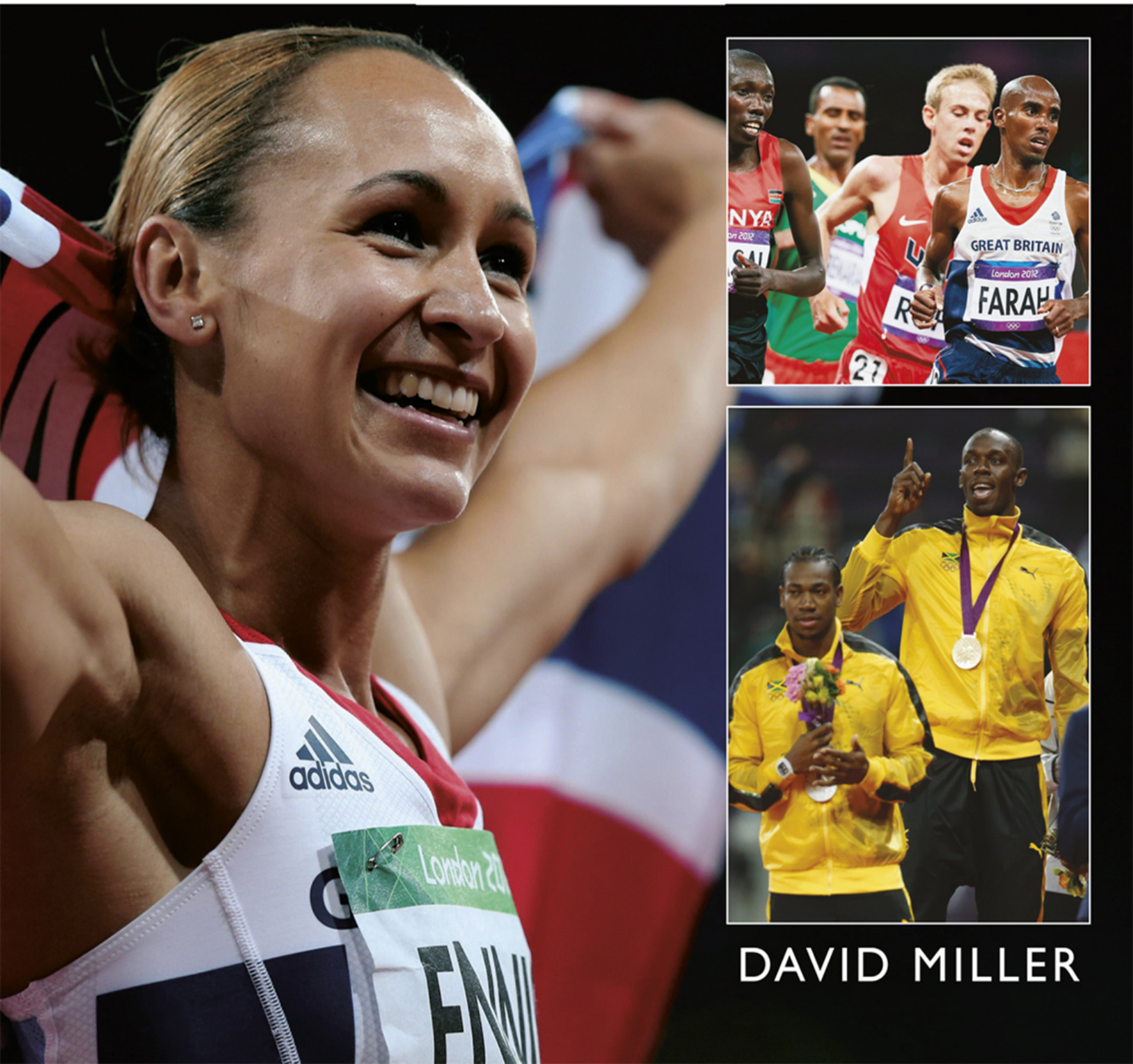
The Official History of the Olympic Games and the IOC

ATHENS TO LONDON
PART I: THE EARLY YEARS (1894–1936)



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PART I: THE EARLY YEARS 1894–1936

For Michèle and Max, Gavin and Ygraine

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PREFACE

The provenance of this publication was an invitation in 1997 from Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee from 1980 to 2001, to write an ‘everyman’s’ history of the IOC. So much of their responsibility remains outside regular news coverage that the President wished for the public to be better informed. During his Presidency, I accompanied Samaranch on a sequence of four tours to twenty-seven outpost nations of the Olympic Movement – twelve National Olympic Committees across central Africa in eleven days; to the Far East including Nepal and Guam; to Pacific islands including Micronesia, just devastated by a hurricane; and to Central Asian nations of the former Soviet Republic. They were often difficult, wearisome journeys, with no tangible reward or prestige for the President other than to bring personal contact from headquarters to distant, sometimes poor, under-funded peoples whose participating spirit nonetheless burns bright through the inspiration of the Olympic flame. At the same time, I felt that a history should include, related in parallel, the events which are the sole reason for the IOC’s own creation: the Games and the heroes great and small.

There have been three previous conventional editions of this history, coinciding with the Games of Athens in 2004 and Beijing in 2008, and the build-up to the London Games of 2012. The original intention, a Millennium launch at the time of Sydney 2000, had to be postponed on account of uncertainty following the IOC’s crisis of 1999, in the shadow of the Salt Lake City corruption scandal. Each subsequent four years, the text has been updated with four new

chapters, embracing the immediately previous Summer and Winter Games. For the first time, this fourth edition has been updated immediately following the 2012 Games, to reflect the all-round achievements of London's hosting. It is simultaneously published in e-book format in three volumes:

Part I – 1894–1936, covering the first ten Summer Games and four Winter Games, from early near-disasters and including entrenched antipathy towards female competitors under the influence of the first three Presidents, yet steadily growing towards global acclaim.

Part II – 1948–1980, post-Second World War, through the period of financial and Cold War anxieties, and the continuing profound ideological amateur–professional conflict.

Part III – 1984–2012, with a simultaneous expansion of billion-dollar television and sponsorship contracts alongside mounting defamation by drug cheats and the near catastrophic crisis of 1999.

I have been grateful for the continuing enthusiasm for this history of IOC President Jacques Rogge. While my opinions are not necessarily those of the Executive Board, I hope to have reflected accurately the symbiosis of administrators and athletes.

PART I

The Early Years (1894–1936)

Slowly to climb the steps today from the road at Lausanne beside Lake Geneva, through the tranquil landscaped gardens towards the Olympic Museum, past the bronze statues of legendary Olympians Paavo Nurmi and Emil Zátopek, is to gain some small sense of ancient mythological Olympia. Can the modern version of this unique brand of human activity, so dependent upon the dedication of athletes to the pursuit of excellence, survive for another century? Amid exploitation on so many fronts, not excluding some opportunist governments bidding to host the Games and athletes greedy for financial success, more than ever the Olympic Games need that abstract quality of integrity, at every level including the IOC, without which Pierre de Coubertin's concept will perish.

The Olympic Games are compelling in so many ways, and foremost is the inspiration that can be drawn from individual heroes and heroines, most notably those such as Jesse Owens, in 1936 or, more recent, Cathy Freeman in 2000, who represented deeper issues of racial integrity with which the whole world can identify. Such achievements, combined with the Games' ancient origins, both mythological and real, plus the fact that the Games take place only every four years and embrace more than twenty sports in parallel, mean that the Olympics are seen to personify the noblest

spirit of mankind, however blurred that ideology sometimes becomes.

The Games are distinguished and separated from other sport, as Richard Pound, prominent IOC member for 30 years from Canada, describes in his book *Inside the Olympics*, 'by their branding': defined by their motto *citius, altius, fortius* – swifter, higher, stronger – the Games being based on symbolism and rituals. These are key to that brand image which captures public acclaim and is a catalyst for competitors at the opening ceremony, which helps to create a global television audience. It is imperative to protect that concept, propagated by de Coubertin, of sport being allied to discipline and fair play, and built around the platform of organised track and field, cycling, rowing, swimming and tennis in the latter part of the nineteenth century among leading industrial nations. Without this branding the Games would be no more than an assembly of concurrent world championships.

However, the IOC, under Rogge and whoever may become his successor in 2013, should guard against the definitions 'uglier, riskier' being added to the formula. First, an obsession with medal winning has become so prevalent, especially among hosting nations – at Beijing and then at the Winter Games of 2010 in Vancouver, with Canada's obnoxious slogan 'Own the Podium' – that the age-old Olympic maxim, 'the important thing is not winning but taking part', is in danger of being submerged by a strident attitude that is the antithesis of all that the Games are supposed to be. Second, as elite competitors strive to be evermore extrovert in technique – in such sports as gymnastics and snowboarding – lesser competitors are exposed to increasing risk as they attempt to emulate the leaders. The IOC is already taking steps to reduce this risk.

Without 'branding' and 'ethics', the Olympic Movement is nothing. Ser Miang Ng, Executive Board member from Singapore and one of the potential successors to Rogge,

reflects: ‘The Games are not a simple sports event where you win, you lose, go home and that’s it. It’s something more noble: the magic of the torch run winding through communities creates a mood that is so contagious. Because of success, the Games have even exceeded their original scope.’ During negotiations in 1991 for the reintroduction of South Africa to the Olympics, following 30 years of exclusion on account of the apartheid regime, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Chief of the Zulus, observed: ‘Sport coaches people for higher office and does so in such a way that the checks and balances which are there in democracy are made to work because people want them to work. The lesson sport has for us is that competition is only viable when it is played within the rules.’ Phil Coles, Australian member and three-time Olympian canoeist, treasures the experience of the Games: ‘More should be done to promote the IOC’s moral message – through the Olympic Museum, through our education programmes. Ninety-nine per cent of the athletes in the three Olympic Villages I experienced were fine people, setting an example to any society, and I wish we could rub off more of our ethic on young people.’

None should underestimate the impact that just one Olympic medal can make within a small nation. Listen to Dr Robin Mitchell, member from Fiji:

> The Solidarity programme [the IOC’s benevolent fund for assisting minorities] makes such a huge difference – for NOCs, for national federations. Look at Nauru, lying on the equator between the Solomon and Gilbert Islands. At one time it was similar to the Gulf States, rich from phosphate deposits. Then the wealth ran out, long before there was a National Olympic Committee. The island took up weightlifting, and with Solidarity’s support they produced a Pacific champion and a silver medal in the world championships. National pride overflowed. In a region that struggles to survive in international sport, something like that can help change a small country.

How far the Games have advanced over a century, especially during the presidency of Samaranch, and with accompanying financial expansion thanks to investment of

television and sponsorship, is remarkable. At all of the first three Games – Athens, Paris and St Louis – the event could have collapsed. Between the second and fourth Games of Paris 1900 and London 1908, criticism of de Coubertin in America was rife, led by James Sullivan, organiser of the third Games at St Louis and volubly supported by IOC member Caspar Whitney, American war correspondent and explorer: ‘The IOC, with de Coubertin as chairman, shows little more conception of the significance of the classic event committed to their care than might have been expected of a barker.’ He and Whitney wanted to create a new international body, one that would extend American influence, and the mood intensified following London’s first Games at which allegedly prejudiced British judging of events aroused American hostility. Theodore Cook, British IOC member, doubted de Coubertin’s still infant project: ‘The IOC is an inept organisation, and its leader flounders in his inability to accept practical suggestions. The IOC is absurdly un-businesslike.’

In spite of such disparagement, the IOC held together, thanks in particular to the efficiency of Stockholm’s Games of 1912 and the leadership of William Sloane, American doctor of philosophy and de Coubertin supporter who separated himself from the strictures of Sullivan and Whitney. Thus, in spite of being threatened by two World Wars, by the enduring conflict between the old amateur concept and increasingly irresistible professionalism, by constant political manipulation including three damaging boycotts between 1976 and 1984, by gigantism in the escalation of sports and competitor numbers, by corrupt practices in the host-city bidding process, by alarming increase in resort to performance-enhancing drugs and not least by the tardiness of the IOC in adapting to the inclusion of sports that appeal to the modern generation of youth, Nelson Mandela felt able to proclaim, when Cape Town was a candidate for the Games of 2004: ‘The Games reach areas

far beyond any sphere of political influence, doing more to unify nations than any politician has ever done.'

A belated move to arrest the damage to Olympic credibility by drug usage, inflicted over a period of more than 30 years, arrived with the institution in 1999 of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). Amid his revolution of IOC administration and finance, Samaranch had been lax in his attention to the biochemical threat, and though WADA's vigilance would be extensive in the coordination of out-of-competition testing worldwide, it was essential that it should be backed at government level. WADA was initially funded by $25 million from the IOC, its launch overshadowed by the Salt Lake scandal. It would not be until the Games of Beijing that testing intervention achieved a measurable level of deterrent.

Deceitful evasion is an element of human nature, and education is a fundamental part of the programme, eliminating the possibility for pleading any excuse. 'A competitor cannot maintain a stance that he or she didn't know about supplements in certain drugs,' HRH the Prince of Orange, IOC member from Netherlands, insists. 'Such claims are totally empty. Every athlete has the opportunity to discover and understand the details.' In response to the largely spurious notion that malicious 'plants' can be made, the Prince's emphasis on the athlete's own responsibility is echoed by Alexander Popov, renowned swimming champion and Russian IOC member. 'Athletes need to know what exactly is the content of any medicine they take. When I was competing, if I had a drink in my kit-bag, I wouldn't touch it if the bag was out of my sight for a second, that's how careful you have to be.'

The Athletes Commission – instituted by Samaranch and, post-Salt Lake scandal, granted ex-officio seats on the IOC – became increasingly hard line. And alarmed. Dr Rania Elwani from Egypt, semi-finalist in two swimming freestyle

sprints at Sydney 2000, reflects: ‘We consider that the guilty should receive a four-year ban, thereby missing the next Games … we sense that the number of the guilty is increasing.’ And Randhir Singh from India, secretary-general of the Olympic Council of Asia, suggests: ‘National federations with athletes testing positive should themselves be suspended.’

Yet if the IOC has been endlessly confronted by a myriad of problems – two Chinas, two Germanys, two Koreas, apartheid, etc., etc. – they might take comfort in the reflection of Ruud Stokvis, sociologist of Amsterdam University, who has observed:

> There is no other organisation that has such a generalised and strong relationship with the population of the whole world as the IOC, nor one which has proved to be so enduring … a majority of the world’s people attach more importance to the Olympic Games than to a meeting of the UN General Assembly … the League of Nations, which preceded the UN, lasted just 20 years. The durability of the IOC is partly due to the system of co-option by which it recruits its members. This is unquestionably not a democratic system, but it has not been proved that democratic appointment procedures are the best for all organisations. Companies have never seriously started adopting them … the IOC has succeeded, in spite of all, in organising the Games every four years. A more representative organisation would have failed long before.

As the morality of sport was driven adrift, not only by commercialism in the late twentieth century but also by the capitalist/communist divisions of West and East and the distortions of achievement by performance-enhancing drugs, it became increasingly necessary, bizarre as it might seem, for establishment of formal regulations on ethics. This point reached its nadir with the corruption scandal of 1999 preceding the Salt Lake City Winter Games of 2002. Robert Badinter, former French minister of justice, who was appointed to the inaugural Ethics Commission, was obliged to emphasise some obvious but disregarded truths:

> Given that loyalty, fair play, respect for others and their dignity, and the rejection of all racist, sexist or nationalistic discrimination, are fundamental to the Olympic Games, the Games convey a global ethical message particularly for the young. The fact that current criticism has been somewhat excessive in no way detracts from the primary task which the relevant IOC bodies have made their own: the Olympic Movement has an ethical dimension which must be clearly defined, firmly guarded and scrupulously respected.

However, there have been occasions when the most urgent need of reconsideration has been the consistency of the Ethics Commission itself.

Part One covers the first three Presidents of the IOC – Dimitrius Vikelas (Greece), Pierre de Coubertin (France) and Henri de Baillet-Latour (Belgium): all ideological disciples of ancient Greek codes of glory, though nearly confounded by the advent of the First World War and then imminence of the Second World War. Gratifyingly, De Coubertin’s initiative would survive.

Chapter I

FOUNDATION

Baron Pierre de Coubertin of France, second IOC President, 1896–1925

‘In this year, 1894, and in this city of Paris, whose joys and anxieties the world shares so closely that it has been likened to the world’s nerve centre, we were able to bring together the representatives of international athletics, who voted unanimously for the restoration of a 2,000-year-old idea, which today, as in the past, still quickens the human heart – for it satisfies one of its most vital and, whatever may have been said on the subject, one of its most noble instincts. In the temple of science, these delegates heard echoing in their ears a melody also 2,000 years old, reconstituted by an eminent archaeologist through the successive labours of several generations. And in the evening, electricity transmitted everywhere the news that Hellenic Olympism had re-entered the world after an eclipse of centuries.

The Greek heritage is so vast, Gentlemen, that all those who, in the modern world, have conceived physical exercise under one of its multiple aspects have been able legitimately to refer to Greece, which contained them all. Some have seen it as training for the defence of one's country, others as the search for physical beauty and health through a happy balance of mind and body, and yet others as that healthy drunkenness of the blood which is nowhere so intense and so exquisite as in bodily exercise.

At Olympia, Gentlemen, there was all that, but there was something more, which no one has yet dared to put into words – because since the Middle Ages a sort of discredit has hovered over bodily qualities and they have been isolated from qualities of the mind.

This has been an immense error, the scientific and social consequences of which it is almost impossible to calculate. After all, Gentlemen, there are not two parts to a man, body and soul: there are three, body, mind and character. Character is not formed by the mind, but primarily by the body. The men of antiquity knew this and we are painfully relearning it.

The adherents of the old school groaned when they saw us holding our meetings in the heart of the Sorbonne: they realised that we were rebels and that we would finish by casting down the edifice of their worm-eaten philosophy. It is true, Gentlemen: we are rebels, and that is why the press, which has always supported beneficent revolutions, has understood and helped us.

I lift my glass to the Olympic idea, which has traversed the mists of the ages like an all-powerful ray of sunlight and returned to illumine the threshold of the twentieth century with a gleam of joyous hope.' (From an address to the Inaugural Congress, Paris 1894)
(Photograph © IOC)

He was short, some 1.62 metres or 5 ft 3 in., with a handlebar moustache that was his dominant feature. Pierre de Coubertin was less a sportsman than an educationalist, not a politician but an amateur sociologist, rather a philosopher than a teacher. Above all, he was a moral leader, a liberal, with both an acute sense of history and a vision of the future that was controversially way ahead of his time, especially within France. He was preoccupied during his adolescence and early adulthood with the mental and moral condition of the French in the aftermath of defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of the 1870s. He had read *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, an acclaimed book by Thomas Hughes, which reflected the muscular Christianity of Dr Thomas

Arnold and was quoted by contemporary French philosophers, such as Hippolyte Taine in his *Notes sur L'Angleterre*. Arnold had become headmaster of Rugby School in 1828 and had been less concerned with academic vigour than with creating an environment for the emergence of a generation of men of character, courage and self-determination. De Coubertin was convinced that the introduction of a system of school sports, student self-government and postgraduate athletic associations, so effectively operating in Britain, might strengthen the democratic society of France and reinvigorate the moral discipline of those enlisting in the French Army.

Pierret de Coubertin, aged six. (© IOC/Le Jeune)

Though de Coubertin was little active in sport, confining himself to recreational riding, fencing and rowing, he travelled to England for the first time in 1883, at the age of 20, visiting several schools – Eton, Harrow, Wellington, Winchester, Rugby and Marlborough, and the more important Jesuit Catholic schools – and universities,

including Oxford and Cambridge. The visit confirmed and justified de Coubertin's objectives, and five years later he published the results of his studies on the British educational system, substantially a reflection of Arnold's principles. In the 1880s, school sport competitions had belatedly begun in Paris. For the first time schools were playing soccer. The Racing Club de France was founded. Yet de Coubertin's vision was already ultra-national. Only a grand project of international breadth would capture the public imagination. He realised, too, that such a project must be formalised, and thus began his ambition to revive the Olympic Games.

De Coubertin's philosophical inspiration can be traced back to the stage of ancient Greek tradition: indeed to the thirteenth century BC and the religious ceremonies and games that were held in Olympia, sanctuary of Greek gods, with its altar to Rhea, Mother of the Earth. The legends of these times – of Zeus fighting his father Kronos, the child-eater; of Apollo defeating Hermes; of Hercules, a victor, stipulating that the games be known as 'Olympic' – were transmitted orally until, in the eighth century BC, the poet Homer recorded them in written form in his epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, still read almost 3,000 years later in many languages. They reveal the emergence of athletic competition in the festival context of the ancient world. Though Homer's tales were written 500 years after the events, they show that athletes competed for prestige under stipulated regulations and in front of huge crowds – and that there were substantial prizes for the winners.

Imperative in the conduct of the Games was the remarkable institution of a truce, said to have originated in 884 BC: an agreement for the cessation of any war involving Greece and free passage for competitors, the clause carved on a bronze disc and preserved until the second century AD. The truce is widely mentioned in ancient records and its

reinstitution was to be unavailingly advocated over 2,850 years later, first by Eric von Frenckell of Finland and then by Juan Antonio Samaranch at the time of the Bosnian war.

The celebration of the Games continued under Aethlius, the first King of Elis, son of Zeus and Protogenia. It is alleged that from Aethlius's name came the title 'athlete'. The site of Olympia lies in the north-west Peloponnese, which was presided over by the town of Elis, where the Greeks, settlers who followed the ancient Achaeans, created their religious sanctuary. The first record of athletic activity at Olympia is dated 776 BC because the available Olympic victor list commences from that year, though archaeological evidence confirms the presence of religious activity long before that. The winner of the 'Stade' race, the sprint, in that first year was Coroebus of Elis. From Stade comes the word 'stadium', the distance being the length of a running track, which is said to be the length that Hercules could walk while holding one breath – almost 200 metres. The four-year period between each Games was an 'Olympiad', and the festival progressively included, besides the *stade*, the *diaulus* (400m), the *dolichus* (4.5km) and, by 708 BC, wrestling and the pentathlon, the latter consisting of running, discus, jumping, javelin and wrestling. By 688 BC, boxing was added, then chariot racing, and in 648 BC the *panchratium*, a combination of wrestling and boxing.

At the time of the Greek–Persian Wars, 510–450 BC, great fame descended upon Olympia and Hellenic lands, and from Olympia spread the exposition not only of sport but also of Greek classical art. Plato (427–347 BC) first visited Olympia when he was 70 and by that time the town had become an essential part of the experience for every person of education. In the fourth century BC, King Philip of Macedon was booed at the Games when it was believed he was preparing to invade Greece, and it was at Olympia in 324 BC, during the 114th Olympiad, that Alexander the Great declared that all Greeks would be united under his shield.

Throughout most of the period the athletes ran naked, apparently in order to be able to compete more freely without obstructive tunics. Though the prize for winners was a branch of wild olive, there were also more valued gifts and indeed sums of money. For obscure reasons, women were barred, even as spectators, and indeed could only visit the sacred precinct of Olympia when the Games were not being staged. The fame of champions in those far-off times exceeded even the acclaim poured upon contemporary winners by the media waterfall, for ancient Olympic champions carried not only the mark of victory but also an aura of beauty and perfection, of mental grace and pure conscience, and were considered to have achieved the greatest feat any man could witness. Champions more lauded than any in the twentieth century included Leonidas of Rhodes, who won the three running events in four consecutive Olympiads, 164–152 BC, and 12 Olympic titles in all – a triumph surpassing that of Carl Lewis. Then, as now, huge crowds gathered from around the known world to watch the festival: from Italy, Egypt, Libya, Ionia and the Caucasus.

The glory of Greece was not to last for ever. Decline set in as athleticism was replaced by the virtues of academia. Socrates was criticised for his contribution to this trend. Slowly the culture of Greece was overrun by the march of the Roman Empire. Stadia were converted into arenas in which slaves might fight for their lives. The opposition was no longer admired opponents but wild animals. The final blow to sporting glory was the spread of Christian asceticism, the perceived virtue of fasting and privation. The Games ended in 393 AD by decree of Emperor Theodosius – the last of 320 Games of Antiquity. Olympia was overrun by barbarians, the statue of Zeus was purloined by Turks, his temple set on fire by the Goths, the valley flooded by the River Cladeus. The riches of the past were gone.

Following the post-Roman religious asceticism of the Middle Ages, the seeds of ancient Greek culture in the shape of sport, individual and collective, began to take root again in the sixteenth century. Robert Dover (1575–1652), an English lawyer, sportsman and anti-Puritan, had organised the Cotswolds Games. There had been circus-style athletics events in Poland entitled ‘Olympic Competitions’, and similarly in Ramlösa, Sweden, under the auspices of Gustav Schartau, a professor in Lund. In 1844, enthusiasts from Quebec organised the ‘Olympic Games of Montreal’, with competition in 28 events. In England in 1850, Dr William Brookes founded the Much Wenlock Olympian Society, progenitor of the Much Wenlock Games, which were an alliance of sport and art, encouraging harmony between the aristocracy and working classes. In Greece, Panagiotis Soutsos, a poet, recommended an Olympic revival, which prompted Evangelis Zappas, a wealthy patriotic tradesman, to support such a proposal, and an Olympic Games, so called, were staged in 1859.

Dr William Brookes, founder in 1850 of the Much Wenlock Olympian Society, progenitor of the Much Wenlock Games that formed part of de Coubertin's inspiration from England. (© IOC)

In 1884, Georges de Saint-Clair, an all-round sportsman who had earlier translated *Tom Brown's Schooldays* into French, became secretary-general of the Racing Club de France, where he instilled the British principle of a multi-sports club. From here arose in 1887, in conjunction with the Stade Francais, the Union des Sociétés Français de Course à Pied (Union of French Running Clubs). French sport was clearly expanding, thereby providing a platform for de Coubertin's slowly flowering ambition.

Though de Coubertin was a lone intellectual with few friends, a man driven by a single passion, he inevitably needed close associates to help add momentum to his project. Foremost among these as he furthered his intention to create a committee designed to be responsible for physical education in schools were Jules Simon and Father Henri Didon.

Simon, a Republican reformer, was a man of convictions as powerful as de Coubertin's, both of them determined liberal democrats. Simon was 74, de Coubertin 25, and de Coubertin looked upon the older man as his spiritual adviser. In Father Didon, however, de Coubertin found a disciple. Didon's view was that chivalry was an essential element of sport and that sport was educational. If de Coubertin gave Didon a fresh outlook on developing society, the monk gave to him a spirituality that strengthened his resolve.

The Dominican Father Didon, friend and mentor, co-founder with Pierre de Coubertin of the Comité pour la Propagation des Exercises Physiques. (© IOC)

The Comité pour la Propagation des Exercises Physiques was inaugurated in 1888, consisting of five members, though de Coubertin was the fulcrum. The Comité was short on public support, but de Coubertin was able to publish informative essays in newspapers and magazines and slowly the Comité attracted attention: an assembly room was arranged at the Sorbonne.

Three years later, 1891, the association organised its first athletic championships: Didon as honorary president announcing to the members that their motto was to be '*Citius, Altius, Fortius*' – faster, higher, stronger – the basis of sport and to become the motto of de Coubertin's ultimate creation. Later the same year de Coubertin also fulfilled a request from the government to stage a conference on physical education. Octogenarian Dr Brookes, acclaimed for

his progressive work in England, was invited to attend the conference but his age prevented him, so the following year de Coubertin travelled to Much Wenlock where a special athletics event was staged in his honour.

As ideas began to be realised, de Coubertin needed foreign colleagues to help substantiate his international concept. Foremost among these would be William Milligan Sloane, son of a Scottish Presbyterian pastor, born in Richmond, Ohio, in 1850, and later of New York where he took a degree at Columbia University. Subsequently he taught Classics at Newell Institute, Pittsburgh, then moved to Berlin to study ancient history and gained a doctorate in Leipzig in ancient Arabian poetry. Additionally, he was secretary to the American ambassador in Germany, George Bancroft, who helped develop in him a proclivity for sport, which Sloane retained upon returning to work at Princeton and then Columbia universities. It was in his role as president of the Ivy Collegiate Faculty Committee on Athletic Sports that de Coubertin sought his allegiance on a visit to the States in 1889. In 1892, Sloane visited Paris to attend rowing and football competitions involving French, American and English teams. De Coubertin outlined his plan and Sloane set about attempting to convince a sceptical, traditionally insular American audience of its virtues. De Coubertin returned to the States in 1893 on a promotional visit during the finalisation of his plans for a sports congress in Paris the following year. Reaction, however, remained lukewarm: only Professor Sloane was keen to attend.

Liberal educationalist. The founder (seated third left) at Ecole Monge, 1887–8. (© IOC/David)

Charles Herbert was born in India in 1846, his entire family bar himself slaughtered in the Cawnpore Massacre of 1857, a bloody uprising against British rule. He returned to live in England, becoming in 1883 honorary secretary of the Amateur Athletic Association created three years earlier. He then met de Coubertin, who appointed him ‘Commissioner for England and the British Colonies’ in the preparation for the Congress. Though Herbert was doubtful about the project, it was through him that de Coubertin would direct his efforts to ensure the presence of a British team at the inaugural Games of 1896. Herbert himself would not attend, unable to afford the journey.

Viktor Gustav Balck, who was to become known as the ‘Father of Swedish sport’, was an initially cautious but eventually committed disciple, fired by de Coubertin’s ideological objective. Born in 1844, the son of a shopkeeper, Balck had joined the merchant navy at the youthful age of 12, switching to the royal navy in 1859 and subsequently joining the Karlsberg Military Academy. Here he became involved in sports and in 1891 joined the staff of the Stockholm Central Institute of Gymnastics, run by the Ministry of War. Rising to major, then colonel, by 1907 he was head of the Institute, having vigorously popularised all branches of currently conventional games in Sweden. In

1875 he had founded the Stockholm Gymnastics Association and was equally influential in the development of rowing and ice skating, promoting strong links with England. Though elected as an inaugural member of the new Olympic Committee, he was unable to attend the Congress at the Sorbonne, but he ensured that Sweden was represented, by one Frederic Bergh. At short notice, he was only able to persuade one athlete to compete in Athens but was himself one of seven members to attend the Session there. Balck was of immense significance, as evidenced by his extensive correspondence with de Coubertin, some 100 missives being exchanged between 1894 and 1921. Balck was also instrumental in founding the International Skating Union.

IOC founding members. Standing (r–l): Dr Willibald Gebhardt (GER), Jiri Guth-Jarkovski (TCH), Ferenc Kemeny (HUN), Viktor Balck (SWE). Seated: Pierre de Coubertin (FRA), Demetrius Vikelas (GRE), Gen. de Butovski (RUS). (© IOC/Meyer)

While de Coubertin was on the one hand a reforming democratic liberal, he was also alert to the social prejudices of the day, aware that the presence, on the sporting committee he was about to create, of titled noblemen would enhance credibility: much as it does in the present day with charitable organisations. Arthur Oliver Villiers Russel, second Baron Ampthill, was born in 1869 in Rome, where his father

was British ambassador. His grandfather, the Earl of Clarendon, was at the time minister of foreign affairs. Russel was to make his name at Eton and then New College, Oxford, becoming president of both the Oxford (political debating) Union and the Boat Race Club. De Coubertin had met him on his visit to Eton and immediately envisioned this young sportsman as an inaugural member of what was to be the International Olympic Committee. Although Ampthill made little direct intervention in de Coubertin's campaign, the prestige of his involvement was undoubtedly beneficial.

The founder as leisurely oarsman. (© IOC)

So, too, was that of Karl August Willibald Gebhardt, who had qualified as a chemist at the Friedrich-Wilhelm University in Berlin before moving to the United States to work on physiological chemistry between 1890 and 1893. At school, Gebhardt had been a fencer. He was concerned with the social aspects of overcrowded cities in relation to their inhabitants' physical well-being, was an advocate of healthy sport as a fundamental right and hence became a natural disciple of de Coubertin's. Gebhardt regarded Germany's entrenchment in the traditions of gymnastics as too nationalistic and became involved in the second 'General Exhibition of Sport, Games and Gymnastics' in Berlin in