calls that were perceived to be biased, Argentina walked out during a game with Uruguay in the basketball tournament.⁵⁹ In another example, the Argentine and Uruguayan rowers refused to participate in the regattas because of the conditions under which they were organized.⁶⁰ So many of these problems were impregnated with nationalistic overtones that Baillet-Latour declared that regional athletes and spectators equated an athletic defeat with a national dishonor.⁶¹ Considering the difficulties besetting the organization of the Games and the lack of experience of the regional sport community in international competitions, these inconveniences were hardly surprising.

In spite of the controversies, regional athletes embraced the contests. Although the quality of competition varied from sport to sport and was relatively modest compared to Olympic standards, the 1922 Latin American Games benefited the athletes in several ways. First, the contests allowed them to test each other and in the process improve their abilities. That several new track and field South American records were established during the Games speak to that effect.⁶² Second, the competitions served as a training event for future Olympic Games and let athletes compare their performances in respect of Olympic standards. A good number of future Olympians, and even medal winners, competed in Rio de Janeiro. A case in point is Manuel Plaza, a Chilean long distance runner that won the 5,000 meter, 10,000 meter, and marathon races in the Games. Plaza would startle European sport aficionados by becoming the unlikely silver medalist in the 1928 Olympic marathon; then as in 1922, he was welcomed in Chile as a national hero. Similarly, Argentine swimmer Alberto Zorrilla, who obtained a silver medal in the 4 x 200-meter freestyle relay in Rio de Janeiro, turned into an Olympic medalist in 1928. Several of the Uruguayan fencers, Argentine track and field athletes and fencers, Brazilian water polo players and track and field athletes, to mention only a few, that participated in these Games later appeared on the Olympic stage. Finally, the Games also permitted some 1920 Brazilian

Olympians, such as diver Adolpho Wellisch and shooter Guilherme Paraense to continue their international sport careers and dreaming of Olympic success.⁶³

While regional athletes tested their mettle in competition, regional sport officials met with IOC representatives during the Latin American Games to establish the Latin American Games Committee. The primary goal of this institution would be to organize the Games every two years, which in turn would promote regional participation in the Olympic Games.⁶⁴ Certainly, the IOC had planted a foothold in the region; the 1922 Latin American Games had apparently served their purpose.

Interpreting the 1922 Latin American Games

The Latin American Games of 1922 in Rio de Janeiro were the first project that the IOC-YMCA partnership carried out. Although Coubertin had perceived Olympic potential in the region early in his career, there was no particular intention in initiating the expansion plan there. Latin America was the opening target of the IOC-YMCA partnership solely because the latter saw in Brazil’s intention to include an athletic event in its 1922 centennial celebrations a chance to rapidly demonstrate what the partnership could accomplish. Whether the regional sport structures, and more specifically the Brazilian ones, were developed enough to warrant staging a large multinational event modeled after the Olympic Games was if not overlooked at least an underrated issue.

The YMCA seems to have been the end of the partnership with the most difficulties in assessing local conditions. For instance, in May 1920 Elwood S. Brown thought that the *Confederação Brasileira de Desportos* (Brazilian Confederation of Sport) was,

*an unusually well organized and healthy concern. It has no rival nor meets with any serious opposition. This is in truth a strong national organization. It is in complete control of all sports and has well known and able men connected with it in every center.*⁶⁵

Given the many difficulties that the *Confederação Brasileira de Desportos* had while attempting to organize the 1922 Latin American Games, this depiction was at worse phony or at best an obvious overstatement. First, the *Confederação* had administrative problems. Sometimes between late 1921 and 1922 an employee of the *Confederação* purloined a large amount of the funds secured from the government for the Games. This unfortunate event “naturally made the government chary about reinforcing the previous subvention.”⁶⁶ On the other hand, the *Confederação* clashed with other sport institutions. For example, it considered that the Brazilian *Comité Olímpico Nacional* (National Olympic Committee), which had existed since 1914, had no role to play in national sport.⁶⁷ Also, according to Brazilian sources, the *Confederação* was the consequence of a dispute with a similar sport institution.⁶⁸ If these conditions were not

problematic enough, Brown reported to Coubertin in November 1921 that “practically all of the officers of the Brazilian Athletic Federation . . . have been supplanted by new men.”⁶⁹ The situation of the Confederação, and Brazilian sport at large, was more complicated than what the YMCA first believed.

Eventually, some YMCA officials understood better, albeit not entirely, the sport scene in Brazil and, in spite of their enthusiasm, grew frustrated by it. This frustration led to decisions that arguably were not in the best interest of Brazilian sport. In mid 1921 Brown had asked his colleague Jess T. Hopkins to skip the new men in the Confederação Brasileira de Desportos and seek governmental intervention to move the Latin American Games forward. Hopkins replied that

*It is true that there is petty club politics mixed up in this thing in Brazil but the men who are doing it are high up in Government circles. We could make no case at all against Soarez [the new president of the Confederação] with the present administration. . . . Big stick methods are all right in certain circumstances and nobody likes to use the big stick better than yours truly, but I could not do so in this case and feel that I was using wisdom. I confess, however, that it would give me great personal relief to do it, but I do not think that it would win our objectives for us.*⁷⁰

This is quite revelatory of the shape the IOC-YMCA partnership took in the case of the 1922 Latin American Games. Although Hopkins initially recommended against using the “big stick,” his proclivity for it finally prevailed. As soon as the YMCA saw propitious circumstances to ask governmental intervention, it did so. By

implementing an interventionist approach, the YMCA influenced domestic sport politics and shifted power from one sporting group to another. As soon as the Games were over the power struggles to control Brazilian sport did not relent but intensified. This situation was clearly perceptible in the way São Paulo’s newspapers criticized the Games’ organizers in Rio de Janeiro, which reflects the old rivalry between these two major Brazilian states.⁷¹ The squabbles were so serious that they jeopardized efforts to send teams to the Olympic Games. Although Brazilian athletes were present in Olympic arenas in 1924, a national representation proved impossible in 1928 because of old fights among sport bureaucrats.

IOC officials neglected any role the partnership’s actions might have had in the troubles that affected the organization of the 1922 Latin American Games. The difficulties were constructed as the natural outcome of the insufficient sport development in Brazil, but most precisely, in all of Latin America. Henri de Baillet-Latour made this point clear when reporting to the IOC about the Games. The future IOC president indicated that the problems originated in the regional poor organization skills, ignorance of rulebooks, disrespect of authorities and referees, and excessive patriotism, among others causes. Although Baillet-Latour declared that the condemnations of the Games were exaggerated, perhaps a sign of approval of the IOC-YMCA partnership, he thought that the region could alleviate its problems by implementing the IOC’s recommendations to properly organize sporting affairs, which emphasized European organizational models.⁷²

Many in the region agreed with the IOC’s basic diagnosis of the situation. For example, an *El Gráfico* correspondent to the 1922 Latin American Games believed that “the lack of an iron fist that directs and disciplines”⁷³ was responsible for the disorganization and troubles experienced in Rio de Janeiro.

This could be interpreted not only as a criticism of the Brazilian organizers but also as a reaction against the precarious sport situation in Argentina, which much like that in Brazil witnessed serious disagreements among different sport organizations. That *El Gráfico* repeatedly scorned Argentine officials for delaying the preparation of the delegation to the Games, criticized them for not organizing trials, and hoped that they would take advantage of the problems in Rio de Janeiro “to seriously study the problem of sport



The Uruguayan delegation parading during the opening ceremony of the 1922 Latin American Games. At the back the American flag leads that nation’s sailors. Courtesy of *El Gráfico* (Buenos Aires), 30 September 1922, p. 13

in general,” points in this direction.⁷⁴ In the same spirit, the Argentine daily *La Nación* called regional sport institutions to act vigorously to eradicate uncouth expressions from South American sports.⁷⁵

In spite of the undeniable difficulties experienced by the 1922 Latin American Games’ organizers as well as the international and regional criticisms raised, the YMCA originally referred positively to the event. The association claimed, evidently exaggerating, that the Games were “recognized everywhere as a great national process of international friendship and modern physical training.”⁷⁶ However, three years after the Games Hopkins assessed the event more candidly. Referring to the first Central American Games that would take place in 1926 in Mexico City, another IOC-YMCA partnership’s expansion project in Latin America, he admitted to Baillet-Latour that “Your visit would certainly be a lot happier than was your visit to Rio de Janeiro.”⁷⁷

Baillet-Latour’s gloomy experience in Rio de Janeiro had not only to do with the laborious quest for consolidation that regional Olympic and sport structures went through at the time of the 1922 Latin American Games but also with the IOC-YMCA involvement in the event. As the problems accelerated, the partnership lost sight of its role and larger goal. There was a point at which the YMCA seemed to take a rigid position because it was uneasy about what the IOC would have thought if the Games failed. Fearing failure could sever its relation with the IOC, Brown explained to Coubertin that “whatever points of difficulty have arisen are minor ones and should not affect the fundamental basis of [our] cooperation.”⁷⁸ It seems that by early 1922 the only goal the YMCA cared about was the celebration of the Games—everything else was expendable. The IOC, which had not much to lose, did not complain about the YMCA methods and the subsequent Brazilian governmental intervention. In the face of the IOC’s silence, Baillet-Latour’s comments that “We never have and never will interfere in the internal affairs of the organizing country”⁷⁹ to a Mexican sport official less than three years after the Games unveils the committee’s deceitful strategy during this period.

The contradictions of the IOC-YMCA partnership in the 1922 Latin American Games were not reported by the media though. Although Hopkins had feared that the disorganization of the Games would hurt the YMCA’s reputation, he seemed to have been wrong. The media reports from the Games blamed the Brazilian organizers for the troubles. The YMCA was neither credited nor discredited; indeed, it was virtually absent in the sport pages. Considering its interventionist approach this was not necessarily negative.

The 1922 Latin American Games and the IOC-YMCA partnership’s involvement within the event had complex effects for Olympic globalization in the region. On the one hand, influenced by misperceptions about Brazilian sport development, the YMCA’s own agenda, and the IOC’s contradictions, the partnership’s domineering attitude ne-

glected its stated goals and concentrated exclusively in making the Games happen. This required the accumulation and manipulation of power and, consequently, changing the course of the ongoing political process to consolidate sport in Brazil. In doing so the partnership trumped, or at least endangered, its professed task of developing stable sport structures in the region. On the other hand, the multiple problems affecting the Games forced regional authorities to keep looking for better sport bureaucracies. This search was long, complicated, and fierce but eventually conducive to the full inclusion of South America into the Olympic Movement later in the 1920s. However, despite this integration, democratic and established sport bureaucracies as well as regional games were not possible until much later. Another positive feature of the Games is that the event did bring together in competition several South American nations, which allowed many regional athletes to start dreaming of Olympic excursions. Given that athletes are supposed to be the shining stars of sport, that inspiration was not a minor legacy.

The complexity of this IOC-YMCA effort at Olympic expansion was forcefully shown in a YMCA report written a year after the 1922 Latin American Games. Commenting on the possible regional participation in the 1924 Olympic Games, in November 1923 Hopkins stated that “It is early to prophesy which country in South America will send teams to Paris next year.”⁸⁰ Although prophesying is always difficult, in this case it was even more so because of the unstable conditions of South American sport after the Games in Rio de Janeiro. By influencing the power structure in South American sport, the IOC-YMCA partnership contributed to that instability but at the same time it also provided the impetus for regional authorities to find their own and idiosyncratic solutions to vexing problems. South American participation in the 1924 Olympic Games was possible after troubled negotiations; it marked the beginning of the process by which the region fully integrated into the Olympic Movement. ■

Acknowledgements

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Notes:

- 1 Pierre de Coubertin, “Letter to the Members of the International Olympic Committee (January, 1919),” in *Olympism: Selected Writings*, ed. Norbert Müller (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2000), 738.
- 2 In 1894 Coubertin chose Argentine educator José B. Zubiatur as a member of the original International Olympic Committee (IOC) and said that in South America “athletics is raising its flag.” Pierre de Coubertin, “The Neo-Olympism. Appeal to the People of Athens,” in *Olympism: Selected Writings*, ed. Norbert Müller (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2000), 536. For an account of Zubiatur’s life see Cesar R. Torres, “Mass Sport Through Education or Elite Olympic Sport? José Benjamín Zubiatur’s Dilemma and Argentina’s Olympic Sports Legacy,” *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies* 7 (1998): 61-88.

- A shorter account of the establishment of the IOC-YMCA partnership, as well as the preparations and celebration of the 1922 Latin American Games, has been published in Cesar R. Torres, "The Latin American 'Olympic Explosion' of the 1920s: Causes and Consequences," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, 7 (2006): 1088-1111.
- 3 For the role of the United States military and the YMCA in the "Military Olympics" see Wanda E. Wakefield, *Playing to Win: Sports and the American military, 1898-1945* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997) and S. W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876-1926* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
 - 4 Elwood S. Brown to Pierre de Coubertin, 3 February 1919, "Young Men's Christian Associations. 1909-1927" (hereafter "YMCA, 1909-1927"), Le Comite International Olympique Archives (hereafter IOC Archives), Lausanne, Switzerland.
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 - 24 Ibid. See also Jess T. Hopkins to Elwood S. Brown, 9 July 1921 "World Alliance", YMCA Archives; and Elwood S. Brown to Jess T. Hopkins, 17 November 1921, "South American Federation", YMCA Archives.
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 - 43 Ibid.
 - 44 Ibid.
 - 45 For details of the relationships between F. C. Brown and the Fluminense Football Club and the YMCA see Jess T. Hopkins to Elwood S. Brown, 9 July 1921, "World Alliance", YMCA Archives;

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- 47 *El Día* (Montevideo) (hereafter *El Día*), 14 September 1922, p. 6; *El Mercurio* (Santiago) (hereafter *El Mercurio*), 14 September 1922, p. 21; *O Estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo) (hereafter *O Estado de São Paulo*), 14 September 1922, p. 2; *Jornal do Commercio* (Rio de Janeiro), 14 September 1922, p. 10; and *La Vanguardia* (Buenos Aires) (hereafter *La Vanguardia*), 14 September 1922, p. 6.
- 48 Jess T. Hopkins, First Latin-American Games. Rio de Janeiro-August 27th, to Oct. 15th, 1923 [sic], "Jeux Régionaux. Correspondance, conférences et documents. 1924-1928" (hereafter "Jeux Régionaux, 1924-1928"), IOC archives.
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- 50 See Lamartine P. DaCosta, "Olympic Globalization: Sport Geopolitics or IOC Power Politics?," in *Olympic Studies*, ed. Lamartine P. DaCosta (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Gama Filho, 2002), 96.
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- 52 Jess T. Hopkins, First Latin-American Games. Rio de Janeiro-August 27th, to Oct. 15th, 1923 [sic], "Jeux Régionaux, 1924-1928", IOC archives.
- 53 See *O Estado de São*, *El Mercurio*, and *El Día* for the period of the Games.
- 54 See for example the treatment that *El Mercurio* gave to Chilean long distance runner Manuel Plaza on its edition of 21 November 1922, p. 11.
- 55 The solitary Paraguayan football team joined athletes from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay.
- 56 Jess T. Hopkins, First Latin-American Games. Rio de Janeiro-August 27th, to Oct. 15th, 1923 [sic], "Jeux Régionaux, 1924-1928", IOC archives.
- 57 See *ibid.* On 15 September 1922, *O Estado de São Paulo* (p. 2) reported the results of a swimming event for women in which all competitors seemed to have been Brazilians. However, the YMCA report of the Games does not list the event. The dates of the Games listed in the association's report (August 27 to October 15) include most of the football tournament, which finished later in October.
- 58 See *El Mercurio*, 30 September 1922, p. 1 for an account of the incidents. See also *La Vanguardia*, 15 September 1922, p. 6.
- 59 *El Día*, 16 September 1922, p. 6; and *El Gráfico*, 30 September 1922, p. 23.
- 60 *El Gráfico*, 14 October 1922, p. 15. Although apparently not part of the Latin American Games, the football tournament was notoriously plagued by incidents. Most notably, the Uruguayan team abandoned the tournament and, in some matches, the spectators violently protested seeming refereeing injustices. See the major Argentine, Brazilian, Chilean, and Uruguayan newspapers for the period 17 September-18 October 1922 for accounts of the incidents in the football tournament.
- 61 See Henri de Baillet-Latour, Rapport sur la Mission qu'il a remplie pour le C.I.O. dans l'Amérique du Sud, l'Amérique Centrale et l'Amérique du Nord, "22 E Session Rome 1923. Rapports. Rap. De mission en Amérique, 1923. 1923-1923" (hereafter "22 E Session Rome 1923. Rapports"), IOC Archives.
- 62 See *El Día*, 10 September 1922, p. 6; 13 September 1922, p. 6; and *El Mercurio*, 13 September 1922, p. 19.
- 63 See Jogos Athleticos Latino-Americanos. Resumo dos Resultados Officiais. Comissão Organizadora dos Festejos Desportivos do Centenario, "Jeux Régionaux, 1924-1928", IOC archives; and Brazilian Olympic Committee, *Dream and Conquest: Brazil's Participation in the 20th Century Olympic Games* (Rio de Janeiro: Ouro sobre Azul, 2004) as well as the official reports of the 1924 and 1928 Olympic Games and the major Argentine, Brazilian, Chilean, and Uruguayan newspapers for the period of the Games.
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- 68 Roberto Trompowsky Jr., "Desportos," in *Diccionario Historico, Geographico e Ethnographico do Brasil*, ed. Instituto Historico e Geographico Brasileiro, 2 vols. (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1922), 1: 414.
- 69 Elwood S. Brown to Pierre de Coubertin, 18 November 1921, "YMCA, 1909-1927", IOC Archives.
- 70 Jess T. Hopkins to Elwood S. Brown, 9 July 1921, "World Alliance", YMCA Archives.
- 71 For an introduction to Brazilian politics see Thomas E. Skidmore, *Brazil. Five Centuries of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and E. Bradford Burns, *A History of Brazil*, 3d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). See also *O Estado de São Paulo*, 2 October 1922, p. 3; 14 October 1922, p. 6; 20 October 1922, p. 7.
- 72 See Henri de Baillet-Latour, Rapport sur la Mission qu'il a remplie pour le C.I.O. dans l'Amérique du Sud, l'Amérique Centrale et l'Amérique du Nord, "22 E Session Rome 1923. Rapports", IOC Archives.
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- 74 *Ibid.*, p. 8. See also *El Gráfico's* issues of 20 May 1922, p. 4; 3 June 1922, p. 7; 29 July 1922, p. 4; 26 August 1922, p. 8; 4 November 1922, p. 4. The state of sport in Argentina in the first decades of the twentieth century has been explored in Cesar R. Torres, "Tribulations and Achievements: The Early History of Olympism in Argentina," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 18, 3 (2001): 59-92; *idem*, "Ideas encontradas: la educación física y el deporte en el debate parlamentario sobre la participación argentina en los Juegos Olímpicos de 1908," *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies* 11 (2002): 117-142; *idem*, "A Time of Conflict: Argentine Sports and the 1924 Olympic Team," in *The Global Nexus Engaged: Past, Present, Future Interdisciplinary Olympic Studies*, eds. Kevin B. Wamsley, Robert K. Barney and Scott G. Martyn (London, Ontario: International Center for Olympic Studies, 2002), 162-166; and *idem*, "If We Had Had Our Argentine Team Here! Football and the 1924 Argentine Olympic Team," *Journal of Sport History*, 30, 1 (2003): 1-24.
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