

# Invitations Go Out; Acceptances Come In

By Richard W. Pound

It came as little surprise to anyone that no agreement was reached between the two Koreas before the IOC was to send out the invitations to the 1988 Olympic Games on September 17, 1988.

On August 10, 1987, Kim Yu Sun of North Korea sent a response to Samaranch following the fourth joint meeting.<sup>1</sup> Samaranch had kept the pressure on by sending a letter on July 16, containing the IOC proposal, so not to have any gap in the IOC's efforts to keep matters moving forward.<sup>2</sup> The text of Kim's letter was faxed to him the same day, which was just as well, since the letter itself did not arrive in Lausanne until August 20.

Kim Yu Sun regretted that there had been no agreement reached at the fourth joint meeting, contrary to their expectations. He was concerned with the public statement of "some people concerned directly" with the talks that they could not change their "intrinsic positions" at all "nor were there any possibilities to promote even in case of agreement being reached." He carried on to say that the only way out to overcome the difficulties was "for all parties to this to show each other magnanimity and elasticity in the spirit of sincere cooperation."

On the basis of "serious study" of the IOC's adjusted proposal, his NOC had a new proposal: it proposed to host five full sports and one partial sport by "drastically reducing" the demand for eight sports. This meant, he said, that they "fully agreed" to the IOC proposal (table tennis and archery, full sports; and women's volleyball, partial sport). In addition to this, however, they demanded three more full sports, including soccer. They wanted the full soccer tournament because only one group of the tournament was "too partial" and wanted the individual cycling road event to be replaced by another. On top of that, they wanted another full sport.

Secondly, in order to "create an atmosphere of trust and cooperation" and to "promote the process of agreement," they wanted to discuss at the next joint meeting all the important problems such as the events, denomination of the Games, composition of the Organizing Committee, Opening and Closing Ceremonies, television rights, and "so on."

Thirdly, they wanted the fifth joint meeting to be held in August, if possible, or before September 17, the date on which the invitations to the Games would be sent by the IOC.<sup>3</sup>



Samaranch replied on August 24. It was a short letter. He simply stated the obvious: Kim Yu Sun's letter could not be considered an answer to the proposal made on July 15 as confirmed in the letter of July 16. The IOC would be pleased to call a fifth joint meeting but only upon receipt of the DPRK's full acceptance of the IOC's "important and historical" proposal. He expressed himself as fully confident that the parties, working in the best interest of the Olympic Movement, might still be able to reach a final agreement "in time."<sup>4</sup>

Kim Yu Sun did not respond until August 30, 1987; the fax of the message reached the IOC on August 31. He regretted the condition established by Samaranch for the holding of the fifth joint meeting. He said there was no doubt about the differences between the parties to the talks, but that the meetings held under Samaranch's chairmanship were "in the course of coming near the certain agreement." Such a meeting gave him the confidence that they might manage even now to find a key to "slash differences and reach a final agreement," were the parties to sit together once again and discuss the matter in a "cordial and open-minded way, respecting the views of each other." He urged Samaranch to call another joint meeting as soon as possible.

If it was impossible for Samaranch to call the meeting before September 17, "for some unavoidable reasons," he asked him to put off sending the invitations to the Games until such a meeting could be held.<sup>5</sup>

Samaranch responded on September 4. He regretted that Kim Yu Sun had not found it appropriate to accept

The World Peace Gate at the Seoul Olympic Park is still open. In memory of 1988 the flags of the nations that took part in the Games are still raised – among them even the flags of those countries that no longer exist.

Photo: Thomas Lippert



The adjacent text is taken from the book *Five Rings Over Korea*, published by Little, Brown & Company in 1994 and reproduced with kind permission of the author.

Two years after the IOC Session in 1981 in Baden-Baden had awarded the 1988 Olympic Games to Seoul, President Juan Antonio Samaranch visited the North Korean capital Pyongyang. He is pictured here with city guides and interpreters in front of the 60 m-high Arch of Triumph, a reminder of Korean resistance to Japan.

Photo: IOC Archives



the IOC's important and historical proposal of July 15, which would have enabled the IOC to call a fifth joint meeting quickly. He acknowledged Kim's kind remarks about his efforts to find a solution and assured him the IOC would continue to make every effort to achieve that goal. If Kim Yu Sun was ready to accept the IOC's offer, Samaranch was ready to convene a meeting with the DPRK delegation in Lausanne on October 7 in order to establish the points that could be discussed at a possible fifth meeting between both Korean delegations. Finally, Samaranch was sure that Kim, as a member of the Olympic Family, would understand that it was absolutely impossible to postpone the ceremony on September 17, since the date was stipulated in the Olympic Charter.

Kim Yu Sun's rejoinder was dated September 15. He claimed that a "due answer" was again not given to their "earnest proposal" to convene an early fifth joint meeting, in respect of which he expressed great disappointment and regret. He presumed that the inability to accept the proposal was "connected to some extent with the disagreement between us and the South Korean side." Therefore, he considered it necessary to hold bilateral talks between the two NOCs concerned.

The telex was, to say the least, somewhat garbled. It stated:

*Therefore in our endeavours to seek various ways of solution we came to conclusion that it is necessary to hold bilateral talk represented by the NOCs of the North*

*and South of Korea which are directly concerned in Lausanne joint meeting for having arranged solution decisive of convocation of the 5<sup>th</sup> joint meeting before the deadlock of the joint meeting imbued with our painstaking efforts will become worse. Motivated by this we sent South Korea a letter containing our proposal on holding immediately North-South bilateral talk in the frame of the tripartite meeting for narrowing different views in Lausanne or other convenient places, followed by the 5<sup>th</sup> joint meeting for reaching final agreement. Once difficult problems are solved at the North-South bilateral talk, it will be much easy for three parties to reach final agreement at the 5<sup>th</sup> joint meeting and help the IOC in its work to a certain extent.<sup>6</sup>*

Kim Yu Sun hoped that Samaranch would actively help the north-south direct negotiation. He reiterated his request that the sending of the invitations to the Games be put off; this would be one of the "good conditions" of the talks.

In Korea, on August 15, President Chun Doo Hwan, during his Forty-second Liberation Day message, called for resumption of the suspended north-south dialogue and urged the DPRK to participate in the 1988 Games. On August 21, he warned that he would not tolerate any more major social or economic upheaval that might sully the Republic of Korea's record of achievement under his administration. By September 3, Roh Tae Woo and Kim Young Sam had agreed on dates for direct presidential elections. These would be held on December 16.

The invitations to the Games of the XXIV<sup>th</sup> Olympiad were sent from the IOC's headquarters at Château de Vidy in Lausanne on September 17, 1987, exactly one year prior to the Opening Ceremony, as called for in the Olympic Charter, in accordance with the decision made by the IOC in its special Session held in Lausanne in December 1984. Both the SLOOC and the KOC were present. The DPRK was not.<sup>7</sup>

South Korean president Chun Doo Hwan had transmitted a message to Samaranch for the occasion, bearing the same date, assuring him of the successful staging of the Games. He thanked Samaranch and the members of the IOC for their support and assured them that all aspects of the Games were well under way, including security,<sup>8</sup> facilities, organization, and management, through the concerted efforts of the people and government of the Republic of Korea.

Samaranch made a brief speech at the ceremony, in which he reviewed the efforts of the people of Korea since the decision of the IOC in Baden-Baden in 1981 when the Games were awarded to the city of Seoul. He noted that they and the SLOOC had totally dedicated themselves to ensuring the greatest success of the

Games and were preparing unparalleled facilities so that all athletes could take part under the best possible conditions.

In referring to the political dimensions, he stated:

*As you are all aware, during the last three years, there have been many discussions in this respect, particularly in order to provide all members of the Olympic Family with the best possible conditions to take part in the Games. Under the auspices of the IOC, there have been four joint meetings in Lausanne between the delegations of the NOCs of the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Last year the IOC made a generous and I would even say a very important and historical offer to this country.*

*We have not yet reached a final agreement, but the ceremony today should not be misinterpreted as meaning there will not be one. I can assure you that the IOC will always keep the door open until the very last moment, as we should be more than pleased to see all 167 NOCs of the world taking part in these historical Olympic Games.*

Following the ceremony, Samaranch replied to Kim Yu Sun's telex of September 15. He said that though the IOC appreciated the opportunity for continued communication with his NOC, the IOC was still waiting for a positive response to the important and historic proposal of July 15. He also advised North Kim that, in accordance with the provisions of the Olympic Charter, the IOC had sent the official invitations to all 167 NOCs to participate in the Games of the XXIV<sup>th</sup> Olympiad that day. The invitation was signed by Samaranch as president of the IOC. He had also included with each invitation an accompanying letter referring to the negotiations, under the auspices of the IOC, between both NOCs on the Korean peninsula and the possibility of an agreement that might be reached in the future regarding events to be organized in the territory of Kim's NOC. He was sure this would demonstrate the IOC's continued willingness to discuss the matter and to keep the door open for agreement until the last moment.

Kim Yu Sun did not reply until October 2, when he referred to a meeting with Samaranch in Soukhumi<sup>9</sup> and welcomed Samaranch's mention of a bilateral meeting between the IOC and the DPRK NOC. He thought, however, that North Korea and South Korea were so far apart on the matter of cohosting and that the failure to reduce the differences between them was due to the fact that the South "has been obstinate in opposing our proposal." They had proposed, on September 12, a bilateral meeting, but the South had turned down the idea in a letter dated September 24.<sup>10</sup> As North Kim stated: "She said that the holding of the bilateral talk might have embroiled the problem worse confounded."



At the 90<sup>th</sup> IOC Session in Berlin, IOC President Samaranch passed the ceremonial Olympic flag to the President of the Organising Committee of the Seoul Games (SLOOC), Roh Tae Woo. After Roh became leader of the Democratic Justice Party in 1986, he gave up his Olympic office. Two years later he was elected President of South Korea.

Photo: *Seoul Asiad Bulletin*, No. 3 June 1985

He said the North had once again suggested to the South that a bilateral meeting be held and asked Samaranch to wait until they heard from South Korea."

Samaranch replied the same day, simply stating that the IOC was still waiting for an answer to the letter of September 17 and reminding Kim Yu Sun that time was passing very quickly.

In separate political developments at the time, the U.S. assistant secretary of state advised the Korean foreign minister Choi Kwang Soo on September 14 that, during a visit to Moscow the previous week, he had asked Soviet officials to use their influence over the DPRK to cause the DPRK to accept the IOC's proposal to stage some of the events of the Games in the North. During an interview with the leader of the Japanese socialist party on September 26, Kim Il Sung expressed the hope that direct dialogue with the United States might occur. On September 28, the powerful European Broadcasting Union, holder of the European television rights to the Games, advised Samaranch that organization of events in the DPRK could have serious logistical and financial consequences for broadcasters of the Games. And, in early October, the Japanese Red Army issued a statement saying that the Games were being used as part of the new Japanese imperialist strategy for Asia.

During the course of his visit to Korea in the middle of November 1987, Samaranch attempted to arrange a meeting with the leaders of the opposition political



The first joint meeting of the both Korean delegations on 8 and 9 October 1985 under the patronage of the IOC Executive. Paul-René Martin, Syndic of Lausanne, and Sheikh Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Jabah Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Olympic Council of Asia, were present as guests.

Photo: IOC/Albert G. Riethausen

parties, but this was not made possible by the Korean authorities. He did, however, have a secret meeting with Roh Tae Woo, Park Seh Jik, and Kim Un Yong. At the end of the trip, while in Guangzhou on November 20, Samaranch had a meeting with North Kim, who promised an answer to the IOC proposal by mid-January of 1988. On November 24, Osamu Maruoka, described as second in command in the Japanese Red Army, was arrested in Tokyo, and his plans were stated to be to travel to Korea via Osaka on December 7.

Such tensions as there were suffered an increase when a Korean Airlines aircraft was destroyed over Burma on November 29, killing all 115 passengers on board. Subsequent investigation tied the bombing to agents of the DPRK, one of whom confessed to the bombing as well as being an agent of the DPRK. Ties went as high as the "Dear Leader," Kim Jong Il, son of Kim Il Sung. From the Olympic perspective, it served to increase the isolation of the DPRK, and such support as they might have garnered, even among the socialist countries, evaporated significantly thereafter. This was reflective of the international reaction generally, even among the countries that normally gave at least vocal support to the DPRK. No one wanted to be associated with such criminal behavior.<sup>12</sup>

In the early part of December 1987, the United States and the USSR had a summit meeting in Washington.<sup>13</sup> During this meeting, the Olympic Games were discussed, and following the meeting, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs William Clark briefed the Republic of Korea officials on the content of the Olympic discussions.<sup>14</sup> On December 9, U.S. secretary of state George Shultz had explained the U.S. position that the 1988 Olympic Games should be held without any trouble with the participation of all member countries. In response, USSR general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev

mentioned briefly that the allocation of several sports to North Korea could help the Olympic Games to be held in Seoul smoothly.

During the working group meeting on regional issues, the director of policy planning staff of the U.S. State Department, Richard Solomon, expressed the hope that the Soviet Union would participate in the 1988 Olympic Games. The reply from the director of the Soviet Institute of World Economy and Internal Affairs, Primakov, was that the Soviet Union was apparently 95 percent in favor of participating. The final decision would be made in January 1988, but Soviet athletes had been in training with the intention of participating. He also noted that North Korea had proposed cohosting of the Games and expressed the hope that a number of sports would be held in North Korea, but he did not appear to link the Soviet decision on participation to the North Korean cohosting proposal.

This information was relayed to Samaranch by Ambassador Lee Sang Ock of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea in Geneva on December 14, 1987. Samaranch passed on the contents of this message to the Executive Board members the next day without comment, other than to say that the information might be of assistance.

The presidential elections in the Republic of Korea were held on December 16, 1987. These were to mark the first step in the peaceful transmission of power since the republic was created. Roh Tae Woo became the president-elect, in direct elections.<sup>15</sup> International observers of the elections expressed themselves as satisfied that the elections were, with very few exceptions of no significance, properly carried out.

On December 23, 1987, German Rieckehoff, the IOC member in Puerto Rico, sent a telex to Cuban president Fidel Castro, urging him to use his best efforts to ensure that Cuba would participate in the Games. He reminded Castro that the Olympic Games, imperfect as they may be in some respects, were nevertheless almost the only opportunity in the world where all peoples could meet together in a spirit of human solidarity. Samaranch, who received a copy, thanked him for his effort, which he thought was very good.

Still writing as chairman of the SLOOC on December 26, 1987, Roh Tae Woo sent greetings to Samaranch in a letter delivered through Kim Un Yong, the IOC member in Korea and a vice president of the SLOOC. Kim was delegated to discuss with Samaranch not only the preparation for the Games but also matters of international relations, including a visit of SLOOC officials to China and Eastern Europe. Roh assured Samaranch that although he was faced with an enormous amount of work and responsibilities, he would give his "utmost effort" for the success of the Games and the cause of the Olympic Movement, for which they both stood.<sup>16</sup>

Samaranch met with Kim Un Yong and replied to Roh on January 6, 1988. He was particularly satisfied with the state of preparations for the Games. As of the time of writing, the IOC had received confirmation of participation in the Games from 138 NOCs and was endeavoring to convince the remaining twenty-nine to participate.<sup>17</sup> He said he would help the SLOOC with its relationships with the socialist countries.<sup>18</sup> Finally, Samaranch wished Roh success upon taking office as president of the Republic of Korea on February 25, 1988. He suggested a meeting with Roh prior to the Games, preferably after the forthcoming parliamentary elections.<sup>19</sup>

1988 was not without some potentially explosive opportunities on the Korean peninsula. One example was the regular Team Spirit military exercises, involving U.S. and Korean forces. This was specifically mentioned in the New Year's message of North Korean president Kim Il Sung, which included the following:

*In view of South Korea's internal situation as well as the North-South Korean relations, not a few people are currently expressing deep concerns that 1988 may turn out to be the most tense and complicated year. Under the watchful eyes of the whole world, we should transform this year's situation of the Korean peninsula into a decisively favourable one for the cause of peace and peaceful reunification.*

*Out of these aspirations, we maintain that through a dialogue we should resolve such issues as the termination within this year of large-scale military exercises including the joint military exercises of Team Spirit, preparation for multilateral arms-reduction talks, co-hosting of the Games of the XXIV<sup>th</sup> Olympiad by the North and South and ceasing of mutual recriminations and slanderings. Through the resolution of the above-mentioned pending issues, the North and South should make this year a historic one which will mark a new turning point for national reconciliation and solidarity.*

*For the above purposes, we propose holding a North-South conference in which representatives from all political parties, social groups and various circles including the authorities of the two sides will participate. This joint conference between the South and North will bring down barriers between the two parts of Korea and bring about a new phase conducive to hastening the era of peace and peaceful reunification.<sup>20</sup>*

Undoubtedly, one of the most difficult aspects of managing a complicated situation, as Samaranch was attempting in relation to the Games, is dealing with the mass of often conflicting data that bombards the decision makers. Consider the letter Samaranch received from the IOC member in Malaysia, Datuk Setia Raja Tan

Sri Datuk Seri Hamzah Abu Samah, dated December 23, 1987, which reached him on December 31. In this letter, Hamzah recounts a recent meeting with the South Korean ambassador in Kuala Lumpur, who was a former chairman of the dialogue between North Korea and South Korea. He reported that the ambassador had said that the South Koreans might agree to the sharing of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, to the idea of having joint teams, to the sharing of television rights, and so on, in the forthcoming Games in Seoul. To the ambassador and many South Koreans, to have a successful and noble free Olympic Games was more important than anything else.

It was not clear whether the ambassador was expressing his personal view, a governmental view, or that of the SLOOC. The ambassador assured Hamzah, however, that this view had been expounded by all the candidates in the last general election, including Roh Tae Woo, whom Hamzah had known since the IOC Congress in Baden-Baden when Seoul won the bid to host the Games.<sup>21</sup>

Hamzah said that when he was in Pyongyang two months earlier, the North Koreans had been prepared to give way if they were awarded the whole of the soccer tournament. He did not think that FIFA would agree to this, but since the two Koreas were willing to have joint teams, the problem could be sorted out, and they would be happy with the preliminary tournament. They would, he said, also welcome the possibility of South Korea's wanting to concede on the question of joint Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

Hamzah offered to help solve the problem confidentially, since he was close to both parties in his capacity as Asia Football president and as a former president of the Olympic Council of Asia. Samaranch acknowledged the letter, thanked him for the information, and said he would not hesitate to let him know if he could be of assistance in resolving the question.

The proof of the pudding regarding the IOC efforts to deal with the Korean situation would come by January 17, 1988, the date when acceptances to the IOC's invitation



**Agreeing to disagree:** President of NOC of Korea Kim Chong Ha (left), with his North Korean colleague Kim Yu Sun (right). At the second joint meeting on 8 and 9 January 1986 in Lausanne, it was agreed to hold archery, table tennis and one part of the football tournament in North Korea. After the negotiations had gone on for two years, they ended unsuccessfully.

Photo: IOC/Albert G. Riethausen



# SEOUL FLAME

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## 161 Nations, the Largest-ever, Accept Invitations to Seoul Olympics



The Newsletter of the SLOOC proudly announced that, by the closing date of 17 January 1988, 161 of the 167 NOCs had accepted the invitation. Only six countries – besides North Korea, Albania, Cuba, Ethiopia, Nicaragua and the Seychelles – left the invitation unanswered. When Brunei and Madagascar later withdrew so 159 countries actually took part in the 1988 Games.

Photo: Volker Kluge Archive

to participate in the Seoul Games were due. Reminders were sent on November 18 to ninety-one NOCs that had not yet replied. Further reminders were sent on December 18 to the forty-nine NOCs that had not replied by that date. On January 5, a reminder was sent to the twenty-one NOCs that had not yet accepted, and on January 10, the IOC sent a reminder that the last date for acceptances was January 17 to the ten NOCs that had still not replied.

It was a matter of some relief to Samaranch that East Germany accepted to participate in the Games and officially notified the IOC by letter dated December 21, 1987, of its decision. Manfred Ewald forwarded the acceptance and in his covering letter said the announcement was made on the assumption that the Games would be organized on the basis of the Olympic Charter and would contribute toward strengthening the unity of the Olympic Movement, understanding between nations, and the maintaining of world peace. His NOC would, furthermore, support the efforts of the IOC aimed at making it possible to hold the Olympic events in both parts of Korea.

Typical of the communications that Samaranch was receiving at the critical period in early January, prior to the official deadline for notification of participation, was a telex received from President Kenneth David Kaunda of the Republic of Zambia dated January 6, urging him to allocate a reasonable number of sports to the North. Copies of this message were sent to presidents Chun Doo Hwan and Kim Il Sung. (Samaranch later got a letter of the same date delivered through the Zambian embassy

in Bonn, in which the copies of the letter were shown as having been sent to Kim Il Sung and Roh Tae Woo as president-elect of South Korea.) Kaunda did not hesitate to note that one of the many capacities in which he sent the message was as chairman of the Frontline States and the Organization of African Unity.

Samaranch replied on January 11, thanking Kaunda for his interest in the matter and congratulating Zambia for having accepted the invitation to take part in the Games. He assured him that the IOC would do everything in its power to enable every country to take part. He reviewed the two years of negotiations, the proposal made by the IOC in July 1987, and the fact that the IOC was still waiting for a reply from the DPRK. He noted that 144 NOCs had confirmed their participation, already a record, and that the IOC expected still more before January 17.<sup>22</sup>

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Everyone was watching the count of acceptances as the deadline approached. Lord Killanin wrote to Samaranch on January 5, saying how delighted he was that Marat Gramov, president of the USSR NOC and Soviet minister of sport, had followed East Germany and Hungary by indicating acceptance. He would be keeping his fingers crossed until all the acceptances were in. Samaranch, he said, had had a "very trying and difficult time," and he hoped that the pessimism Samaranch had expressed would not be justified.<sup>23</sup> He felt that Samaranch had done "more than enough in regard to North Korea as the Games were allotted to Seoul." He would see him the next month at the Olympic Winter Games in Calgary.

That there would be certain refusals to attend was known to almost all the close observers of the situation. Cuba had made it clear it would not participate unless the north-south situation was resolved. The DPRK was clearly not going to attend unless the negotiations were successful from its perspective.<sup>24</sup> It was also likely, because of the relationship between Cuba and Nicaragua, that the Cuban influence would result in nonacceptance by Nicaragua. Sure enough, on January 16, Moises Hassan, president of the Nicaraguan NOC, telexed Samaranch to advise him that his NOC would not participate. He cited as reasons for the decision the lack of concentration on sport due to the hostilities in his country, nonqualification of their best athletes through the Pan American Games, and the bad economic situation in the country.<sup>25</sup>

Samaranch replied to the telex the next day, stating that even a symbolic presence of Nicaragua would be very positive. He found it strange that Nicaragua would have participated in the Games in Los Angeles, the Central American and Caribbean Games, and the Pan American Games the year before, while the country was in the same circumstances as the present. He reminded the NOC that through the IOC program of Olympic Solidarity

there were funds available for at least eight persons as well as a grant for equipment and supplies. He asked them to reconsider their decision once again and reminded them that the NOC would not share in any of the Olympic Solidarity funds for the period of 1988–1992 if it did not participate in the Games. He was certainly not prepared to let stand without comment such a feeble rationalization of a political decision not to participate. The request had no effect.<sup>26</sup>

The DPRK decision not to participate was officially communicated to Samaranch in a letter dated January 11, 1988, signed by Kim Yu Sun. Samaranch, to keep the pressure on the DPRK, had sent a special telex to Kim on January 6, reminding him that Ambassador Chin had asked, during his meeting with Samaranch on October 19, 1987, for a delay until mid-December to answer the IOC proposal of July 16. Samaranch had agreed to wait but now wanted a reply. The letter from Kim Yu Sun was received in Lausanne on January 26.<sup>27</sup> He stated that they could not participate in the Games to be “singly” hosted by the South Korean side and that this being the case there was no possibility for them to accept the invitation. He was sorry that this was the outcome, but it was the only measure they could take “because of the failure of agreement on the cohosting question we ardently desired for.” However, he went on to say: “But we do not think that it is our last effort to effect the Olympic cohosting and inform you that we still have hope for its possibility.”

Kim Yu Sun referred to the New Year address of the respected leader Kim Il Sung and his call for a north-south joint conference to discuss “some immediate problems for national reunification and détente including the problem of north-south cohosting of the XXIV<sup>th</sup> Olympiad.” He thought that if this conference were to be held and would take measures for the solution of the cohosting problem, a subsequent joint meeting in Lausanne might lead to a final agreement. Interestingly enough, North Kim appeared to acknowledge that the DPRK had not answered the IOC’s July 1987 offer: “We hope that you will also await our answer to the IOC’s proposal requested in your telex dated July 15 [*sic*], until the north-south negotiation will be held.”<sup>28</sup>

On January 28, Samaranch replied, saying how disappointed he was with the decision. The IOC was, however, willing to further await their reply to the historic and important proposal made on July 15, 1987. He emphasized and drew North Kim’s attention to the fact that time was passing very quickly and that each day gone rendered the possibility of any agreement more and more remote. He reiterated the statement made at the IOC press conference on January 18 that, even though the deadline for inscriptions had passed, the IOC was still ready to reach an agreement that would enable his NOC to participate in the Games.

The Cuban decision was communicated by Castro himself in a letter dated January 13, 1988. It was a full three pages, rehashing the earlier efforts on his part to bring about some sense of compromise, acknowledging Samaranch’s efforts in the same direction, commenting on the political situation in South Korea (which he decried), and concluding with the decision not to attend.<sup>29</sup>

*The National Olympic Committee and government of Cuba have decided not to enter, that is to say simply not to commit ourselves to the Games. Although we deeply regret this unavoidable decision, our people and our athletes, whose conduct is always governed by profound ethical considerations and a deep sense of honour, will not be disheartened and will continue to train for the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992, assuming that no punitive action is taken against us for having behaved in such a dignified manner. We wish nevertheless to inform you, dear friend Samaranch, that taking into account your great interest in our participation, should the miracle of ensuring a safe and non-violent celebration of the Games in Seoul happen, and should you with your characteristic tenacity manage to achieve a co-hosting of the Games, we should be prepared to reconsider our decision, provided that, in those circumstances, the IOC would esteem the humble participation of Cuba to be worthwhile.*

*I should like you to know that for Cuba, the moral principles of the people are of more importance than the excitement of the Olympic Games and the gold medals to be won.*

Castro’s letter did not arrive in Lausanne until January 21, and Samaranch waited until February 16 to answer, which he did from Calgary, Canada, where he was attending the Olympic Winter Games. The reply was only one page. He was sorry that the decision was made, since once again Cuban athletes would not be present at the greatest sporting event in the world. He reminded Castro that after their last conversation, he had improved the offer to the DPRK as Castro had requested, but that this had not brought about a definitive solution to the problem. He said he intended to go to Pyongyang himself to see if he could make a last effort to achieve a solution. He said that even though the deadline had passed, the IOC was continuing to leave the door open, although the time was passing very quickly and a solution would have to be found as soon as possible. He urged Castro to reconsider his own position.

By the time of the deadline for acceptance of the invitations to participate in Seoul, 161 of the 167 NOCs recognized by the IOC had accepted. It was, by any measure, a stunning accomplishment for the Olympic Movement and for the Republic of Korea, in its struggle

Sydney 2000: in an historic moment, North and South march together into the Opening Ceremony, united under one flag.

Photo: IOC/OSPC



for the international recognition that it had sought in hosting the Games.

Acceptances were one thing, however, and actual participation in the Games another. How “soft” were some of the acceptances, and how many had been sent in simply to preserve flexibility rather than as definitive promises of attendance? For that matter, how was the new Roh government going to fare in the elections for the National Assembly later that year? Would public opinion in Korea rally behind the Games as they grew nearer? Would the volatile DPRK be kept under control, either on its own initiative or under “counsel” from its Chinese and Soviet allies?

It was certain, regardless of one’s view of the eventual outcome, that the work was far from over. The initial “sale” of the Seoul Olympics had been made from an attractive catalog, but the “goods” had neither been paid for nor delivered. Both the IOC and the Republic of Korea would have an anxious eight months ahead of them. ■

- 1 This was followed by a press conference on August 11, indicating the DPRK’s dissatisfaction with the IOC proposal and a demand for a fifth joint meeting.
- 2 On July 27, the DPRK ambassador to Beijing, Sin In Ha, gave a press conference at the DPRK embassy and stated that the USSR, China, and other Communist countries supported the DPRK’s desire to co-host the Games but stated that they had not promised to boycott the Games if they were held only in Seoul. Coincidentally, on the same day, an Olympic delegation from the USSR NOC was in Seoul to begin meetings with SLOOC officials and review preparations for the Games. On August 4, the DPRK indicated its dissatisfaction with the IOC proposal and demanded a fifth joint meeting prior to September 17. Assistant Foreign Minister Park Soo Gil responded for the South on

August 6, saying that the South might be willing to accept proposals to transfer additional events to the North if it were to accept the IOC proposals made at the fourth joint meeting. The DPRK ambassador in Beijing held another press conference on August 10, for Communist journalists, to explain the reduced demands by the DPRK.

- 3 The usual number of background activities had preceded this exchange. On July 23, the DPRK had proposed that the two Koreas and the United States meet in Geneva to discuss mutual arms reductions. This did not receive much support from South Korea; on August 3, Park Soo Gil proposed that the two foreign ministers meet but rejected the DPRK proposal as a “typical propaganda piece.” The formal statement was more neutral and simply indicated the points that South Korea wanted to discuss, without discussing the DPRK agenda. New York was proposed as the place for the meeting, where both would be present for the opening of the UN session; the Olympics were not mentioned.
- 4 It was an interesting period in the entire exercise. There were already some signs that the international sports organizations were not wholly pleased with the prospect of events in North Korea. As early as June 22, a spokesperson for FILA (the international wrestling federation), Toshimisu Azuma, had stated that there would be no wrestling competitions in the 1988 Olympics if they were to be held in North Korea. By August 22, the president of FIAC (the international cycling federation), Valery Syssoev (a Soviet), telexed Samaranch to advise that because they had learned the DPRK had renounced holding any Olympic cycling events, the FIAC Congress scheduled for two days later planned to advise all national federations that all competitions would take place in the South. This response from the IFs was as broad as it was long; on the one hand, it showed support of the IOC in its efforts to help the Seoul Games and the consensus in favor of the Games. On the other, it was potentially disquieting for Samaranch, since he did not want the individual sport federations taking unilateral actions that might interfere with the process he was managing so delicately, and that might force North Korea into a corner too early and provoke precipitous action on its part.
- 5 A press conference was held by the DPRK NOC on August 31, to advise that it had requested the IOC to postpone sending the invitations.
- 6 This effort was part of a flurry of activity generated by the DPRK as it became evident that the IOC would be sending the invitations to the Games as scheduled. On September 9, an article in *Rodong Shinmun* warned of increasing tensions if the Games were to be held only in South Korea. On September 10, the North Koreans suggested that the real deadline for successful negotiations might be January 17, 1988 (the date replies were due from the NOCs), rather than the date the invitations were to be sent. On September 11, North Kim said he would be sending a letter to the KOC, requesting bilateral meetings between the Korean NOCs prior to the fifth joint meeting. On September 12, South Kim announced he would pick up the letter at Panmunjom on September 15. South Korea was in no hurry to start such negotiations, was suspicious of them, and, in any event, was going to do nothing to interfere with the sending of the invitations to the Games on September 17.
- 7 Only five days prior to sending out the invitations, Samaranch was on an official visit to Syria to attend the Tenth Mediterranean Games. While there, he announced that the IOC would keep negotiating with both Koreas and would not “close the door.” This was a propitious place from which to counter a radio report that had emanated from Radio Pyongyang, monitored in Tokyo on August 5, in which it was reported that Syrian vice president Abdel Halim Khaddam had declared to DPRK minister of foreign affairs Kim Yong Nam during the latter’s visit to Syria in July that Syria might boycott the Games.
- 8 This was the first aspect noted, in response, no doubt, to the alleged concerns that had led to the Soviet boycott of the Los Angeles Games, the previous withdrawal of the 1966 Asian Games from Korea, and the general concerns related to the situation in South Korea, both domestic and in its relationship with North Korea.
- 9 This was the thirty-sixth meeting of Socialist Ministers of Sport, held in Soukhoumi, USSR, on September 21–23. At this meeting, the DPRK had denounced the IOC’s sending of the invitations to the 1988 Olympic Games. Samaranch had attended this meeting, in accordance with his normal practice. The meeting, as might be expected, endorsed the idea that the Games should be shared between North Korea and South Korea and that a positive solution to the matter should be pursued. The press communiqué issued upon the conclusion indicated that this was the seventh time Samaranch had

- attended such meetings and that he had explained in person the progress to date in the meetings of the two Korean NOCs under the auspices of the IOC. Notwithstanding the terms of the communiqué, the USSR was very pleased with the actions of the IOC. Samaranch had read the entire IOC proposal in response to the DPRK criticism.
- 10 The sending of the DPRK letter of September 12 had been preceded by an announcement by North Kim on September 11 that he would be delivering a letter to the KOC at Panmunjom the next day. South Kim had advised Samaranch on September 22 that he would be sending a letter to North Kim on September 24. The letter urged the DPRK NOC to accept the IOC's latest proposal. The KOC had advised the IOC that it accepted the revised proposal arising out of the fourth joint meeting on August 17. The KOC view of the proposal was that negotiating in the absence of the IOC was intended by the DPRK to weaken the South's position. This was a view shared by Chun Doo Hwan, who wrote separately to Samaranch on the subject.
  - 11 North Kim announced on October 2 that he was sending a letter to the KOC, which could be picked up on October 3. South Kim indicated that he would receive this letter on October 12. North Kim acknowledged the new date on October 6 and agreed to change the date for receipt of his letter. North Kim's letter urged the KOC to agree to a second meeting between the two NOCs, as proposed by the IOC. On October 15, South Kim said he would send a letter to the DPRK NOC to be received at Panmunjom on October 16. This letter would urge the DPRK NOC, once again, to accept the IOC's revised proposal. In a memorandum sent to Samaranch on the same date, the KOC expressed its thanks that he had insisted on the acceptance by North Korea of the IOC proposal before agreeing to have a fifth joint meeting. It also expressed the view that the recent push by the DPRK NOC for bilateral talks had the ulterior motive of dividing the IOC and the KOC, since there was no "important information" as alleged by the DPRK to be brought to the IOC. The KOC wanted no more events to be allocated to the North. The DPRK NOC said the letter would be received on October 20 at Panmunjom. On October 23, the DPRK NOC issued a statement proposing postponement of negotiations for the cohosting of the Games. Little occurred after this, other than a press conference by the KOC on November 26, in which it urged the DPRK NOC to accept the IOC's proposal.
  - 12 I spoke with Samaranch on November 30, after his return from Japan and China, and he said he had had assurances from the top leaders in China that China would participate in Seoul. On the matter of the KAL bombing, in a conversation on December 3, I suggested that this tragedy, if linked to the DPRK, might, in a macabre way, actually help the chances of successful Games in Seoul.
  - 13 Samaranch had sent his by now customary telegrams on behalf of the Olympic Movement to both Reagan and Gorbachev on the eve of the summit meeting.
  - 14 Samaranch and I had watched the signing ceremony on television in his hotel room in Lausanne on December 8. During the evening, Samaranch said that he had suggested sanctions against nonparticipating countries in the course of his recent Far Eastern trip but had later withdrawn the idea. We had a long discussion on the issue, and he said he wanted to discuss the possibility at the Executive Board. I told him I was opposed to the idea of sanctions in the circumstances, and he asked if I would mind not speaking to that effect too early in the Executive Board discussion.
  - 15 Roh won with approximately 37 percent of the popular vote, which was, in the circumstances of so much political division in the country at the time, a healthy, if not overwhelming, plurality. Samaranch was so nervous about the outcome that he had Kim Un Yong call him every half hour with the results up to that point. My recollection is that Samaranch called me in turn about three or four times to pass on the latest results.
  - 16 A Soviet delegation was present in Seoul on December 27–30 to agree on the accommodations to be allocated to the Soviet team, as well as on certain consular functions to be performed in Seoul. At a dinner on December 28, the Soviets predicted that 160 countries would participate in the Games.
  - 17 Two days previously, Soviet NOC president Marat Gramov had stated in Frankfurt that the USSR did not intend to boycott the Games; the problem of the DPRK remained to be solved, but the IOC had left the door open for further talks.
  - 18 Samaranch had also spoken on January 6 with the vice president of the Cuban Council of Ministers, José R. Fernandez Alvarez, to review the IOC's efforts to ensure the participation of the DPRK. Fernandez had agreed to discuss the matter with Castro, but in view of the "privileged" relationship with the DPRK, it appeared difficult to accept anything short of sharing the Games between the two countries. On January 8, Samaranch sent Fernandez a copy of his telex to Kim Yu Sun of January 6, together with the number of acceptances to date, and reminded Fernandez that the latest offer to North Korea had been based on the recommendation made by Fidel Castro.
  - 19 It was also helpful on the domestic Korean front that Kim Young Sam, the runner-up in the December 1987 elections, stated on January 6 that his party would do its best to make the Olympic Games the "greatest festival in the world." This was a welcome change from some of his earlier statements as a political candidate; he was, perhaps, leaving open his political options as a future (successful) presidential candidate.
  - 20 During breakfast in Samaranch's room on January 26, he professed to be very worried about the DPRK, even to the point of fearing that there would be "war" if there were no eventual agreement on the Olympic question. He had sent Roh Tae Woo a letter urging that the annual Team Spirit exercises be canceled, or at least postponed until after the Games. The previous week he had met with USSR foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze and explained the IOC proposal. Samaranch also told him that the level of the DPRK delegation was very low, having no power to negotiate, and that the IOC was willing to try to find a solution. Shevardnadze appeared to have been somewhat surprised at the level of negotiations and said he would look into it.
  - 21 Hamzah's recollection on this latter point does not appear to be correct, since Roh did not attend the IOC Session in Baden-Baden. He had stayed in Seoul to coordinate the efforts relating to the bid from the capital as minister in the government.
  - 22 Both the USSR and China announced their participation in the Games on January 11. The USSR statement still supported the sharing of the Games but said the number of sports to be allocated to the North was for the IOC to decide. The DPRK situation had, the statement said, not been discussed by the Soviet NOC. South Korea followed these announcements with supportive announcements of its own. It said that it would permit the USSR and other socialist countries with which it had no diplomatic relations to transport athletes and officials on their own planes or ships. It confirmed the previous secret arrangement that the USSR would be permitted to bring a ship to Incheon and to use it as its "main supply base" for its Olympic athletes. The USSR published the decision of the DPRK not to participate in the Games without comment. Politically, the Korean opposition parties and the U.S. State Department all welcomed the Soviet decision to participate.
  - 23 Samaranch was resolutely pessimistic regarding the Seoul Games. It was as if he did not want to allow himself to believe that the matters were under control in case that might cause him to relax and be caught unaware if something unexpected were to develop. He was similarly pessimistic about Sarajevo, Los Angeles, Calgary, Albertville, Barcelona, and Lillehammer. He is well along the way to being pessimistic about Atlanta and Nagano. By the time of publication, he will already be mildly pessimistic about whichever host city has been chosen for the Games in the year 2000.
  - 24 The DPRK NOC issued a statement of its intention to boycott the Games on January 12.
  - 25 The actual letter from Hassan did not reach the IOC until March 22. In his reply to the letter, Samaranch merely repeated the contents of his telexed reply described in the next paragraph.
  - 26 A broadcast by Radio Pyongyang, monitored in Tokyo on March 24, 1987, stated that following a visit by Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega to Pyongyang, Ortega had declared to the DPRK vice president and minister of foreign affairs that Nicaragua would not take part in the Games unless they were cohosted by North Korea and South Korea.
  - 27 The news, as such, of its decision not to participate was derived from the press announcement by the DPRK on January 12.
  - 28 On January 19, after all the acceptances were received, SLOOC president Park Seh Jik announced that the SLOOC would continue to keep the door open for the DPRK to participate in the Games.
  - 29 Samaranch told me in a conversation on January 7 that he had spoken with Manuel Gonzales Guerra, the IOC member in Cuba, and Conrado Martinez, the sports minister, who had appeared to want to participate in the Games. The final decision, however, would be made by Castro himself.