

Brazil, Berlin and Bavaria – back in 1936*

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The logo of the 1936 Chess Olympia in Munich. 21 national teams with 208 players took part in the tournament, which took place from 17th August to 1st September. It was not recognised by FIDA. The winners were Hungary ahead of Poland, who included Jewish players in their team. Germany was third.



Photos: Marcia Neto-Wacker/
Christian Wacker Archive

Since Rio de Janeiro was been chosen as host for the 2016 Olympic Games, interest in historical research about Brazil in the Olympic Movement has grown significantly. While collecting documents and information we discovered new and forgotten material and in some cases primary

sources had been listed under unexpected keywords. This was the case with a 15-page summary of the achievements of Raul do Rio Branco, member of the IOC from 1913 until 1938.¹

Various colleagues started to write about topics simply forgotten over decades. New information was created, new questions arose. Now on the eve of the opening of the Olympic Games in Rio, two main sport historical questions about Brazil and the early Olympic Movement still lack an answer: Had Rio de Janeiro really been candidate for the 1936 Olympic Games? Why did Brazil participate at the 1936 Chess Olympia in Munich?

Brazil as candidate to host the Olympic Games 1936

One of the topics discussed over the last years has been the possibility of a candidature of Brazil for the 1936 Olympic Games.² In the official minutes of the IOC Session organised in Monaco from 21st to 27th April 1927, Brazil was registered as one of the candidate countries.³ In the minutes of the IOC Session in Berlin, having taken place from 22nd to 24th May 1930, Brazil was no longer mentioned as a candidate.

Now the candidates were cities and not countries. Those were Alexandria, Barcelona, Berlin, Budapest, Buenos Aires, Cologne, Dublin, Frankfurt, Helsinki, Nuremberg, Rome and Lausanne.⁴ In the minutes of the 1927 Session, eight countries were listed with dedicated cities: Switzerland (Lausanne), Italy (Rome or Milan), Germany (Berlin), Spain (Barcelona), Finland (Helsinki), Hungary (Budapest), Egypt (Alexandria) and Brazil (Rio de Janeiro). The text also emphasises that the candidates had been presented by their respective governments. Despite the context of the minutes, no other document

could be secured that mention the candidature of Brazil for 1936.⁵

Even though Argentina had not been mentioned in the minutes of 1927, Buenos Aires appears in the minutes of 1930. An important letter in the IOC Archives might shed light concerning that contradiction.⁶ In that letter, dated 10th August 1928, IOC President Count Henry de Baillet-Latour wrote to Argentinean IOC Member Riccardo Aldao that the candidature of Buenos Aires had been accepted and the city will be added to the list of candidates.

This letter is of additional interest taking into account that Brazilian IOC Member Raul do Rio Branco, who participated at the IOC Session in Monaco, positioned himself at several occasions against a candidature of Brazil to be a host for the Olympic Games. In his opinion Brazil was not prepared to organise the Olympic Games because of a lack of a sports culture in his country.

In a letter Raul do Rio Branco wrote to his colleagues at the IOC on the occasion of the recognition of the foundation of the Brazilian Olympic Committee 1935.⁷ His letter included a summary about his 22 years' service as a member of the IOC.⁸ An important paragraph deals with a critical approach about Brazil in the Olympic Movement and does not mention a Brazilian candidature at all.

On the contrary, Raul do Rio Branco seriously doubted the capacity of Brazil to host an Olympic Games. Related to that, he recorded a conversation he had with the two Brazilian officials: Ferreira dos Santos and Roberto Trompovsky, Jr. during the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp. The possibility of Brazil hosting the Olympic Games had been discussed and Raul do Rio Branco called it an illusion that died in December 1922 with the death of Roberto Trompovsky Jr.

Brazil's ambition to host an Olympic Games goes back to the second decade of the 20th Century. In a small article published in the paper *Estado de São Paulo* on 2nd July 1919,⁹ criticism had been raised about the possible candidature of France for the 1920 Olympic Games in the light of promised Olympic Games to Rio de Janeiro in 1922.¹⁰ It should not be forgotten, that Brazil did not participate in any Olympic Games back in 1919!"

It should be allowed to summarize two hypotheses connected to the candidature for the Olympic Games 1936.

Hypothesis 1: It would have been possible for the Brazilian government to present the candidature without the accord of Raul do Rio Branco. Because of political and economical crises at the time, Brazil did not follow up the process. Between 1927 and 1931 Brazil faced an extremely difficult situation with social and political movements leading to a *coup d'état* in 1930, when the military powers replaced their President Getúlio Vargas. The economy of Brazil was based before on coffee production but changed to an industrialized one with a strong bourgeoisie and a powerful middle class.

Those new powers entered politics, reformed public institutions, influenced the industries and most importantly changed the Brazilian election system. At the same time first workers' movements started to fight for a reduction of working hours and poor payments in coffee production. The so-called "tenentismo" and the "coluna Prestes" are the most famous examples of those movements. Brazil had been mainly an agrarian country with dependency from exterior powers. The crisis of 1929 demonstrated the power of the coffee oligarchs in Brazil. The oligarchs from Minas Gerais and São Paulo managed an agreement called "café com leite" (coffee with milk) to nominate one candidate for the federal government to maintain their political power in their country.

Finally, the candidate from São Paulo, Júlio Prestes, won the election, but could not take over because of the *coup d'état* in 1930. The country had been close to civil war, but the threat ended by the strong hand of President Getúlio Vargas, who had gained power by force and had been elected only several years later. He ruled the country until 1945 and then committed suicide in 1954.



Hypotheses 2: It might be possible that the records to the minutes of the 1927 IOC Session in Monaco were wrong. Brazil was not meant to be the candidate, but Argentine. The mistake might have happened during the process of transcription and Brazil got confused with Argentina, which happened quite often in those times.

Brazilian participation at 1936 Chess Olympiad

After the Olympic Winter Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and the Summer Games in Berlin, the 1936 Chess Olympiad in Munich should have defined a third Olympic mega-event in Germany.¹² The political dimension of the event got additionally underlined by its location in Munich, which had been regarded as "Hauptstadt der Bewegung" (Capital of Movement) by the National Socialists and the centennial celebration of the Chess Club Munich.¹³ The German Reich had two main reasons to organise the Chess Olympiad despite a lack of membership at the World Chess Federation (FIDE) and therefore the unofficial status of the event.¹⁴

The event was part of the German Reich propaganda promoting chess as an able-bodied game to ideologically educate the German "soldier". And the Olympic year of 1936 could be consummated with a third mega-event following the organisation of the Winter and Summer Olympics.¹⁵

Huge banners in Munich promoted the event; at one of the central squares – the Karlstor – luminous writings announced the event, including the Olympic rings. The chess players even had been called "Olympioniken des Geistes" (Olympians of the spirit).¹⁶

The organiser of the third olympic mega-event

In 1933, the German Reich forced all chess federations in Germany to connect to the "Großdeutscher Schachbund GSB" (Greater German Chess Association), including the powerful German Chess Federation and the Workers Chess Clubs. This political move enabled the German Reich to exclude communists and, ideologically more important, Jews, since chess sports had been dominated by Jewish players worldwide and therefore also in Germany. With the officially proclaimed goal of aryanization the GSB even excluded so-called Quarter-Jews from their association, even surpassing the laws of the German Reich.

The level of solidarity to the German Reich also got its expression in the design of the logo for GSB with the usage of the swastika inside a chess field. Even the NSDAP could not accept such a symbol as the GSB had not been part of the party! The GSB wanted to be recognised as a loyal and politically opportunistic institution inside the machinery of the German Reich.



Tomás Pompeu Acioly Borges, Brazilian National Chess Champion in 1935.

The Chess Olympiad took place in a hall at the Munich Exhibition Park on the "Theresienhöhe".

Already in the dusk of the 1936 Chess Olympia, the German Reich promoted chess as a sport to mentally prepare German soldiers for war. It even had been called "Wehrschach" (able-bodied chess) and was to be absorbed by everybody. Chess Olympia 1936 in Munich was designed and organised as tool of maximum propaganda, starting the day after the 1936 Olympic Games.¹⁷

Brazil's Olympic team of 1936 during their march into the Olympic Village. Second from left: The deputy commandant of the Olympic Village, Wolfgang Fürstner took his life by suicide three days after the end of the Games. Second from right: IOC Member Raul do Rio Branco.



Photo: Volker Kluge Archive

During the time of the Chess Olympia a huge chess event had been organised in Nottingham with the attendance of some elite players. For England this had been reason enough not to send a team to Munich, the same had been done by the US. The strongest nation in Latin America, Argentina, did not send a team either, even though the organisers in Munich would have paid the travel costs. The Netherlands did send a B-team on purpose and refused to report the Munich event in its official chess press.

Even if it is not possible to state an official boycott for the 1936 Chess Olympia, indirect boycotts were obvious and, in reverse, participating nations could not be regarded as to be sympathetic to the German Reich.¹⁸ The only team participating from outside of Europe had been Brazil!

The organisation of the 1936 Chess Olympia

Munich was not only the location for the biggest Chess Olympia ever organised since then, even it had not been officially accredited by the World Chess Federation and therefore remained an unofficial chess Olympia. It also had seen the most expensive and representative promotional features, with banners from participating nations and oversized knightheads in front of the trade hall at "Theresienhöhe", where the games took place.¹⁹

The event took place inside the trade hall. It had been extremely hot in mid-August 1936 and around 3000 spectators had been arrived from all over Germany to watch the event. As part of the opening ceremony a life-size chess game had been performed, banners of all participating nations had been carried along toward a swastika flag, that finally surrounded by them. Such

symbolic propaganda approaches had not been seen even in Berlin, according to the Official Report!²⁰

Chess had fit perfectly into the ideology of the National Socialists and had been promoted as "Volksspiel" (game for the people). Already back in 1933, the educational purpose of chess had been emphasized in setting the "Wehrschach" (able-bodied chess) in close relation to able-bodied sport.²¹ The able-bodied chess should be absorbed by everybody and the 1936 Chess Olympia started right after the opening day of the 1936 Olympic Games.²²

The Brazilian participation

A quick view to the list of participating nations is astonishing. Twenty-one, mostly European nations, took part with 208 players competing. Each team could nominate maximum 10 players. Brazil had been the only team outside of Europe to send chess players. As mentioned earlier, big chess nations like the USA, Argentina and England did not come to Munich and preferred to participate at the chess event organised at the same time in Nottingham. They did not officially boycott the Chess Olympia, but probably regarded their absence as convenient. Brazil, on the contrary, did not participate in any international FIDE chess events before Munich and for many years after. The USA, Argentina and England never missed any.

One might ask here, why did Brazil make so many efforts to take part. Could it be because of the strong political relations between the Getúlio Vargas regime and the German Reich? It should not be forgotten that the Vargas regime demonstrated open solidarity to NSDAP, especially during the Olympic year of 1936. Lucrative business relations bound the two regimes, vast groups of German expatriates in Brazil officially confessed to the ideology of the German Reich and strong relations between the secret services existed.²³

Brazil did not only send a team with appropriate chess players to the 1936 Chess Olympia, it also took care to exclude those not sympathetic to the Vargas regime. In order to understand the situation of chess in Brazil and the organisations behind, it will be necessary to share a glimpse of Brazilian chess history.

The first internationally recognised and highly respected Brazilian chess player had been João Caldas Viana Neto, who, in 1905, was able to reach a draw against the famous German player, Richard Teichmann in Rio de Janeiro. Almost two decades later, in 1927, the first national chess competition had been organised in Rio de Janeiro with the winner João Souza Mendes Júnior from the organising city of Rio. He had been born on the Azores Islands, but became a nationalized Brazilian and one of the dominant chess players during the early decades of chess in Brazil.

Another important personality in Brazilian chess was Walter Oswaldo Cruz, the son of the internationally famous and influential medical scientist, Dr. Oswaldo Cruz. The 1932 national championship had been badly organised due to political changes – Getúlio Vargas pushed himself to power after a bloodless coup d'état in October 1930 and chess doyen João Caldas Viana Neto passed away one year later.

The small and fragile Brazilian chess community found itself paralyzed and only had been able to organise the championship with two inscribed participants. The young Orlando Roças Júnior managed the win. The final of the 7th Brazilian Chess Championship started in September 1935 with the two finalists Tomás Pompeu Acioly Borges and Orlando Roças Júnior. The later had been part of the *caricça bourgeoisie*, like most Brazilian chess players of that time. They cooperated or at least tolerated the nationalist regime of Getúlio Vargas, himself a Brazilian bourgeois empowered by members of this type of society. Tomás Pompeu Acioly Borges on the contrary derived from a family from Fortaleza in Northern Brazil and had been an active supporter of the anti-fascist "Aliança Nacional Libertadora" (National Liberation Alliance).

The games of the two adversaries ended in chaos with Orlando Roças Júnior not respecting the decisions of referees and even provoking arguments with the result of a change of the President of the "Federação Brasileira de Xadrez" (Brazilian Chess Federation). Nevertheless, Tomás Pompeu Acioly Borges had been declared winner.²⁴

But the best Brazilian chess player at the eve of the 1936 Chess Olympia had not been nominated for this international event.²⁵ On the contrary, Tomás Pompeu Acioly Borges was imprisoned from March 1936 to June 1937 and later immigrated to Argentina. The rules for the Brazilian Chess Championship were changed and Borges never again participated at those championships. ■

Literature

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 Winter, Edward 2006: *The 1936 Munich Chess Olympiad*. www.chesshistory.com/winter/central/municholympiad.html, 23rd April 2016

- 1 When the first edition of the book De Francesco Wacker-Neto – Wacker Christian 2010 with the title *Brazil goes Olympic* had been published back in 2010, the topic Brazil and the Olympic Movement did not yet find the interest of historians and journalists. The Olympic Games in London had been on the agenda. With the beginning of the Olympic period towards Rio de Janeiro many new documents had been discovered. The authors discovered the document of Raul do Rio Branco recently in the archives of IOC in Lausanne.
- 2 This topic already had been mentioned at De Franceschi Wacker-Neto – Wacker 2010, p. 165 without further remarks due to a lack of primary sources.
- 3 Despite the usual process to nominate cities, the IOC registered only candidate countries during its IOC Session from 21st to 27th April 1927 in Monaco.
- 4 The same minutes mentioned by mistake, that the Olympic Games of 1936 will be the 50th anniversary of the beginning of Modern Olympic Games. In fact the Games commemorated 40 years since the first Olympics in 1896.
- 5 The last research at the archives of IOC took place by the authors at 10th May 2016.
- 6 This letter is stored together with all further communication regarding the other candidate cities mentioned in the minutes 1930 in one and the same folder at IOC Archives.
- 7 Regarding the two foundations of the Brazilian Olympic Committee see also De Francesco Wacker-Neto – Wacker 2010, pp. 85–104.
- 8 When we carried out our research for the book De Francesco Wacker-Neto – Wacker 2010 this letter did not exist yet in the IOC archives (folder Brazil). Probably it had been relocated later.
- 9 Lamartine Da Costa had been so kind to forward this article to us.
- 10 It had been agreed with the IOC to call the Regional Games in Rio de Janeiro 1922 Regional Olympic Games. See also De Francesco Wacker-Neto – Wacker 2010, pp. 152–160.
- 11 The only exception might have been Adolpho Christiano Klingelhofner, a Brazilian national, who participated at the Olympic Games 1900 in Paris and had been wrongly considered French. The first official participation of a Brazilian team took place in 1920.
- 12 *Schach-Echo*, Vol 5, Nr. 9,7, Sept. 1936, p. 212: „... dritte Großveranstaltung des olympischen Jahres...“.
- 13 *Tal* 2008, p. 99.
- 14 Due to the new ideological positioning of the "Großdeutscher Schachbund GSB" (Greater German Chess Association) the association decided already 1933 to step out of FIDE because of its national socialist ideology and its racist regulations especially against Jews. FIDE would never have had accepted these restrictions and the GSB simply acted before getting excluded by the World Chess Federation. Therefore the Chess Olympia 1936 was organised without FIDE, even though FIDE did not boycott the event and left the decisions for participation to the member countries. See also Negele 2008, p. 22. *Tal* 2008, 103
- 15 *Tal* 2008, p. 115.
- 16 Richter, Vol. 1, 1936, pp. 29, 117.
- 17 Negele 2008, p. 21. *Tal* 2008, pp. 92–95.
- 18 *Tal* 2008, p. 103.
- 19 *Tal* 2008, pp. 100–102, 115. Hungary won most medals and supported the GSB to return to FIDE in 1939.
- 20 Richter, Vol. 2, 1937, pp. 68–69. Munich as cultural centre of the German Reich had been the worthy location for an intellectual fight and an event to serve the peace, following the opening speech of the mayor of Munich, Karl Tempel. See also Richter, Vol. 1, 1936, pp. 30–31.
- 21 Post, Erhardt 1933: *Erster Kongreß des Großdeutschen Schachbundes in Pyrmont*, p. 9: „Neben dem Wehrsport, der der körperlichen Ertüchtigung dient, wollen wir zur geistigen Schulung und Erziehung das den ehrlichen Kampf darstellende Wehrspiel treten lassen, das uralte Schach.“
- 22 Negele 2008, p. 21. *Tal* 2008, p. 95.
- 23 De Francesco Wacker-Neto – Wacker Christian 2011, *Brazil goes Olympic*, (2nd edition) pp. 134–144. *Tal* 2008, p. 105. Wacker Christian 2007, „Brasilien und Berlin. Die brasilianische Beteiligung an den Olympischen Sommerspielen in Berlin 1936“, in: *ISHPES-Studies* 13, 2, pp. 228–233.
- 24 Costa.
- 25 Nine Brazilian chess players participated at Chess Olympia 1936 in Munich: João Souza Mendes Júnior, Walter Oswaldo Cruz, Oswaldo Cruz Filho, Raul Herman Charlier, Ademar da Silva Rocha, Otávio Figueira Trompowsky, Cauby Pulcherio and Heitor Alberto Carlos. The ninth player is called J. Cruz in the Official Report, See Richter. Vol. 1 1936, p. 33 and cannot be identified with certainty.



Olympic stamps of 1936 with the special stamp of the Munich "Chess Olympia".

Photo: Dieter Germann Collection