

IN MEMORY OF JUAN ANTONIO SAMARANCH



Courtesy of the IOC

Juan Antonio Samaranch

* 17 July 1920 † 21 April 2010

Juan Antonio Samaranch, the Marquis de Samaranch, the seventh President of the IOC from 1980-2001, died in his native Barcelona on 21 April 2010. Juan Antonio Samaranch Torreló was born in Barcelona on 17 July 1920, the son of Francisco Samaranch Castro, a textile manufacturer, and Juana Torreló Malhevy. He received his education at business schools and the German College before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

Samaranch briefly boxed under the name Kid Samaranch, and then competed in roller hockey. In 1950 he began his sports administrative career with the Executive Council of the International Federation of Roller Hockey. In 1954 he became Vice-President and in 1956 was appointed to the Spanish Olympic Committee. He was made a member of the IOC in 1966 and became President of the Spanish Olympic Committee in 1967. In 1974 he became an IOC Vice-President, a prelude to his tenure as Presidency, which began in Moscow in 1980.

Samaranch served as IOC President for 21 years, the second longest term after that of Pierre, Baron de Coubertin. He will also almost certainly be remembered as the most influential IOC President after Coubertin. When he took over the reins of the IOC, the organization was close to bankrupt. Samaranch made the group into a financially successful organization, by bringing in television rights fees to the IOC (previously they had been almost exclusively negotiated by the COJOs), and especially by helping institute the TOP Program, originally standing for The Olympic Programme, but now known as The Olympic

Partners. The TOP Program, carried out in concert with ISOH Member Dick Pound, asked a small number of large corporations to become worldwide corporate partners of the IOC, but charged them large fees for this right. When Samaranch took over as President, it was becoming difficult to find cities to bid for the Olympics, witnessed especially by Los Angeles in 1984, which was the only bidder for those Olympics (it was LA's third successive bid and everyone knew it was certain to win). The finances were too tenuous, but Samaranch's fiscal expertise made the Olympic Games and Olympic Movement a commercially viable enterprise and by the end of his term, as many as 11 cities would bid for an Olympic Games, and it became necessary to limit the number of cities bidding. Samaranch will also be known for bringing the Olympic Games into the 20th Century, by eliminating many of the restrictions of amateurism and opening up the Olympics to professionals. His other great contribution as President lies in opening the IOC to women and making steps towards gender equality at the Olympics by increasing the number of sports and events for women.

Unfortunately, he will also be remembered for the Olympic Bribery Scandal that occurred on his watch during the fall and winter of 1998-99. It was an inopportune episode in Olympic History and Samaranch must bear some responsibility for it, as it occurred while he was President. By that time he was nearing the end of his reign as IOC President, and he could have stepped aside in 1997, and probably wished he had. But he weathered the storm,

and instituted significant IOC reforms in response to several studies and reports that were done after the Scandal was revealed, one commissioned by him for the IOC and written by Dick Pound.

The International Society of Olympic Historians (ISOH) began in December 1991 and our first few years were also difficult financially. We had few members and no support from any outside sources. Our first President, Ian Buchanan, and I often opened our wallets to keep the journal being published. In July 1994, Ian and I flew to Lausanne, where we were joined by Wolf Lyberg. Wolf was a long-time friend of President Samaranch, and he helped shepherd us through a meeting with the President. At that meeting, Juan Antonio Samaranch, a student of Olympic History, made ISOH financially viable for the near future when he promised us IOC support.

In the spring of 2001, only a few months before the end of Samaranch's Presidency, the ISOH Executive Committee, led by myself as President at the time, and accompanied by Ian, Tony Bijkerk, Wolf Lyberg, David Wallechinsky, and Karl Lennartz, again met in Lausanne with President Samaranch. While there we had our Executive Committee meeting, but Samaranch joined us for over an hour of the meeting, and then we all had a nice lunch together. At this meeting he increased the IOC stipend to ISOH, and guaranteed us financial support for the next few years. Samaranch further showed his interest and support of Olympic history when he enlisted David Wallechinsky and me as consultants to help the IOC when they were originally setting up their website in the late 1990s.

Juan Antonio Samaranch will leave a mixed legacy as President of the International Olympic Committee. In the

United States he was reviled for his role in the Olympic Bribery Scandal, but that is a short-sighted view and one that misses all the good that he did for international sport. I believe that with the passage of time, he will be remembered more for what good he did, and not for that problem, which went far deeper than any personal involvement he may have had. For the International Society of Olympic Historians (ISOH), he will be remembered for his interest in Olympic History, his support of it, and especially for his support of our organization when it was sorely needed. We will miss him, as will all members of the Olympic Family.

Bill Mallon

My first contact with Juan Antonio Samaranch dates back to March 1969, when he, as President of the Comité Olímpico Español, answered a written request of mine and personally send me a copy of the book *Sellos Olímpicos 1896-1966*. Then it took seven years, before our contacts were resumed, when he answered another of my written requests by forwarding the request for information about the book *Los Juegos Olímpicos Antiguos* to its author Conrado Durántez Corral who, today, is also a respected member of our Society. Conrado Durántez himself then send me a copy of his book.

It was to be the start of a long correspondence between the then still IOC-member Samaranch and me which lasted for several decades until his retirement as President of the International Olympic Committee. My first personal meeting with Samaranch dates back



Juan Antonio Samaranch during a meeting with the ISOH Executive Committee in Lausanne. *ISOH Archive*

to January 1987, when he came to Wassenaar, the Netherlands, to personally present the Olympic Order in silver posthumously to the widow of the late IOC member Cornelis Lambert “Kees” Kerdel, who had passed away on November 8, 1986 in The Hague.

However, our correspondence continued for many years, and from 1987 onwards the subject mainly concerned the plans in the Netherlands to establish a Sports and Olympic Museum in our country. This idea had his great interest and he supported it wholeheartedly. The Dutch Sport and Olympic Museum “Olympion” in Lelystad was officially opened by Crown-Prince Willem Alexander in the summer of 1995; but unfortunately, owing to a lack of enough paying visitors, it had to be closed down on May 1, 2004.

Later, when I had taken over as Secretary-General of the ISOH from Bill Mallon during the 1996 Olympics, we were invited to organize a meeting of the ISOH Executive Committee in Lausanne in August, 1998. Our meeting was attended by Fékrou Kidane, who had been appointed by Samaranch to represent the IOC in the ISOH Executive Committee. At the end of one of our morning sessions, Samaranch came over and had lunch with us. He always showed very much interest in our historical work.

In 2001, the year that he gave over the IOC Presidency to Jacques Rogge, he invited the ISOH Executive Committee again to organize a meeting at the IOC Headquarters. Then, he even attended part of our meeting. He promised the ISOH a substantial raise of the yearly subvention, because he had noted that our publication: the *Journal of Olympic History* had steadily been improving the quality of its contents, but that colored photographs could not yet be used at that time. He also informed the ISOH-Executive Committee that it should appoint a member for the IOC Commission for Culture and Olympic Education! During the same meeting of the Executive Committee Karl Lennartz was appointed by us into this IOC Commission.

Of course, I also met Juan Antonio Samaranch in Athens in 2004, in Turin in 2006, and in Beijing in 2008; but for the last time in 2009, when Karl Lennartz and I spoke with him during the XIIIth IOC Congress in Copenhagen about one of our planned publications. He was then already looking very frail.

His death is a great loss for the Olympic Movement, as he has been instrumental in making the IOC into a financially sound, but also into the leading sports organization in the world today.

Antony Th. Bijkerk

The death of an IOC-President may for many people be a rather uninteresting matter in the world of today. I wonder how many are aware of the fact that an IOC-President—there have been only ten of them

so far—represents a “movement” that perhaps thrills a billion of men and women in the whole world, and not only every fourth year.

The Olympic Movement had its share of scandals and dubious matters; but it always managed to steer away from those with flying colors. It may have lost a little of its glory, but for the moment it is stronger as ever before.

Juan Antonio Samaranch has made his presidency into a “fantastic” job; ever since he was elected into the IOC in 1966 as the 273rd member of the illustrious company of men... and later, thanks to him, also of women.

It was by pure coincidence that I came to know him. During the Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952, I lived in the home of the famous Lauri Pikhala—about 300 to 400 meters from the Olympic Stadium. One of the first days of the Olympics, I noted a gentleman—very confused—talking with somebody. I saw that an interpreter was needed and asked if I could help. It turned out that he wanted to go to the boxing arena and I was also on my way to that arena. To our surprise, we were heading for the same final in the boxing arena. He told me that he was a sportswriter for the newspaper *El Pueblo*, a paper from Barcelona. He also told me that he had been a boxer once, but made only seven matches; but won only one of them, which gave him the wisdom to give up his plans for a boxing career.

We saw each other every day and Samaranch—as his name was—turned out to be a supporter of Ingemar Johansson. Johansson lost in the final of the heavyweight and was then disqualified for “too defensive boxing”. After an advice from the Jury, the Organizing Committee refused to hand him the silver medal. After a long report by a Finnish boxing expert, Samaranch became very interested in the case; but it was not until 1981, that Johansson, and two more disqualified boxers, still received their medals in Göteborg, where the Swedish Olympic Committee had organized a big gala of trotting and which Samaranch not only attended, but also presented the medals himself.

Our friendship became a fact and grew because we met almost every year at various Olympic meetings and at other events, which he visited as IOC member and member of the Spanish Olympic Committee.

It soon became apparent to me that J.A.S. was not the man everybody thought—big Olympic man with an enormous ego, only wishing the best and always asking for the best hotels, the most luxurious cars and the best food—no, he was simple. He always was very precise—and that is important—always was exact on time for a meeting.

He was well trained and made every day thirty minutes of gymnastics to keep fit. I remember noting this especially when we shared a train-coupé in a long trip from Moscow to Beijing. He was strong during a long period of difficulties, when the IOC became so weak that it almost crashed. Thanks to his intervention, but also with the help of some very able IOC-members, he overcame those difficulties. He had to fight some of the



Juan Antonio Samaranch is interviewed by Wolf Lyberg for the *Olympiaboken* in 1996. Courtesy of the IOC

International Federations, and even some of the National Olympic Committees, which threatened to break away from the IOC. Then he proposed changes in the IOC Charter to avoid the birth of new rivaling organizations.

He got the splendid idea to start the so-called TOP program which consisted of the signing on of 10 to 15 of the biggest companies in the world as sponsors of the IOC. They had to sign on for three or four years. The IOC rose as a Phoenix and very soon was financially independent and richer than ever before; even though the IOC paid big sums to the International Federations and the National Olympic Committees. In a way you can say that he finished the work that Lord Killanin started and that was to “kill” the idea that professionals could not participate in the Olympic Games.

He also commercialized the Olympic emblem and this was one of his toughest fights, as his opponent was the strong and dominant Director of the IOC Mrs. Monique Berlioux. She fought bitterly to keep it as it was, but lost. He admits that he probably would not have managed to change the IOC without the help of some very able IOC members, and they also helped him to overcome the scandalous swindles of several other IOC members in relation to the Salt Lake City bid for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. As a result the IOC became stronger and better managed.

Samaranch also wanted to change the length of an IOC membership. There had never been a limit so far, but Samaranch wanted to change that and managed to get it fixed, first at 78 years, and later, after another fight, to 80 years.

He asked me to write a book about the *One Hundred*

Years of the International Olympic Committee and later, in 2001, also a book about his Presidency. His confidence in me was shown best, when he allowed me to read all the minutes of the IOC-Sessions and Executive Board and write books about them; all the “word to word” discussions and decisions. When the Executive Board took that decision, I was warned that some of the members were certainly going to read it and if I revealed something of the contents, this could have repercussions. It fortunately never happened.

He came over to Sweden many times. He liked to run the tracks of Gunder Hägg in Vålådalen. He liked to climb the mountains in Sweden and we became great fishermen. I distinctly remember his joy, when we flew three or four members to a small lake by helicopter. It was minus 25 degrees and very cold; but he was the only one to catch a trout and was overjoyed by this. Years later, in summertime, we walked eight kilometers in the mountains where we found another small lake. But there the trout were so crazy that we took 42 in total, some weighting up to 1 kilogram; which we had to carry home. That evening all the guests in Vålådalen had really fresh trout for dinner!

My memories of him are incredible and I can go on telling about our mutual adventures in the Swedish woods and on the Swedish waters; not to forget some 35 meetings of the IOC and of IOC-NOC meetings over a long period of time.

He was good friend and I will remember him with affection!

Wolf Lyberg



Juan Antonio Samaranch receives a t-shirt during a meeting with the ISOH Executive Committee in 2001. ISOH Archive

The 15th World Olympic Collector's Fair was organized this year in the German Sports & Olympic Museum in Cologne and the Honorary President of the IOC, Juan Antonio Samaranch, would, as usual, perform the official opening of the fair. I had hoped to meet him there again. However, because of the ash clouds from the volcano on Iceland, and the closure of the European airspace, he could not fly over.

Two days after the fair, I read on teletext that he was very ill. Only one day later he passed away. In my opinion his death is a great loss for the Olympic Movement, but also for me personally.

I met Samaranch for the first time in 1986, when he came to Cologne to present Liselott Diem, for whom he had great admiration, with the Olympic Order. However, at the time there was no possibility to speak with him; he was "too far away".

In the early 1990s, I was invited to participate in a "working group" under the leadership of IOC-member Raymond Gafner and Professor Norbert Müller. This "working group" was put together in order to write the history of *100 years of Olympic Movement* in three volumes. Every two months, the working group met for a weekend and discussed the plan. And every Saturday afternoon, the IOC President joined us in the discussions for one or two hours. In those days he was like a colleague to us.

Each Sunday afternoon, we ended our meeting with a lunch, in which Samaranch also participated. One time he asked me about Liselott Diem and I told him that she was already very ill and would possibly pass away soon. He immediately came up with several questions: "*Does she have the best doctors? Are there better specialists in the United States? Are there any financial problems? If so, the IOC is willing to take care of the costs.*"

Fortunately, I could inform him that she was in good hands.

In 1994, during the Olympic Winter Games in Lillehammer, I was standing in the lobby of the IOC-hotel, when he just arrived coming back from a visit to Sarajevo. When he saw me, he came over and told me how important his visit to Sarajevo had been, ten years after the end of the civil war in Bosnia.

When he came to Cologne in 1997 for the 75th Anniversary of the German Sport University, I was asked to act as his host.

In 2005, the CESH, the organisation of the European sport historians, met in Seville, Spain. The University of Seville seized the opportunity to honour the Honorary IOC President. When he arrived, I went up to him and greeted him with: "*Good afternoon, Mr President!*" He laughed and answered: "*You are my President, President of ISOH!*" And then right away came the question: "*Are you still being supported, like in my time?*" I could reassure him that we were! That was Samaranch all over; worried about the well-being of organisations which he felt a bond with.

During the XIIIth Olympic Congress in Copenhagen in 2009, I admired him for the manner in which he supported the bid of the City of Madrid for the Games of the XXIst Olympiad. I am convinced that the good result of Madrid in this election will also be thanks to his plea. However, to me he already did not look well during this Congress, and I worried about his health.

Now he has passed away. The lasting memory of him will, in my opinion, always be that he was "the great, strong, but also fatherly President of the Olympic Movement".

Karl Lennartz

Juan Antonio Samaranch was a man with a long, intense, and fruitful life. The example of his life cycle could be an ideal for any human being.

He, the “Emperor of the Rings”, with the second longest Olympic presidential career, he straightened out the history of Olympism with daring and unthinkable innovations, he removed the black sides of it, he invented remedies and gave serenity and power to this great movement. The struggle against apartheid, the removal of boycotts, the introduction of women in Olympic and international sport leadership, the consolidation of the Olympic peace with a broad protection and international support, the environmental defense, the Olympic training through the Itinerant School (an Olympic solidarity programme of sports management and sports administration courses), the elimination of amateurism as a barrier of hypocrisy, the generous aid to the underdeveloped Olympic Committees for its operation and for the preparation of their athletes; the vocational boost to Olympic philately and numismatics as historical legacy of the Olympism and the majestic buildings of the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Museum. Because of all these achievements he was widely recognized as the most prominent IOC President in time and success after Pierre Coubertin.

With his personal political convictions, he served Spain and its society, respecting and working with the political moment in each different time, following his well-known maxim: “Olympism respects every political system, provided that each and every one of them, respect the principles of the Olympic Charter”.

Conrado Duránte

I met Antonio Samaranch in 1992 in Sudan. There he invited me to join the IOC Solidarity School for sports administration. I did my best for them through all the years 1993 to 1998 in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In 1986 and 1988 we staged a high level course in Britain on sports administration at the Universities of Brighton, London and Loughborough.

In 1994 I managed to get Juan Antonio Samaranch invited to Much Wenlock to plant an oak. A year later he invited the Head Teacher and a party of children to Lausanne.

I always found him a gentleman in the Olympic family. In 1980 he “saved” the Olympic idea... our slogan... to follow Magna Carta, not Jimmy Carter won the day.

At the IOC Congress in Baden-Baden in 1981, Philip Noel-Baker said he would propose the IOC for the Nobel Prize if they, together with UNESCO, could truly bring sport for all to the whole world—especially the developing world. Pity it didn’t happen.

Don Anthony

It was in 1968 in Mexico during the consultative meeting of the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) that I met for the first time Juan Antonio Samaranch.

He was then the President of the Spanish NOC and I was the Secretary General of the Ethiopian NOC. It was the period when the NOCs were trying to organise themselves under the leadership of Giulio Onesti (Italy), Raoul Mollet (Belgium) and Raymond Gafner (Switzerland).

In fact it was in 1975 in Lausanne where I was present to cover the IOC Session that I had my first discussion with Samaranch, in his capacity of Chairman of the IOC Press Commission.

I was trying to get assistance to organise seminars for African sports journalists on Olympism.

It was however in 1969 that Samaranch exposed in an article published in the periodical ‘Deporte 2000’ his vision for strengthening and renewing the IOC. Juan Antonio Samaranch thought and his analysis left no room for doubt that he would one day embark on this labour of renewal.

When Samaranch became President of the IOC in 1980, his policy of renewal completely changed the landscape of the Olympic Movement. Samaranch was a diplomat and he was therefore interested in the social, economical and political activities of the society. He entrusted me with the task of following and reporting to him on the apartheid issue before appointing me as his advisor for matters pertaining to developing countries. He also set the Olympic Solidarity fund to provide assistance to the NOCs.

Samaranch’s main concern was to prevent boycott of the Olympic Games because of political reasons. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the fate of Sarajevo, the South and North Korea relations, the recognition of the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong and Chinese Taipei, the establishment of cooperation with the United Nations system and with inter and non governmental organisations, the observance of the Olympic Truce during the Olympic Games are among the subjects dealt by Samaranch during his presidency.

Sport and environment, women and sport, humanitarian activities have also been a concern to the Olympic Movement. Juan Antonio Samaranch was very happy about the release from prison of Nelson Mandela, the end of apartheid and the return of South Africa to the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992.

Samaranch has visited 199 countries in the world and met with the heads of state and governments and ministers of youth and sport of the concerned countries and territories through their respective NOCs.

Juan Antonio Samaranch, Marqués de Samaranch, was a great leader. I had the privilege to serve as Director of his Executive Office. As IOC President Jacques Rogge said in Barcelona: Samaranch was the second renovator of the Olympic Movement after the founder of the IOC, Baron Pierre de Coubertin.

Fékrou Kidane