

Royalty and the Olympic Games: from Ancient Greece to the Present Day*

By Alberto Aragón Pérez

The Philippeion is a wonderful circular temple built in 338 BCE in the sacred area of Olympia to commemorate the military and political glory of King Philip II and his Macedonian dynasty. This monument is a good example of the propagandistic use of the sanctuary by the powerful monarch.

Photos: Centre d'Estudis Olímpics Samaranch



The Olympic Games comprise a heterogeneous amalgam of athletes from every country in the world and from every social and educational background. Most Olympians from humble origins have reached the glory, fame and wealth thanks to their sporting accomplishments. Not all sports persons have such modest roots. Many of them belong to wealthy families and this aspect has given them access to sports at high levels. Among this group of athletes we can find royalty, a small group that is the best example of exclusivity within upper society and political élites. Royal Olympians have existed always, in the Ancient Games, after their modern revival and currently. I became interested in this issue when I met King Konstantinos II of Greece in Olympia, and realised that the connection between his three main achievements (a national and Olympic reigning champion and sitting IOC Member) was not mere coincidence.

The historical, social and political aspects of the sport and Olympism has interested many authors and researchers. However, a scholarly review of this specific subject has yet to be written. This article aims to give a perspective about the royal presence at the Olympic Games, reaching a conclusion from three key themes:

kings at the Ancient Greek festivals, royal athletes at the modern Games (the central section and most detailed section) and other royal connections within the Olympic Movement.

Monarchy at the Ancient Games: aristocracy, kings and emperors

Homer's works *Iliad* and *Odyssey* offer the two earliest written references concerning Greek athletics and agonistic contests. *Iliad's* Book 23 depicts the funeral games organised by Achilles in honour of his close friend Patroclus, who was killed by the Trojan Prince Hector. The games consisted of eight athletic contests in which the most notorious Achaean heroes challenged their equals through athletic tournaments.¹ Every single man who took part at those funeral games was an Achaean prince or king who was fighting to conquer Troy. They took part in the contest not for the material prize but in pursuit of a greater glory. Victorious princes confirmed that they were in possession of excellence and *arete*, idealistic attributes of their social and political position. Ulysses, one of the winners, appeared as an *aristos* ('the best', used as synonym for aristocrat) who belonged

to the *aristoi* (aristocratic families). Greece was in the process during the period of Archaism (9th and 8th centuries BCE) of developing city-states called *poleis*. A *polis* was a territorial, political and social institution led by aristocratic families which controlled the process and were direct heirs of monarchic regimes. Pan-Hellenic sanctuaries gained importance and promoted athletic festivals in which virtually only the nobility competed within this Archaic period. It was reflected in the stories of Elis itself, the *polis* that administrated Olympia and the Games. The city sanctuary, so said a myth transmitted to us by Pausanias, had royal roots because the Delphic Sybil suggested King Iphitos of Elis to restore the Olympic Games.²

As well as many aristocrats, some Greek monarchs were competitors in Olympia, Delphi and Nemea. Some of them even became Olympic champions thanks to owning the fastest chariot and horses even though they did not drive them – they could hardly be called athletes but their triumphs were justification to the masses for their political power. The ideological storytelling around the *aristoi* was reinforced with the prestige of the agonistic triumph and proved that their lineage was blessed by the sanctuary's divinity. Values linked to the triumph – like intelligence, skill and strength – were presented as *aristoi*'s inborn values: the rich chariot owner achieved a champion's prestige while avoiding the risks that a driver and a rider faced. Although the upper classes and nobility participated at the *gymnikoi* events (footraces, pentathlon and combat contests) because their wealth allowed them to hire good trainers and coaches, equestrianism was properly aristocratic and the common event for royal members.³ Royalty understood that the agonistic games were a good opportunity to stand up for its social and political legitimacy.⁴

Many cities ruled by aristocratic families had lost the official name of monarchies although kept most monarchic characteristics, so some aristocrats who competed cannot be strictly considered as royal Olympians. Sparta was a powerful state that maintained the term monarchy as its constitutional regime for many centuries. Spartan King Demaratus became Olympic champion in 504 BCE thanks to his fast chariot and horses. Spartan monarch Agesilaus II, whose reign began at the beginning of the 4th century when Sparta was the most powerful Greek state, wanted to show the strength of his kingdom in the place where all the Greeks met every four years: Olympia. According to Xenophon and Plutarch, he encouraged his sister Princess Cynisca to take part at the 396 BCE Olympic Games in the chariot races. As a woman, her attendance at the event was forbidden. However, her chariot won so Cynisca became the first female Olympic winner ever. She competed four years later and won again.⁵ During the



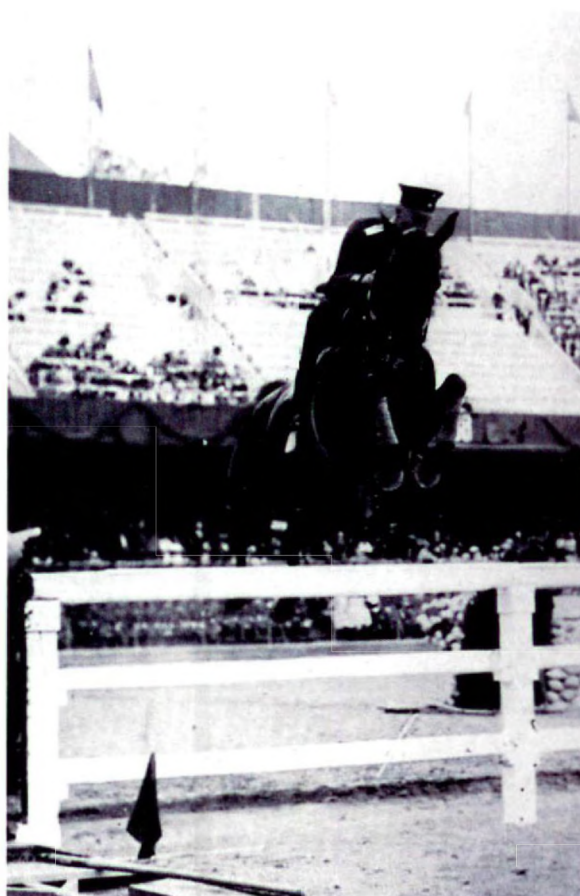
A charioteer driving a quadriga under flying goddess Nike, who crowns the horses, was a typical motif on Syracusan coins during the reign of Hieron I, an Olympic champion.

Classicism movement (5th century), Sicilian monarchies were tyrannies that had achieved stability – the word 'tyrant' did not in those days necessarily have negative connotations. Sovereign ruler Hieron I of Syracuse was a winner of the chariot races of the 476 and 472 BCE Olympic Games. He wanted to perpetuate those successes so he asked Pindar for lyric poems relating his triumphs. Hieron I did the same to honour his brother-in-law and right-hand-man Cromios when he won at the Nemean Games.⁶ King Arcesilaus IV of Cyrene – a Greek colony in present-day Libya – was presented with an olive wreath during the 460 BCE Olympic Games.

Macedonians believed in Greek gods, spoke a Greek dialect and organised athletic festivals. Nevertheless, they were not allowed to enter Olympic competitions because the judges, *hellanodikai*, instituted by Elis did not consider Macedonians ethnically Greeks. King Alexander I, who reigned during the first half of the 5th century BCE, wished to join the footraces in Olympia but could not because he was Macedonian. However, he claimed descent from Argive Greeks and was thus allowed to compete.⁷ Although he did not win, it created a precedent, and thereafter Macedonian royalty was permitted to participate. His grandson King Archelaus I was the winner in the 408 BCE Olympic chariots race. He also won at the Pythian Games. King Philip II transformed the Kingdom of Macedonia into the most powerful Greek state in the middle of the 3rd century BCE. Such political growth needed a cultural and religious legitimacy over all the Greeks.

The Pan-Hellenic sanctuary of Olympia and its huge prestige was the best platform to propagandize the new Macedonian hegemony. Philip II gained victory in three different equestrian events at the Olympic Games between 356 and 348 BCE and won in Delphi too.⁸ Philip II died in 336 and his son Alexander III (the Great) succeeded him. His attention was focused on the military and political affairs required by the hegemonic Kingdom of Macedonia, so athletics was not a priority. Moreover, his teacher Aristotle criticised athletics because physical training had become excessive. Plutarch wrote that the philosopher taught the King that athletics and physical competitions were neither transcendent nor significant. Alexander the Great refused to compete at the Olympics, as his father

Prince Friedrich Karl was the first sportsman from the house of Hohenzollern. His grandfather was the nephew of Kaiser Wilhelm I. A lieutenant, he took part in the show jumping in 1912 in Stockholm and won a bronze medal with the German team. In the First World War he served as the leader of a flying squadron and was shot down in 1917 on the Western Front. He died in Rouen, France, from injuries sustained in the crash.



did. He said that he would only attend the Games, "If kings were my rivals" in order to avoid a victory over plebeian men or the defeat of a monarch.⁹ He gave little significance to Olympia or Delphi but he never attacked any agonistic festivals, and Macedonia even hosted an Olympic Games in the city of Dion.

Another Hellenistic kingdom, Egypt, encouraged the agonistic participation at the Pan-Hellenic games so athletes from Alexandria obtained wonderful results with 41 known Olympic triumphs because the Egyptian monarchy encouraged athletics to reinforce its Hellenistic identity. However, none of the Ptolemaic kings competed at Olympia or Delphi.

After defeating Queen Cleopatra of Egypt, Octavius Augustus assumed immense power in 27 BCE while the Republic of Rome was reorganised as an autocratic regime under the name of Empire, eventually ruled by a monarch. Tiberius was Emperor after Augustus died in 14 CE and he became the powerful leader of Rome. Seventeen years before, he received the sacred olive wreath as Olympic champion in the chariot race. Although he was Roman he was allowed to compete because he was related to the powerful Emperor Augustus. Agrippa, related to the first four emperors, attended personally the 16 BCE Games as spectator. Germanicus Caesar, the Tiberius' adoptive son, won at the games of the 17 CE Olympiad.¹⁰ When Emperor Nero travelled to the Eastern half of the Empire to get the support of the

Hellenistic élites, he then actively endorsed the Greek sanctuaries and their games. As part of this diplomatic gesture, he competed at the 65 CE Olympics winning three equestrian and three artistic events, some of them eventually invented for him.¹¹

Emperor Domitian carried out a restoration programme in Olympia to build new temples and facilities for the athletes and emperors of the 2nd century CE (Hadrian, Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius) continued this policy. They defended Hellenistic ideas and, as result, attended agonistic festivals without competing but promoting sanctuaries like Olympia through coinage, construction of religious and gymnastic facilities and the restoration of the Olympia's stadium.¹²

Kings and princes as modern Olympic athletes

In the same way that Greek athletics were very connected with the aristocratic *arete*, modern sport has an upper-class social origin. Sport during the 19th century in the British Victorian era was participated in by those who enjoyed enough free time and were brought up on the benefits of physical exercise. Those pedagogical and health benefits were theorised by Thomas Arnold and inspired Baron de Coubertin to think of physical education as a tool in the educational system.¹³ Pierre de Coubertin visualised an Olympic revival as a philosophy for a new élite within society:

"The second characteristic of Olympism is that it is an aristocracy, an élite. Of course, this aristocracy is completely egalitarian in origin since membership is determined solely by physical superiority".¹⁴

The first modern Olympics in 1896 were strongly encouraged and financially supported by the Greek royal family. Four years later in Paris, blue-blooded men backed the Coubertin's enterprise within the competition itself. Some athletes were already related to royalty in different ways. Countess Hélène de Pourtalès was a sailor at those Games and is considered the first woman to win an Olympic contest after Princess Cynisca of Sparta.

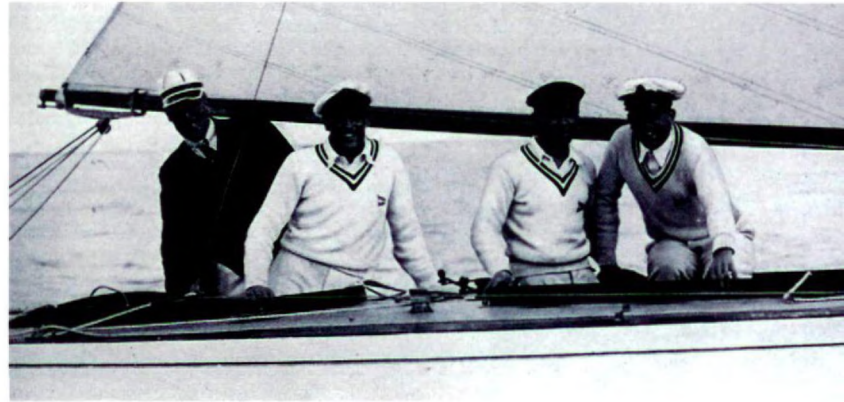
Golf was other sport in which female participation was allowed, and Daria Pankhurst Wright Pratt, an US citizen, gained the bronze medal. She was still a commoner in 1900, but 13 years later she joined royalty when she married Serbian Prince Alexis. He was grand-nephew of Sovereign Prince Aleksandar of Serbia, rightful claimant to the Serbian throne, opposed to the ruling King Aleksandar I. Daria maintained the title of Princess of Serbia once she was widowed. Apart of her marriage, her connection with royal circles goes deeper because of her daughter Harriet Wright, born of a previous marriage. Harriet's husband was Greek Count Alexandros Mercati, a close friend of King Konstantinos I – who had entered the 1900 Olympic golf tournament achieving an eleventh final stand and was an IOC Member until 1925.

The list of royal presence at the second Olympic edition was enriched by two remarkable anecdotes. The Spanish Royal Family has a long relationship with the Olympic Movement and ISOH's Member Fernando Arrechea informs us about its first Olympian. Fernando Sanz Martínez de Arizala was born in Madrid but was a French citizen when he won a silver medal in the cycling event of sprint at Paris 1900. Although he competed in the city where he lived, his Spanish name is explained because he was the illegitimate son of King Alfonso XII of Spain from a love affair with the opera singer Elena Sanz Martínez de Arizala.¹⁵

Another French medallist with royal blood at Paris 1900, legitimate in his case, was the horseman Louis Napoléon Murat. He won the discontinued contest of mixed hacks and hunters combined. His first name Napoléon was no coincidence: he was grand-nephew of Emperor Napoléon Bonaparte, and his grandparents, Caroline Bonaparte and Joachim Murat, had ruled the Kingdom of Naples.

Stockholm 1912 hosted events in which sportsmen belonging to ruling royal families competed for the first time. Curiously, they were three athletes from those three European empires whose monarchies were abolished when World War I ended few years later. Representing Germany, Prince Friedrich Karl von

Prussia was a member of the German equestrian's showjumping team which won the bronze medal. His parents were Prince Friedrich Leopold and Princess Louise Sophie Schleswig-Holstein. Grand Duke Dmitry Pavlovich Romanov stood for another Empire, Russia, joining the equestrian competition. He finished fifth in the team tournament and ninth in the individual. Dmitry was grandson of Tsar Alexander II and cousin



of ruling Tsar Nicholas II. In addition, his mother was Princess Alexandra of Greece, the King Georgios I's daughter. Prince Ernst zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst competed for the Austrian Empire as a fencer into the 1912 sabre contest. He was eliminated at the preliminary rounds so his experience as Olympian was short.

Some sources, mostly contemporaries, have said that Duke Paoa Kahanamoku belonged to the Hawaiian royalty (Hawaii was a Polynesian monarchy abolished when the United States conquered the islands). However, 'Duke' was not a title but just his first name: the famous swimmer and surfer was not member of any royalty.¹⁶

King Olav V of Norway became the first monarch to compete at a modern Olympics when he was Olympic champion in sailing's Class 6 m at Amsterdam 1928. He was still Crown Prince but succeeded to the Norwegian throne in 1957. His daughter, Princess Astrid, was married four years later to a sailor called Johan Martin Ferner, an Olympian who was the runner-up in the same class in 1952. Thanks to that marriage, he joined the Norwegian royal family, albeit years after his silver medal.

The Winter Olympic Games have also hosted the performance of blue-blooded athletes, though the number of cases was fewer and from small nations. Prince Konstantin von Padua represented Liechtenstein, a tiny state in the Alps with a large Alpine sports tradition, the downhill at the 1948 Olympics – he finished 99th – and Prince Max von Hohenlohe-Langenburg did it too eight years later – coming 45th. Additionally, non-European monarchies participated at the Games because many Asian royal members have been Olympians in

The Norwegian Crown Prince Olav (1903-1991) second from left) became Olympic 6 m sailing champion in 1928 on board the yacht 'Norna', which was helmed by the experience boat-builder Johan Anker (left). After the death of the Prince's father Håkon VII, he was crowned King Olav V in 1957.



At the Holmenkollen Games: to commemorate the 100th anniversary of ski-jumping at Huseby-Bakken, the Norwegian post office dedicated a stamp to King Olav V.

The four time Danish Olympic champion Paul Bert Elvstrøm congratulated the 20 year old Greek Crown Prince Constantine in Naples in 1960 on his gold medal in the dragon class.

Photos: Volker Kluge Archive

a notable variety of sports.¹⁷ The Afghanistan national field hockey team qualified for Berlin 1936 and was an Asian royal pioneer because three players belonged to the ruling Afghan royalty.¹⁸ Prince Birabongse Bhanudej Bhanubandh, commonly known as Prince Bira, was the grandson of King Mongkut Rama IV of Siam (now Thailand). He competed in Olympic sailing of 1956 when he achieved his best result: 12th in the Star Class in 1960, 1964 (with his wife Princess Arunee) and 1972. Before taking up sailing, Prince Bira was attracted by racing cars and competed in six Formula One seasons.

Maharaja Karni Singh of the Indian Princely State of Bikaner was a shooter who took part in five Olympic Games from 1960.¹⁹ His best achievement was 8th position. Iran entered the Winter Games of Innsbruck in 1964 with four skiers. One of them was Prince Aga Khan IV, businessman and holder of the religious title of 49th Nizarilsmaili Imam. He did not achieve very notorious results in the downhill, giant slalom and slalom.

Sailing was hosted in 1960 on the coastline of Naples, a city founded by Ancient Greek colonists in 6th century BCE. This was a perfect backdrop for the gold medal of Crown Prince Konstantinos II of Greece in the Dragon Class. He succeeded to the Greek throne in 1964 but was forced into exile nine years later after a military coup d'état. Konstantinos II's sister Sofia, later Queen of Spain, joined the Greek crew as substitute but did not compete so did not become an Olympian. Her future husband Juan Carlos I, King of Spain since 1975, had been an Olympic sailor three years before in the German coasts of Kiel. He entered the Dragon Class like his brother-in-law and obtained a worthy 15th rank.

The yachting sporting tradition was maintained by the Norwegian royal family thanks to Crown Prince Harald V, who succeeded his father Olav V as King in 1991. He entered the 5.5 m Class at the 1964 and 1968



Olympics and the Soling Class in 1972 – respectively, he ranked 8th, 11th and 10th. He was the Norwegian flagbearer during the opening ceremony of Tokyo 1964 and opened Lillehammer'94.²⁰

The British royal family, whose members are celebrities all over the world, have represented their country at Olympic competitions too. Athletes from the House of Windsor represented United Kingdom in equestrianism, the traditional high aristocracy sport since antiquity. Captain Mark Phillips met Princess Anne, Queen Elizabeth II's daughter, during the 1972 Munich Games – he was a member of the British three-day event team that was victorious – and they became engaged within a year. Princess Anne competed in the same event in Montreal 1976. Before they divorced, Phillips won his second medal when the British team were runner-up at the 1988 Games.

Another famous European royal family participated in the Winter Olympics. Crown Prince Albert II, current Sovereign Prince of the small Mediterranean country of Monaco, was an Olympic bobsleighter at every Winter Games between 1983 and 2002. His best results were 25th in the two-man event in 1988 and 26th in the four-man in 1994. Moreover, his grandfather, uncle and wife were three successful Olympians.²¹

The Mediterranean coast that borders Barcelona hosted the sport of sailing at the 1992 Games so was scenery of the sailing event in which Crown Prince Felipe VI, King of Spain, after he succeeded his father Juan Carlos I in 2014, achieved an Olympic diploma²². Four years before him, his sister Princess Cristina, Duchess of Palma de Mallorca, competed at the 1988 Seoul Olympics as part of the Spanish sailing team that finished in 20th position in the mixed multihull event. At the Barcelona 1992 Olympics she met her future husband Iñaki Urdangarín, a handball player who was a key player for the Spanish national team

Norway's Crown Prince Harald took part in the Olympic Games three times from 1964 to 1972. As King Harald V he opened the XVIII Winter Olympic Games in Lillehammer.



that won two bronze medals in 1996 and 2000. In Australia, as he was already married, Urdangarin played as member of the royal family.

The latest cases of Western monarchies with presence at the Summer Games came through two female equestrian athletes. Princess Nathalie Sayn-Wittgenstein is the niece of current Queen Margrethe II of Denmark and granddaughter of previous King Frederick IX. She joined the Danish dressage team which finished third at the 2008 Games and fourth at London 2012. Zara Phillips is an Olympic rider like her parents, Princess Anne and Captain Phillips. The granddaughter of Queen Elizabeth II was part of the British three day event team which won silver at the London 2012 Games. She was born in the city.

The impressive economic growth of many Arab monarchies the last few decades has motivated the encouragement of sport at different levels, even the participation of royal athletes at the Summer Olympics. The first royal Arab Olympian was Princess Haya of Jordan, the daughter of King Hussein I. She was a horsewoman who was positioned 70th in the individual showjumping of Sydney 2000. Her cousin-in-law Zeina Shaban is a Jordanian table tennis player who was engaged to Prince Rashid bin El-Hassan after her Olympic presence in Athens and Beijing.

The Dubai royal family has shown a significant interest in the Olympic Games since Sheikh Ahmed Al-Maktoum won a gold medal in the double trap of

Athens 2004. The shooter is the cousin of the current Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates, Emir Mohammed Al-Maktoum. Sheikh Saeed Al-Maktoum, son of the previous Emir of Dubai, has entered every shooting event of skeet since the 2000 Olympics where his best rank was 9th.

Although other Arab countries have not allowed the participation of female athletes until London 2012, two women from the Dubai's royalty have been Olympians. Sheikha Latifah Al-Maktoum joined the equestrian Olympic tournament in Hong Kong in 2008 to achieve a 54th final standing. Sheikha Maitha Al-Maktoum, the Emir Mohammed Al-Maktoum's daughter, attained an Olympic diploma in 2008 in taekwondo – less than 67 kg. This sport is not commonly associated with wealthy social classes. Prince Faisal Al-Shalan of Saudi Arabia was an equestrian athlete at the 2008 Olympics whose achievements in both individual and team jumping events were not especially significant.

However, King Abdullah's grandson Prince Abdullah Al-Saud was a rider who, after the humble performance in China, stayed with the Saudi Arabian showjumping team that won the bronze medal at the 2012 Olympics. Another Islamic Royal Family in Asia with Olympic experience, but not Arabic in this case, is the Sultanate of Brunei, after Prince Abdul Hakeem Jefri Bolkiah, a skeet shooter who competed in Atlanta and Sydney with modest results.

Crown Prince Felipe was the flag-bearer for the Spanish Olympic team in 1992 at the opening of the Games in Barcelona. He took part in sailing and came sixth in the soling class. His father, King Juan Carlos I had competed in the Dragon class at the 1972 Olympic regatta at Kiel. In 1988, Felipe's sister Cristina competed in the tornado.

Photos: Official Report Barcelona 1992, OS(OIOC Archives)



Royalty with the Olympic Movement

The International Olympic Committee is a private institution that keeps strong relations with governments and upper-class circles. Aristocracy has been a constant feature at the Olympic élites²³. Furthermore, a baron founded the Olympic Movement. After 13 original Members founded the IOC in 1894, fewer than 550 people (all men before the Samaranch Presidency) have joined the IOC Membership. Among them, the official IOC Members list shows that 14 Barons, 26 Counts, 8 Marquises, 6 Lords and 5 Dukes. Most of them are from European countries, although some of them are nowadays republics. Maybe there were more aristocrats in the IOC, but their titles do not appear. Likewise, 42 members are linked to monarchies, a number slightly smaller than that of nobles, a minuscule percentage of the total human population.²⁴ The IOC worked since its origin without any government subvention thanks to royal, aristocratic and upper class "*members who were independently wealthy and had the time to devote to the enterprise*".²⁵

Six out of ten IOC Presidents have held a noble title – including Baron Godefroy Blonay, acting President during World War I. Two of them were ennobled by their Kings for their services. Here are two notorious examples of how royalty is inextricably tied to the Olympic Movement: Barcelona-born Joan Antoni Samaranch, whose Presidency implemented the Olympic Movement and the Games, also reinforced the international image of Spain. Among other things, he facilitated the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. King Juan Carlos I, Samaranch's

close friend, rewarded his work as head of the IOC through the creation of the title of Marquis of Samaranch in 1991. The law Real Decreto 1861/1991 explained the new marquise:

The efficient devotion of Don Joan Antoni Samaranch Torelló to promote sport and understanding between peoples, from the prominent public positions that he has occupied, have been culminated with his brilliant performance as President of the International Olympic Committee. Therefore, willing to show him my Royal appreciation, I am about to give [Samaranch] the title of Marquis of Samaranch, for himself and his successors, according to the Spanish nobility laws.

Former IOC Member King Albert II of Belgium took a similar decision. The Belgian institutions, according to the King's wish, awarded Jacques Rogge the new title of Count in 2002. Rogge, heir to Samaranch as IOC President, entered the aristocracy only one year after he assumed his position. Moreover, King Albert II again granted Belgian nobility to an Olympic administrator when he gave the NOC President Pierre-Olivier Beckers the title of Baron in 2012.

The Olympic Charter establishes that the head of state (or his designee) of the host country has to officially declare the Olympic Games open. It has happened in every Summer Olympics of the modern era, with the exception of 1900 and 1904. It has become another significant connection between Olympism and royalty in that when the Games have been hosted in a Kingdom its sovereign, as head of state, declares the event open. It has happened ten times at the Games of an Olympiad and four times at the Winter Olympics, as it is here listed:

King Georgios I at Athens 1896, King Edward VII at London 1908, King Gustav V at Stockholm 1912, King Albert I at Antwerp 1920, Prince Hendrik at Amsterdam 1928, King George VI at London 1948, Princess Ragnhild at Oslo 1952, King Gustav VI Adolf for the 1956 equestrian events at Stockholm, Duke Philip of Edinburgh at Melbourne 1956 (Australia belongs to the Commonwealth), Emperor Hirohito at Tokyo 1964 and Sapporo 1972, Queen Elisabeth II at Montreal 1976 (Canada belongs to the Commonwealth too) and London 2012, King Juan Carlos I at Barcelona 1992, King Harald V at Lillehammer 1994 and Emperor Akihito at Nagano 1998. However, there are two episodes in which monarchs opposed the Olympic Games. Roman emperors Theodosius I and his grandson Theodosius II forbade non-Christian religion. Apparently, but without direct sources, it supposed the end of pagan sanctuaries like Olympia and Delphi.

Conclusion

After our extensive compendium of examples, it is notable that the presence of royal members in Olympism is bigger than in many other social phenomena. This reality deserves a social, political and economic explanation. Why are royals attracted by the Olympic Games? Why do they join the Olympic Movement through both athletic and institutional approaches? Moreover, is Olympism particularly pleased having this close relation? In Ancient Greece, equestrian events were contests in which Greek aristocrats and kings typically competed. The reason is clear: as Ferrari or Mercedes achieve victories in Formula One nowadays because they own the cars, the rules of Ancient equestrianism were that owners of chariots and horses were the official competitors. Consequently, wealthy people like kings had the best chance to achieve the sacred wreaths of olive, laurel or celery.

If we summarise the royal appearances at the modern Games, we can see that equestrianism and sailing are the most common sports. Ten royal Olympians have been riders and eight were sailors. Both sports are commonly associated with upper classes since they require very expensive equipment (horses and boats) and their practice is not accessible to most of the population. Royal athletes have enough money and leisure to afford its training and preparation. On the other hand, without underestimating the skills required for their performance, these sports are performed by fewer people than other disciplines like team sports or athletics so opposition is less. No royal Olympian, even aristocrat, has ever run a marathon, entered the Tour de France or belonged to football or basketball teams. Current King Felipe VI of Spain trained for his sailing Olympic participation in Barcelona at the same time that he was studying.²⁶ Likewise, four cases of Asian

royal Olympians took place in shooting, a sport whose physical requirements are very particular, maybe less rigorous. We can say that royal people enjoy enough free time to exercise and reach a good level in those not very popular sports, so it gives opportunity to compete at the Olympic Games. However, their other daily business and occupations make impossible to be focused full time on training for specific disciplines like professional athletes. Furthermore, sailing, shooting and equestrianism have a prominent military identity. It is not by chance that military instruction is traditionally an important aspect within the educational curricula of members of monarchies.

Sport is a worldwide social phenomenon with big impact on culture, economy and many other aspects. Athletes are influential models and their achievements are widely celebrated among their local and national fellows. Daria Pratt, Johan Martin Ferner, Mark Phillips, Iñaki Urdangarín, Charlene Wittstock and Zeina Shaban were normal athletes from non-aristocratic origins in most cases who gained such social prestige that they became engaged to princes and princesses after entering Olympic contests. Sport grew in the first four decades of the 20th century and reached a spectacular dimension. The transformation into a phenomenon known as mass sport meant that European élites assimilated the English sporting ethos of the previous century. In countries with a monarchy, those upper classes who enthusiastically adopted that leisure activity were backed by the monarch himself.²⁷



Prince Albert learned bob-racing at a training course run by Olympic Solidarity and took part in five Winter Olympics from 1988 to 2002. Since 1985 he has been a Member of the IOC and has also succeeded his father Rainer as Prince of Monaco Albert II.

Royal members saw in the first half of the 20th century that new phenomenon as something modern and enterprising, close to the élitist spirit of the bourgeoisie aristocracy. Simultaneously, sports were gaining huge popularity. Journalists and the media have been decisive

in this phenomenon and reinforced that popular social dimension, which is very clear at the Olympics because of its world awareness and influence. This fact interests political élites (monarchies included) because top level sport (whose best example is the Olympism) can be used as a political tool and the excellence of the royal athlete can be managed as propaganda thanks to the media.²⁸

Internally and at an international level, different governments and political and sports institutions try to use the Olympics and other sporting events like the FIFA World Cup as a symbol and mirror of the hosting country. Such huge sports events are very popular all around the world and they are communicated to millions of people through press, radio, television, etc.²⁹ The social prestige of the Olympic brand with its main perspectives – the competition, hosting the Games, ceremonies, the IOC, etc. – are aimed, in conclusion, by royalty. This group has historically based its legitimacy and exclusivity on prestigious social and cultural phenomena: military victories and religion in the past, sport and the Olympics in our modern societies in our time. ■

1 Homer, *Iliad* 23, 256–897.

2 Pausanias 5, 20, 1.

3 Nicholson 2005 pp. 2–13; Young 2004 p. 13.

4 Nicholson 2005 pp. 11–17; Kyle 2007 pp. 76–79; Crowther 2004 p. 9. To win at one of the four Pan-Hellenic games or just to participate was helpful to justify status and privileges of the ruling families once they were challenged since the 7th century in many *poleis*. In order to get it, some rulers hired the services of poets like Pindar and Bacchylides to magnify the athletic performance of monarchs and their close circle.

5 Xenophon, *Agesilaus* 9, 6; Plutarch, *Life of Agesilaus* 20, 1. The prestige of these two victories was enormous and she evoked them at her funereal epigraph. Spartan athletes were very successful at the Pan-Hellenic Games: Sparta was the second city with more known victories at the Olympics and the first together with the other three games.

6 Pindar, *Nemea* 1; Kyle 2007, pp. 83 and 129.

7 Herodotus 5, 22. As Macedonian monarch, it meant that he was not Greek according to the *hellenodikai's* decree. The King argued that he belonged to a lineage descent of the Peloponnesian city of Argos and the mythical Heracles. The judges said his claim was true.

8 Plutarch, *Alexander* 4, 5. The political use of his success was reflected in the coinage of coins where the reverse commemorated his athletic achievements (something that Sicilian tyrants had already done).

9 Aristotle, *Politics* 5, 4; Plutarch, *Alexander* 4, 5. Philosopher Aristotle was Alexander's tutor when he was a young prince.

10 Scanlon, 2002, pp. 45–52. Obviously, Imperial authorities were not rejected. Mostly when they were establishing a policy of protection to Greek sanctuaries like Olympia. The Games flourished extraordinarily in the Eastern half of the Empire alongside the Imperial cult started to be introduced.

11 Suetonius, *Nero* 11, 1 and 12, 3; Crowther 2001, p. 7. Emperor Nero himself drove the chariots. The negative image that has perpetuated of his participation is because of his biographer the historian Suetonius, politically opposed to him. Suetonius described Nero into his work as awkward and egomaniacal.

12 Suetonius, *Domitian* 4, 1. The imperial interest in athletics is explained because they were really concerned about the Greek culture and religion. On one hand, it gave benefits to the imperial authorities, a new political situation that broke up with some traditions of the Greek religion.

13 Bádenas 2005, pp. 89–94; González Aja 2005, pp. 238–240. Coubertin developed this pedagogical idea in order to plan the revival of the Olympic Games.

14 Coubertin, 1935. The established rule of amateurism eventually made that at the initial Olympic Games only wealth athletes, if not supported by a sport club, could fund their own trip and attendance.

15 olimpismo2007.blogspot.com.es/2009/08/exclusiva-un-borbon-fue-medallista.html (retrieved on 5th November 2014); Newspaper El Mundo, 25th September 2006. As it was an extramarital relationship, Fernando could not be recognised by his father the King, he never belonged to the Spanish Royal Family and he did not receive its surname Borbón but only his mother's family name.

16 Duke Kahanamoku won three gold medals and two silver medals between 1912 and 1924 and joined the US water polo team in 1920. His family was connected with low levels of the Hawaiian nobility.

17 However, the smaller number of African monarchies has ever been involved with neither the Games nor the Olympic Movement. The only remarkable case was Abebe Bikila from Ethiopia. The double Olympic marathon champion was enrolled within the Imperial Guard and Emperor Haile Selassie I showed deference to him in some occasions, like when he organised his magnificent funeral.

18 They were Mohammad Asif, Mohammad Sultan and Shuja'ud-Din.

19 He was the last person to officially hold his royal title because the Republic of India abolished every kind of royalty in 1971.

20 Additionally, his son Crown Prince Håkon lit the cauldron of the 1994 Winter Games.

21 Albert II of Monaco married Princess Charlene Wittstock, a South African swimmer who was finalist at Sydney 2000, joining her national team in the 4 x 100 m medley relay. Albert II's grandfather and Princess Grace Kelly's father John Kelly Sr. from USA was a brilliant rower three times Olympic champion in Antwerp 1920 and Paris 1924. His son, John Kelly Jr., Albert II's uncle and later US Olympic Committee President, 'was a rower and Olympic medallist too (bronze in 1956).

22 Apezarena and Castilla 1993, p. 451–457. The Spanish crew was completed by the Prince's friends Fernando León Boissier and Alfredo Vázquez Jiménez. They had chances to finish in podium position until the last race but finally they ranked sixth.

23 Martínez Gorroño 2005, p. 267.

24 Here is a list of these 42 IOC Members with a royal title, according to the IOC itself. Prince Georges Bibescu (ROU); from 1899 to 1902. Prince Serguei Sergei Belosselsky-Be zersky (RUS); 1900–1908. Prince Eduard Max Salm-Horstmar (GER); 1901–1905. Prince Alexander von Solms Braunsfels (AUT); 1905–1908. Prince Semen Troubetzkoi (RUS); 1908–1910. Prince Scipion Borghese (ITA); 1908–1909. Prince Léon Ouroussoff (RUS); 1910–1933. Prince Otto von Windisch-Grätz (AUT); 1911–1919. Prince Stefan Lubomirski (POL); 1921–1923. Prince Kazimierz Lubomirski (POL); 1923–1930. Prince Samad Khan Momtazos Saltaneh (IRI); 1923–1927. Duke Jacobo Fitz-James Stuart de Alba, closely related to the Spanish King (ESF); 1924–1927. Prince Axel Schleswig-Holstein (DEN); 1932–1958. Prince Isato Tokugawa (JPN); 1936–1939. Sovereign Prince Franz-Josef II of Liechtenstein; 1936–1980. Great Duke Jean of Luxembourg; 1946–1998. Rajah Bhalindra Singh of Patiala (IND); 1947–1992. Sovereign Prince Raniero III of Monaco; 1949–1950. Sheikh Gabriel Gemayel (LIB); 1952–1987. Prince Gholam Reza Pahlavi of Persia (IRI); 1955–1980. Crown Prince Albert II of Belgium, later King; 1958–1964. King Konstantinos II of Greece; 1963–1974. Prince Alexandre de Mérode (BEL); 1964–2002. Prince Georg Wilhelm von Hannover (GER); 1966–1971. Prince Tsuneyoshi-Takeda (JPN); 1967–1981. Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX de Djakarta (INA); 1968–1976. Sheikh Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (KUW); 1981–1990. Prince Faisal Fahd Abdul Aziz (KSA); 1983–1999. Princess Nora of Liechtenstein; since 1984. Sovereign Prince Albert II of Monaco; since 1985. Princess Anne (GBR); since 1988. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah (KUW); since 1992. Princess Pilar de Borbón (ESP); 1996–2006. Great Duke Henri of Luxembourg; since 1998. Crown Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, later King; 1998–2013. Rajah Randhir Singh (IND); since 2001. Prince Nawaf Faisal Fahd Abdul Aziz (KSA); since 2002. Emir Tamin Al-Thani (QAT), since 2002. Prince Tunku Imran (MAS); since 2006. Princess Haya Al-Hussein (JOR and UAE); since 2007. Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark, since 2009. Prince Feisal Al-Hussein (JOR); since 2010. Prince Tsunekazu Takeda (JPN); since 2012.

25 Toohey and Veal 2007, pp. 48–52. Coubertin established imprecise criteria to appoint new IOC Members.

26 Apezarena and Castilla 1993, p. 454. Crown Prince Felipe finished his BA in Law at the Autonomous University of Madrid in 1993. He failed two exams in the academic year 1991/92, the Olympic year.

27 Simón Sanjurjo 2012a, pp. 3–5. It is the case of Spain under the

- reign of King Alfonso XIII (1902–1931), who encouraged the upcoming phenomenon of sport granting the title of Real (Royal) to many football clubs, backed the Barcelona's Olympic bid for 1936 and supported aristocratic sports like sailing.
- 28 Fernández and Ramajo 2014, p. 707; Simón Sanjurjo 2012a, p. 37; Toohey and Veal 2007, p. 36.
- 29 Fernández and Ramajo 2014, pp. 704–705; Simón Sanjurjo 2012b, p. 91. Hosting countries used to plan a national and local branding image through the organisation of the event. E.g., Spain aimed to share a democratic image by hosting the 1982 FIFA World Cup, hosted seven years after Dictator Franco died.

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