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Juan Antonio Samaranch: From Barcelona Elite to the Olympic World

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Juan Antonio Samaranch's election as the seventh president of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) turned him into a major international figure and allowed him to revolutionise world sport. However, Samaranch's interesting career began long before his IOC presidency and continued for several years after it. This chapter tells the story of his illustrious life, which, for the sake of convenience, is examined in three parts: the period before he became IOC president (60 years), his presidency of the IOC (21 years) and the years following his retirement from the presidency (10 years). Quite naturally, the largest section covers Samaranch's time at the head of the IOC and, therefore, at the informal head of world sport.

One of the main sources for this chapter is my own memory, as I had the good fortune to work for the IOC from 1982 to 1987, during the early years of Samaranch's presidency, and I have closely followed

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the rest of Samaranch's career. These reminiscences have been combined with information provided by the small number of published biographies of Samaranch, although these works do not cover the latter years of his presidency or the final phase of his life.¹ Samaranch also wrote his own memoirs, but they provide no additional insights and are only available in Spanish.² Numerous publications, especially from the IOC, describe the main stages of Samaranch's presidency and include some very informative photographs. Of particular note is "The Centennial President", published uniquely in English.³ Another source was the third volume of the history of the IOC, commissioned by Samaranch for the IOC's centenary.⁴

Before the Presidency (1920–1980)

Juan Antonio Samaranch was born prematurely on 17 July 1920, in Barcelona (Spain), to Francisco Samaranch Castro and Juana Torelló Malveyh. He was the eldest child from his father's second marriage. Francisco already had a son and a daughter before Juan Antonio came along, and would have two more sons after him. The family ran a

¹For example, the very critical *El deporte del poder, Vida y milagro de Juan Antonio Samaranch* by Boix, J. and Espada, A. (1991), Madrid: Ediciones Thenas de hoy (translated into French by Pointu, R. (1994) as *L'héritage trahi*, Paris: Romillat). Another critical book, *The Lords of the Rings*, by Simson, V. and Jennings, A. (Stoddart 1992), led to legal action by the IOC in the Swiss courts. For a hagiographic view, commissioned by Samaranch himself, go to: Miller, D. (1992) *Olympic Revolution, The Olympic biography of Juan Antonio Samaranch*, London: Pavilion Books. Events in Lausanne are covered by Morath, P. (2000) in *Le C.I.O. à Lausanne*, Yens: Cabédita. A recent book published in China in 2014 provides very valuable details and photographs of Samaranch's life: Palacios, P., Mont-Roig, E. and Surroca, J. M. (n.d.), *President Samaranch, 21 years in the Presidency of the IOC that changed Sport throughout the World*, Beijing: Chinese Olympic Committee, IOC and Samaranch-China Foundation.

²Samaranch, J. A. (2002), *Juan Antonio Samaranch: Memorias Olimpicas*, Barcelona: Planeta Singular.

³IOC (1997) *The Centennial President* (articles by members of the IOC and relatives, compiled by Marie-Hélène Roukhadzé), Lausanne: IOC.

⁴Landry, F. and Yerlès, M. (1996) *The International Olympic Committee: One Hundred Years: The Idea—The Presidents—The Achievements*, Lausanne: IOC, Volume 3: The Presidencies of Lord Killanin (1972–1980) and Juan Antonio Samaranch (1980–), Especially the Conclusion, Written by Samaranch, pp. 415–422.

prosperous textile company, which allowed Juan Antonio to be educated at good primary and middle schools in his home city. He spoke Spanish, Catalan and French, but he did not become fluent in English until the 1970s. He obtained a non-university business diploma (*perito mercantil*) at a German school in Barcelona, which he had validated by the new Spanish authorities in 1940, and started work with the family's textile business, Samaranch SA, which specialised in making bedspreads. Although the company ran a model factory at Molins de Rei (near Barcelona) and was based in the predominantly left-wing region of Catalonia, then a bastion of the Republic, Samaranch's political leanings tended towards the right. The left-wing government in Catalonia was finally swept away by General Franco at the end of the 1930s, after the cancelation of the Barcelona People's Olympiad in 1936 (not recognised by the IOC).

Businessman, Sportsman and... Politician

He briefly took up boxing (under the name "Kid Samaranch") and, more significantly, started playing roller hockey (also known as rink hockey—a form of hockey played on roller skates that was quite popular in Catalonia and Spanish-speaking countries) as a goalkeeper. He quickly became the national roller hockey coach for R.C. Español (a club that included his favourite football team, which was a direct rival of Barça F.C.). Largely thanks to Samaranch, the Spanish roller hockey federation became affiliated to the international roller hockey federation in 1946 in Montreux (Switzerland), where the federation had gathered for the Nations' Cup. It was here that he met the tournament organisers, the brothers Albert Mayer, a Swiss IOC member, and Otto Mayer, who was also second in command (Chancellor) at the IOC and who immediately saw great potential in Samaranch.⁵ The Nations' Cup in Montreux became a regular event for Samaranch and the Spanish roller hockey team, and was also Francoist Spain's only contact with the sporting world until the 1960s (the Soviet Union systematically blocked Spain's efforts

⁵Boix, J. and Espada, A. (1991), *El deporte del poder*, op. cit., p. 216.

to join international sport as a way of putting pressure on the regime). As a result, roller hockey allowed Spain to win its first world title after World War II, at the 1951 World Championships in Barcelona. Spain won again in 1954 and Samaranch became vice-president of both the international roller hockey federation and the Spanish hockey federation. During the 1940s, he had used his column in the Barcelona newspaper *La Prensa*, written under the by-line Stick, to raise the sport's profile, and it was as the newspaper's (very critical) special correspondent that he attended his first Olympic Games, at Helsinki in 1952.

After failing in his first attempt to gain a council seat, Samaranch was elected to Barcelona city council in 1954 as a representative for the third district. He was very quickly appointed councillor for sport, and in 1955 he became president of the provincial council's sports commission. That same year, he married María Teresa Salisachs Rowe (known as Bibis), a member of a wealthy, bourgeois Barcelona family. The couple had a daughter (María Teresa Jr.) and then a son (Juan Antonio Jr.) who became IOC member in 2001. Meanwhile, Samaranch's positions on the city council allowed him to obtain the post of vice president of the (local) organising committee for the second Mediterranean Games, which were held in Barcelona in 1955 (the inaugural edition had taken place in Alexandria four years earlier). He used his position to invite the president and chancellor of the IOC to the games (in the end, they did not attend), as well as all the members of the IOC (five came). For the first time, he was able to rub shoulders with the Olympic world and became its leading supporter in Spain.

In 1956, he was appointed Catalonia's official representative at the national sports delegation (a department of Spain's sports ministry responsible for elite sport) and became its president ten years later.⁶ Aided by the growing resources obtained from the taxation of betting on Spanish football, he adopted a very innovative approach to this position, visiting national federations, inaugurating sports facilities, meeting presidents and making statements in the press, etc. It also

⁶Samaranch was also the vice-president of the Royal Automobile Club of Catalonia from 1957 to 1985 and a friend of Bernie Ecclestone, President of F1 Management.

allowed him to become a member of the Spanish Olympic Committee (SOC) and chef de mission (head of the Spanish team) for the Cortina d'Ampezzo Winter Olympics (1956) and the Rome (1960) and Tokyo (1964) Summer Olympics. At the end of 1956, during the opening ceremony of the Melbourne Games, which Spain boycotted, he raised the Olympic flag at Montjuïc, the venue for the 1955 Mediterranean Games and one of the sites where the Barcelona Olympics would take place in 1992. He continued to mix with members of the Olympic world and was elected president of the SOC in 1967.

The following year he led Spain's delegation to the 1968 Mexico City Olympics (which the Franco Government wanted to boycott but which Samaranch convinced the SOC to attend, thereby saving his future standing in the IOC). This was a very difficult event for Spain, both politically and on the field of play. Politically, Mexico, who continued to recognise the defunct republican regime, not Franco's regime, snubbed the Spanish government by raising the republican flag at the Games. As a result, Spain boycotted all the cultural activities organised alongside the Games. Nevertheless, Samaranch commissioned a painting by Salvador Dali (*El atleta cósmico*) that was shown in Mexico City. Sportingly, Spain's results were well below the country's expectations and raised eyebrows.

Samaranch had become national sports delegate in 1966, but was sacked from this post in 1970. However, his sporting career had not prevented him pursuing his political career, and, in 1967, he won a seat in the Cortes (lower chamber of the Spanish parliament) with the largest majority of any of Spain's members of parliament. He went on to successfully defend his seat in the 1971 election. During the ceremony to admit him as a member of parliament, he was photographed taking the oath, hand on the bible and dressed in a Phalange (Franco's party) uniform, in front of General Franco. This photograph resurfaced during preparations for the Barcelona Olympics, leading to harsh criticism from a number of observers, especially Boix and Espada⁷ and Andrew Jennings, who pursued him with it to Lausanne.⁸ Samaranch responded by saying that it

⁷Boix, J. and Espada, A. (1991), *El deporte del poder*, op. cit., p. 129.

⁸Simpson, V. and Jennings, A. (1992), *The Lords of the Rings*, London: Stoddart, p. 84.

was up to the Spanish people to judge his actions during Franco's regime, but, at the beginning of his time as IOC president, Samaranch benefited greatly from the wall of silence and deliberate forgetfulness that hung over these years in Spain. He had, however, one of his critics—Andrew Jennings—condemned by a Lausanne court for criminal libel which imposed a five-day jail sentence, suspended for three years.

In 1961, the year he left the city council, he founded the Barcelona Boat Show, which, for several years, provided him an opportunity to promote Catalonia and invite VIPs to Barcelona. He also left his family's textile business to move into real estate and banking, a career change that allowed him to perpetuate the family's fortune. In 1965, he took part in the IOC Session (general assembly) in Madrid, where he was due to be co-opted into the IOC thanks to his good relations with the then president Avery Brundage, cultivated in particular by his wife, Bibis. But the existing Spanish member, Baron de Guëll, succeeded in having his son-in-law, Pedro Ybarra, the Marquis of MacMahon, co-opted instead. Samaranch was finally co-opted into the IOC the following year, in Rome, becoming Spain's second IOC member, even though, at this time, countries that had not yet hosted the Olympics (with the exception of India and Brazil) were entitled to no more than one IOC member. In fact, he owed his position entirely to Brundage's insistence.⁹ Samaranch's appointment could also be seen as compensation for the Session failing to award the 1972 Olympics to Madrid (with the sailing and swimming events planned in Barcelona). Another significant event in 1966 was the introduction of a 75-year age limit on new members. This limit became a hurdle Samaranch had to overcome before being re-elected IOC president in 1997.

Building a Career in International Sport

After his election as president of the Spanish Olympic Committee (SOC) in 1967, Samaranch began his involvement in international Olympism. Although he failed to get elected to the IOC's Executive

⁹Boix, J. and Espada, A. (1991), *El deporte del poder*, op. cit., p. 222.

Board (government) the following year, Avery Brundage, acting on the advice of Monique Berlioux, the IOC's French director general (number two), appointed him head of protocol—a position that had not previously existed. He was finally elected to the IOC Executive Board in 1970, and became IOC vice president four years later.

Samaranch's political career in Spain also continued to flourish and, in 1973, at the age of 53, he was appointed president of Barcelona Provincial Government (Deputación). The Deputación had been set up under Franco to replace the famous Generalitat de Catalunya (Autonomous Government), which was re-established after Franco's death. In fact, Franco's demise, in 1975, triggered a major transition period in Spanish politics, during which Samaranch founded with others the Concordia Catalana conservative party. However, he was quickly forced to withdraw from the first post-Franco elections, partly due to a demonstration in Barcelona in April 1977, where marchers chanted the slogan "Sa-ma-ranch, fot el camp!" ("Samaranch take a hike").

In May 1977, he was named Spain's new ambassador to the Soviet Union (and Mongolia), an appointment that shows that Franco's successors were happy to gloss over Samaranch's Francoist past. He handed over the presidency of the provincial council to Josep Tarradellas, who had been the president in exile (from 1954) of the Generalitat. Samaranch had hoped to be sent to Vienna, Austria, but finally accepted Moscow on the advice of King Juan Carlos. Moscow was due to host both the 1980 Olympic Games and the Session that would elect the IOC's next president (the incumbent, Lord Killanin, had decided not to stand). The ambassadorship allowed Samaranch to receive numerous senior members of the Olympic Movement in Moscow before the Games and to launch a campaign to convince the Soviet bloc (around 20 IOC voting members) that he was the right man to become IOC president. Following the decision of the United States and its main allies to boycott the Moscow Olympics, in 1979 Samaranch began making strenuous efforts to ensure as many countries as possible, especially those from Africa and South America, took part in the Games. In this, he was supported by Horst Dassler (the then boss of adidas), the Frenchman André Guelfi (head of Le Coq Sportif, one of adidas' brands) and the Mexican Mario Vásquez Raña (president of

the recently founded Association of National Olympic Committees). The Soviet Union, which provided financial assistance to help countries take part, was very grateful to Samaranch,¹⁰ even though only about half the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) recognised by the IOC sent teams to the Games and many of them participated under the Olympic flag, rather than their national flag. West Germany, Canada and New Zealand stayed away, thereby sinking the chances of IOC members from these countries who may have hoped to become IOC president. Spain took part under the Olympic flag and forbid its ambassador from attending Olympic ceremonies. However, Samaranch did attend the ceremonies and the Games in his new role as president of the IOC, having tendered his resignation as ambassador, although he continued to use the title “your excellency” until the Salt Lake City scandal of 1998–1999 (see below).

President of the IOC (1980–2001)

Juan Antonio Samaranch was elected president of the IOC in Moscow on July 16, 1980, the day before his 60th birthday. His successor, Jacques Rogge, would be elected 21 years later, day for day, and the result announced from the same place (Palace of the Unions). Samaranch was chosen by the IOC Session after only one round of voting, winning 47 votes, against 21 votes for the Swiss Marc Hodler (President of the International Ski Federation), 7 votes for the German Willy Daume and 4 votes for the Canadian James Worrall.¹¹ The New Zealander Lance Cross withdrew before the election. It is said that Samaranch stroke a deal with Marc Hodler to let him in charge of matters regarding the Olympic winter games.

¹⁰A Soviet source has claimed that Samaranch was linked to the KGB (Soviet secret service), after he had been caught using the diplomatic bag to discreetly send Russian icons back to Spain: Samuel, H. “Former Olympics Chief Juan Antonio Samaranch linked to KGB, book claims”, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 November 2009.

¹¹Details of the result were kept secret, but revealed by journalists. See, for example, Miller, D. (1992) *Olympic Revolution*, London: Pavilion Books, p. 20.

Samaranch was backed by Monique Berlioux, the IOC's Lausanne-based director general, who had supported him for several years and who did not want a Swiss from Bern as president (too close to Lausanne). Samaranch was elected for eight years, which was rapidly increased to nine years, so the presidential election did not coincide anymore with the Olympic Games. He was re-elected by acclamation in 1989, 1993 and 1997, allowing him to serve for a total of 21 years (at the time, there was no 8 + 4-year maximum term for the IOC president) and making him the longest-serving IOC president after Coubertin (29 years). Samaranch was part of the wave of Latino administrators elected to important positions in the Olympic Movement, which included Havelange (FIFA) and Vasquez Raña (ANOC) before him, and Acosta (FIVB) and Nebiolo (IAAF) after him, all supported by Horst Dassler (adidas).

Strengthening the Olympic Institution and Unifying the Olympic System

One of Samaranch's first decisions as IOC president was to move to Lausanne. He set up home at the Lausanne Palace Hotel, occupying a junior suite (room 301), which consisted of two bedrooms (one for him and one for his wife) and a small office whose walls were covered from floor to ceiling by Olympic souvenirs collected during trips on behalf of the IOC (he visited all 204 NOCs then recognised by the IOC). He was later severely criticised for this suite, although it was, in fact, smaller than the apartment his successor occupied in the same hotel. His predecessors had continued to live in their home cities (Dublin and Chicago, respectively), so Samaranch's decision to live in Lausanne came as a great surprise to Monique Berlioux, the IOC's director general. Berlioux was very much against the idea, as it turned the presidency of the IOC into an executive presidency. What is more, Samaranch set up his office on the ground floor of the IOC's headquarters in the Château de Vidy, and took back the power Monique Berlioux, whose office was on the first floor, had built up over successive Olympiads since her appointment in 1967.

Samaranch's first preoccupation was to ensure the IOC's head office remained in Lausanne, rather than moving to Paris, Munich or elsewhere, as some had suggested it should. To achieve this, he had to persuade the Swiss government to award the IOC special status in Lausanne above that of a simple, Swiss not-for-profit association (article 60–79 of the Swiss Civil Code). After much negotiation, and to general surprise, on the eve of the opening of the Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden in September 1981, the Swiss federal government issued an order exempting the IOC from federal income tax (complemented by a similar exemption from cantonal taxes) and allowed the IOC to obtain an unlimited number of work permits for staff recruited from abroad (at the time, Swiss work permits were hard to obtain, even for Europeans). This order was renegotiated into a more balanced agreement between the IOC and the federal government in 2000. On the basis of its new status, the IOC decided to build a new head office in Lausanne, to supplement the Château de Vidy, which had become too small. The president began building close relations with Lausanne's city leaders, with whom he was on excellent terms, and began building his network in Lausanne with Raymond Gafner, a Swiss member of the IOC. He asked the Senegalese member, Keba Mbaye, a former judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, to set up in Lausanne the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which soon became sport's highest authority for settling sport disputes.

In the early 1980s, Samaranch fought with all his strength to avoid boycotts of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics by the Soviet Bloc (in retaliation for the boycott of the Moscow 1980 Games by the United States and its allies) and of the 1988 Seoul Olympics (South Korea did not have diplomatic relations with the Eastern Bloc). He lost the battle for Los Angeles, which nevertheless hosted a well-attended Games with 140 countries participating (compared with 81 in Moscow), but won it for Seoul, which was boycotted by only a few small countries (Cuba, Ethiopia, etc.). Los Angeles was notable for being the first time a team from The People's Republic of China had taken part in an Olympic Games since 1952 (China could have sent a team to Moscow four years earlier, thanks to Killanin, but decided to boycott the Soviet Games). The 1984 Sarajevo (Yugoslavia) and 1988 Calgary (Canada) Olympics—which were then held six months before that Olympiad's

Summer Games, ran almost without difficulty. Moreover, the Los Angeles Olympics generated a surplus of around US\$225 million for the organisers, the first time an Olympic Games had made a large profit. The IOC fought without success to recover some of this money, which was contractually due to the organisers (who set up with it an Olympic legacy foundation), the US Olympic Committee (which eventually reimbursed other NOCs for their stay in the Olympic villages) and the city of Los Angeles (the only city to bid for the 1984 Games and which did not build any facilities for the Olympics). Nevertheless, the main consequence of these Games for the IOC was to rekindle interest in bidding for the Olympics. Thus, in 1985, when the selection process for the 1992 Olympics began, six cities bid to host the Summer Games and seven cities bid for the Winter Games.

The Quest for Financial Power and Autonomy

Like many other people, Samaranch had detected another problem for the IOC apart from boycotts: its very heavy dependence (more than 80%) on the sale of Olympic Games television rights to American networks. At the time, the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) had bought the rights to every edition of the Olympics since the 1964 Winter Games and 1968 Summer Games, paying about US\$116 million for Los Angeles in 1984 (more than 75% of the amount paid for television rights). Samaranch asked Richard Pound, an IOC member from Canada (see the chapter on Pound in this book), to preside a commission to investigate new sources of finance. The commission suggested making the IOC the sole negotiator and signatory of contracts with broadcasters (system introduced in 1992) and to demand higher rights from the European Broadcasting Union, which had a quasi-monopoly over broadcasting (also done as of 1992). In addition, it proposed setting up a partnership programme called TOP (*The Olympic Programme*, then *The Olympic Partners*). This programme allowed multi-national companies, such as Coca Cola, to sign a single contract with the IOC, the organising committees (OCOG) of upcoming Winter and Summer Games and all the National Olympic Committees (NOC), and thereby sponsor forthcoming Olympic Games,

the IOC and the NOCs' teams. This system would avoid the situation that occurred at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, where the Japanese company Fuji sponsored the Games while the American company Kodak, who felt they had to sponsor an Olympics on home soil, sponsored the American team through the USOC, the United States' NOC. The public found this situation confusing. The first TOP contract was signed in 1985, after two long years of negotiations with the USOC. The USOC was to receive 20% of the rights as compensation for it no longer being able to have its own sponsorship programme with members of TOP or their direct competitors, nearly all of which were, at this time, American multinationals. As the IOC did not have its own marketing department, management of TOP was contracted out to ISL (International Sport and Leisure), which had recently been set up by Horst Dassler, the head of adidas, and his four sisters, and which, to general surprise, had just been awarded the contract to market FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and the football world cup, the world's second largest sports event after the Olympics.

These new sources of finance enabled the IOC to re-launch Olympic Solidarity on a solid financial footing. A Spanish director, the former secretary general of the Spanish Olympic Committee, was appointed and Olympic Solidarity's offices were moved from Rome (head office of the European NOCs, which were large donors at the time) to Vidy, under the aegis of an ad hoc commission presided by Samaranch.

Pound, who Samaranch relied on to carry out his most difficult missions, was also involved in the project to share the 1988 Games between Seoul in South Korea (which had been awarded the Games) and Pyongyang in North Korea. He later explained in minute detail¹² the labyrinthine negotiations where Samaranch finally obliged North Korea's leaders to refuse his offer to host some Olympic events north of the 38th parallel for fear of having to open their borders to the media.

One of the most important issues to affect the Seoul Olympics in 1988, and the 1980s in general, was doping. Seoul was expected to be a political landmark for South Korea, but the event that made the biggest headlines was the disqualification for doping of the Canadian sprinter

¹²Pound, R. (1994) *Five Rings Over Korea*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Ben Johnson after he had won one of the Games' marquee events—the men's 100 m. Doping had already been a major problem at Los Angeles, four years earlier, but it was mostly pushed to the side-lines by, for example, the IOC Executive Board only dealing with some 15 positive drugs tests after the LA Games had closed, when there was less media attention. Prince Alexandre de Mérode, who Samaranch had entrusted to tackle doping, was determined not to let himself get caught out by Samaranch and the IOC Executive Board a second time, so he “leaked” Ben Johnson's failed drugs test to the media before the IOC had time to give its verdict. Other cases were hushed up, but the IOC was forced to support the Council of Europe's 1989 anti-doping convention, which led to the founding of the World Anti-Doping Agency ten years later, presided by Pound (and not by Samaranch, as originally intended).

From Fighting Boycotts to Marketing the Games and Bids

All these events led to the final demise of amateurism, a process begun by Lord Killanin and completed by Samaranch. Although the final resolution of the 1981 Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden had included the statement that the Games should never “become open competitions”, professional athletes were progressively allowed to compete in the Olympics, with the agreement of their International Federations (IF). As a result, professional footballers (under 23s) and tennis players first took part in the Games in Los Angeles in 1984, followed by NBA (National Basketball Association) basketball players in Barcelona in 1992 (American Dream Team) and NHL (National Hockey League) ice-hockey players in Nagano in 1998. But the transition towards professionalism was not so straightforward in the Soviet bloc, as has been told elsewhere.¹³ Disagreement over professionalism was also the reason given to the press for the resignation of Monique Berlioux, the IOC's

¹³Chappelet, J.-L. (1991) *Le Système olympique*, Grenoble: Presses universitaires, pp. 213–227. Samaranch considered this book to be “the best independent analysis of the Olympic Movement”. See Pound (2012) “Preface” in Ferrand, A. et al. (2012) *Olympic Marketing*, London: Routledge, p. xv.

director general. In fact, a power struggle within the IOC headquarters at Vidy had made relations between the president and director general increasingly tense. Cooperation finally broke down in May 1985, during the IOC's meeting in East Berlin, and Monique Berlioux was forced to resign, albeit with a generous compensation package to ensure her total media silence which she never broke.

Six cities bid to host the 1992 summer Olympics, including both Barcelona and Paris (which quickly recruited Berlioux). Fierce competition between the rival cities gave rise to unprecedented practices in the run up to the final vote in 1986. Although Samaranch did not vote (as in other IOC elections), his home city won, collecting 47 votes, compared with 27 votes for Paris. The timely award of the 1992 Winter Games to Albertville, a few minutes before the vote for the Summer Games, can be seen as a consolation prize for France. Just before the 1992 hosts were chosen, a new head office (Olympic House) was opened in a public park (very unusual in Switzerland) next to the Château de Vidy, completing a project Samaranch had announced immediately after his election.

The Barcelona Olympics, in July 1992, were a testimony to Samaranch's strategy, even though he contributed very little to their organisation (in the hands of the local socialist party). As well as being a great success in both financial and urban development terms, they were the first Games for many editions to be unaffected by boycotts. The new republics that arose after the breakup of the Soviet Union took part as independent countries or, for the last time, under the title "unified team". Yugoslavian athletes competed as "independent athletes" in order to get round the sanctions the UN had imposed on Yugoslavia during its civil war, and post-apartheid South Africa sent its first team since 1956. Some people thought that Samaranch would end his presidency on this successful note, but he could not bring himself to stand down and was re-elected by acclamation in 1993.

Outside his IOC activities, in 1987 Samaranch had become the president of *Caixa de Catalunya* (one of Barcelona's biggest savings banks, formed by the merger of several smaller banks). His position was confirmed in 1990 but discreetly terminated in 1999 at the height of the "Salt Lake City scandal" (see below). At the end of 1991, the King of

Spain had made him the Marquis of Samaranch, a hereditary title. His successor at the IOC—Jacques Rogge—had received a knighthood in 1992 and was later made a count by the King of Belgium. It is said that Samaranch wanted to be made a duke, a title that had been given to Adolfo Suárez, Spain's prime minister during the post-Franco democratic transition, but had to make do with a marquise, like a previous Spanish member of the IOC.

In 1993, in the presence of the Spanish royal couple and the president of Switzerland, Samaranch inaugurated a modern Olympic Museum at Lausanne-Ouchy. The new building replaced the museum opened by Coubertin at "Mon-Repos" in the 1920s and which closed in the 1960s, and a temporary museum near Lausanne station set up by Samaranch in 1982 and which remained open until 1993. The Ouchy museum was built on a site that had originally been earmarked for the IOC's administrative offices, but this project was abandoned for fear of local opposition. Most of the museum's CHF96 million cost¹⁴ was financed by donors, who were thanked by marble "bricks" bearing their name and displayed in the entrance hall. It is surrounded by an open park with views over Lake Geneva. The museum was refurbished before the end of Samaranch's presidency and Samaranch ran the foundation that owned the walls until he died.

The 1994 Winter Olympics at Lillehammer (Norway) were the first to take place two years before the Summer Games, a system introduced following a proposal from Samaranch influenced by a TV executive. Despite harsh criticism of the IOC and its president before the Games, Lillehammer was a great media success, mostly thanks to the public's enthusiasm and the idyllic winter setting. At the beginning of the Games, Samaranch, travelling in an armed convoy, visited Sarajevo, the city that had hosted the Winter Games ten years earlier and which was now in the middle of a civil war. It has been suggested that Lillehammer was awarded the 1994 Games, ahead of the great favourite Falun (Sweden), because the IOC coveted the Nobel Peace Prize, which is awarded by a committee of the Norwegian Parliament. However,

¹⁴Lyberg, W. (1996) *Fabulous 100 years of the IOC*, Lausanne: IOC, p. 326.

Samaranch did not get the pleasure of receiving this prize, which has never been attributed to the IOC, despite an intensive and highly secretive campaign by Samaranch during the 1990s.

Samaranch then turned to the United Nations (UN). He sent a journalist from Ethiopia who had worked for the UN to represent the IOC at the landmark 1992 Rio Conference, now known as the Earth Summit. He made sustainable development a central issue for the IOC and had it proclaimed the third dimension of Olympism (with sport and culture) by the centennial Olympic Congress in Paris in 1994. Most importantly, he ensured that, in 1993, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution proclaiming an “Olympic truce” for the Lillehammer Games and declared 1994 to be “the year of sport and the Olympic ideal”. This truce, which puts few constraints on signatory states, is proclaimed for every Olympic year via a resolution introduced by the next host country. Inspired by the Ancient truce designed to protect travellers heading to Olympia, signatories (almost all UN members sign the truce) undertake not to start armed conflicts during the Games and for a period of one week before and after them. As such, it provides a potent symbol of the IOC’s influence (the UN granted the IOC rare observer status in its general assembly in 2009).

The Olympic movement was at the peak of its strength and Samaranch talked about a “golden age of sport”.¹⁵ Since 1988, the NOCs have received a minimum payment from the IOC, guaranteed by Olympic Solidarity, which has ensured the universality of the Games. Consequently the number of countries taking part in the Summer Games rose from 140 in 1984 to 203 in 2000. In addition, several IFs have obtained the inclusion of their sports in the Olympic programme, which expanded from 21 sports in 1984 to 28 sports in 2000 (through the addition, in chronological order, of tennis, table tennis, baseball, badminton, softball, triathlon and taekwondo, plus curling for the Winter Games).¹⁶ Numerous cities were now vying to host the Games,

¹⁵Samaranch, J. A. (1996) “Preface” in Chappelet, J.-L. (1996) *Sport Management: An International Approach*, Lausanne: Documents of the Museum, p. 5.

¹⁶Cf. Chappelet, J.-L. (2013) “Managing the size of the Olympic Games”, *Sport in Society*, vol. 16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2013.834621>.

with six bids received for the 1992 Summer Games and eleven bids for the 2004 Olympics. The Swiss city of Sion bid to host the 2002 and 2006 Winter Olympics, but was beaten by Salt Lake City (United States) and Turin (Italy), respectively, despite initial support for Sion's 2006 bid from Samaranch and the IOC Administration. This defeat in 1999 was very poorly received in Switzerland, where the IOC's premises were daubed with derogatory slogans and where the IOC had to withdraw its request for exemption from VAT (value-added tax), which Switzerland had just introduced. Nevertheless, in 2000, the Swiss government and the IOC signed an agreement confirming the IOC's main privileges (tax exemptions excluding the VAT exemption).

Revising Governance

Increased competition to host the Olympic Games led candidate cities to use ever more inventive methods to gain IOC members' votes. The dubious legitimacy of some of these practices led to a major scandal at the end of Samaranch's presidency and the first major changes to the way the IOC is run since it was founded by Pierre de Coubertin in 1894. At the end of 1998, an American newspaper published a letter hinting that a member of the IOC had accepted benefits in kind from the Salt Lake City 2002 Winter Games bid committee. Swiss IOC member Marc Hodler, who was responsible for monitoring the actions of candidate cities, publicly confirmed that numerous IOC members were involved in similar improper behaviour and raised enormous media interest. Samaranch was forced to set up a commission of enquiry to investigate what had become a common practice that was well known by the media but not proved. In his report, published a month later, commission president Richard Pound recommended excluding six members (four others had resigned or died) and issuing warnings to ten others. Intense pressure from the media and sponsors ensured this recommendation was adopted by an extraordinary IOC Session, held in March 1999 in Lausanne, during which Samaranch won a vote of confidence by 86 votes to 2 (plus one abstention and one spoiled ballot).

In the wake of these events, the IOC changed the way it was organised, reducing the number of members from 125 to 115 (as a maximum) and introducing a 70-year age limit for members (the age limit had been increased to 80 in 1995 to allow Samaranch to remain president). The 115 members were divided into four colleges, consisting of 70 individual members (no more than one member per country to ensure diversity), 15 representatives of NOCs (who lost their status if they lost their position, in most cases, of NOC president), 15 representatives of IFs (also limited in their functions, which Samaranch had always wanted to do in order to ensure the support of the IFs and have their powerful presidents at the IOC) and 15 athletes (12 of whom were to be elected from among participants in successive Summer (4 + 4) and Winter (2 + 2) Games). In addition, the president's term of office was limited to twelve years, consisting of a first term of eight years, possibly followed by a further four years. The term for IOC members was set at eight years (renewable). These measures applied only to future members, which made it much easier to get them accepted. Nevertheless, Samaranch was not able to pass responsibility for choosing Olympic cities to the Executive Board (15 members) as Marc Holdler wished, rather than the general membership (maximum of $70 + 15 + 15 + 15 = 115$ members, see above), due to the staunch opposition of ordinary IOC members who would have lost their main power. In addition, 1999 saw the creation of an Ethics Commission and the adoption of a Code of Ethics intended to regulate the behaviour of the Olympic world. This commission was not very active during Samaranch's presidency.¹⁷ It even went as far as to exonerate a member who would be excluded under Samaranch's successor, who ensured the commission did its job to the full at the beginning of his presidency. These important reforms, as well as a number of transparency measures and the ban on IOC members visiting candidate cities, substantially bolstered the IOC's position in public opinion. Although Samaranch's resignation, demanded by the media, was no longer on the agenda, he had to testify (in Spanish) to the United States Congress in order to avoid restrictions being placed on the IOC's commercial dealings

¹⁷Chappelet, J.-L. (2005) "Une commission d'éthique pour la gouvernance du mouvement olympique", in *Ethique publique*, vol. 7, n°2, pp. 132–143.

in the US. Despite a similar scandal to the Salt Lake City affair, the last Olympics under Samaranch's presidency, held in Sydney in September 2000, were a great success. As these Games opened, Samaranch's wife succumbed to cancer. The president flew back to Barcelona in a private jet for her funeral, returning to the Olympic city a few days later.

Samaranch used the final year of his presidency to prepare his retirement and pave the way for his chosen successor, the polyglot Belgian Jacques Rogge, who, among other things, was president of the European Olympic Committees and the Sydney Coordination Commission, an orthopaedic surgeon and an Olympian (sailing at the 1968, 1972 and 1976 Games). Rogge had been co-opted to the IOC in 1991 and elected to the IOC Executive Board in 1998 thanks to Samaranch's support. At first, Samaranch had considered Jean-Claude Killy as his successor, but Killy had declined.

After the Presidency (2001–2010)

Before retiring, Samaranch made sure he would be given both a permanent seat on the IOC's Executive Board as an observer and the position of IOC honorary life president. Only Coubertin had been given this title before him and it would not be given to his successor, Jacques Rogge, who became merely an honorary president in 2013. As honorary life president, Samaranch's living expenses (hotel, transport, taxes, insurance, etc.), which amounted to US\$280,000 in 2009, the last published full year, continued to be paid by the IOC.¹⁸ Long before his retirement, Samaranch had decided that his successor would be elected by an IOC Session in Moscow on 16 July 2001, the same place he had been elected 21 years earlier to the day. There were five candidates: Jacques Rogge (elected in the second round with 59 votes), the Korean Un Yong Kim (23 votes), the Canadian Richard Pound (22 votes), the Hungarian Pal Schmitt (6 votes) and the American Anita DeFrantz, who was eliminated in the first round. Pound was

¹⁸IOC (1999) *Shaping the Future, IOC Interim Report 2009–2010*, Lausanne: IOC, p. 87.

very disappointed with the result. His knowledge of the ins and outs of the IOC, especially with respect to dealings with television networks and sponsors, had made him the favourite for 1997, but he had lost Samaranch's support due to his opposition, in 1995, to increasing the age limit for the president from 75 to 80, which Samaranch needed in order to be re-elected for his last term. (Rogge did not wish to raise the age limit, either, but he had expressed his opinion more discreetly.) Despite being tainted by his involvement in the Salt Lake City scandal (the details of which had been exposed by Pound), Kim finished ahead of Pound, only to be forced to resign from the IOC three years later. He attributed his defeat to Samaranch.

Now 81 years old Samaranch, returned to Lausanne the day after the election of his successor. After a few hours at the Palace Hotel, he was rushed to hospital suffering from the effects of the medication he had taken in order to keep going for the previous few days.¹⁹ He had to undergo dialysis for several months. Although he attended all the Olympic Games held before his death (Salt Lake City 2002, Athens 2004, Turin 2006, Beijing 2008 and, finally, Vancouver 2010), as a guest of honour, he had to be represented by his first vice-president at the ceremony to hand over the keys to Vidy to his successor, at the Olympic Museum on 20 July 2001.

Samaranch's three great successes were reforming the IOC in 1999 (turning a major crisis into an opportunity), achieving major changes in the notion of amateurism (which had risked making the IOC obsolete) and giving the IOC a solid financial base (through broadcasters and multinational sponsors). He summarised these reforms in a few catchy slogans, such as: "the best must take part in the Games" (hence, professionals as well as amateurs) and "the commercialisation of sport is the democratisation of sport" (to justify bringing in sponsors). As soon as he was elected, he worked hard to unify the Olympic Movement, under his guidance, by putting an end to the petty wrangling between the IOC, the NOCs and the IFs. From this point of view, he can be considered the first true "president of the Olympic

¹⁹Luzenfichter, A. and Vandeweghe, H. (2008) Jacques Rogge: "Pour la beauté du sport", Chapter 6 (Une prise de fonctions mouvementée), Paris: Prolongations, pp. 75–80.

Movement”. As IOC president, he was able to co-opt the president of the General (now Global) Assembly of International Sport Federations (GAISF), Un Yong Kim, from Korea, to the IOC, in place of the very critical Swiss, Thomas Keller (previous GAISF President). He began by dividing GAISF into three associations (IFs of summer sports, entrusted to Primo Nebiolo, IFs of winter sports, entrusted to Marc Hodler, and IFs of sports recognised by the IOC) in order to reduce GAISF’s power to share broadcasting rights among the IFs. Later, he would also get elected to the IOC, albeit with difficulty, the president of the NOCs, Mario Vázquez Raña, from Mexico.

In fact, during his presidency, Samaranch co-opted almost 200 members to the IOC (out of a total of approximately 400 members since its foundation), who remained grateful to him for many years, as is shown by the number of votes won by Madrid in the first round of voting to choose the hosts of the Summer Games in 2012 (20 votes), 2016 (28 votes) and, after Samaranch’s death, 2020 (26 votes). In 1981, he also co-opted the first women to the IOC. The only people he failed to co-opt were Peter Ueberroth (president of the Los Angeles OCOG, who had tried to limit members’ privileges during the 1984 Games) and Adolf Ogi (a former president of Switzerland and future advisor on sport to the Secretary General of the UN, whose election bid in 2001 failed because Switzerland already had five IOC members). On the other hand, in 2001—the last possible year—Samaranch succeeded in obtaining IOC membership for his son, Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr.

Samaranch died from heart failure, in Barcelona, on April 21, 2010²⁰ at almost 90 year-old. He had suffered a first heart attack in October 2009. Three ceremonies were to be carried out in his honour in three different cities: Barcelona, Lausanne and Singapore. In Barcelona, a civil ceremony in the Generalitat Palace (where a chapel of rest was set up and the ceremony ended with a rendition of *Amigos para siempre*, the official theme of the Barcelona Games) was followed by a service in Barcelona Cathedral, where the King and Queen of Spain, his

²⁰Longman, J. (2010), “Juan Antonio Samaranch, Who Transformed the Olympics, Dies at 89”, *The New York Times*, April 22, page A27. This article gives a very good summary of Samaranch’s Olympic career.

companion, Luisa Sallent, and the IOC President were among the mourners. Eight sportspeople, including the tennis player Rafael Nadal, carried the coffin between the two buildings and tributes were paid by world figures such as Fidel Castro, Vladimir Putin and Nicolas Sarkozy. He was then buried in a private ceremony at the Montjuic Cemetery, behind the 1992 Olympic stadium. The ceremony in Lausanne was held in the city's cathedral in May 2010 and was dedicated mostly to IOC Administration staff and the people of Lausanne. The Singapore ceremony, held in August 2010 in the local Catholic cathedral, was for IOC members, who were in the city for the first Youth Olympic Games, and who had not been able to come to Barcelona because of the suddenness of his death.

A museum in Barcelona and a stadium in Lausanne bear his name; however, a local controversy prevented a street in Barcelona being named after him.

Conclusion

Juan Antonio Samaranch's life was entirely inspired by sport. His commitment to Olympism undoubtedly dates back to 1955, when the hosting of the Mediterranean Games by his hometown aroused his interest in the IOC. Becoming involved in roller hockey, an important sport in post-war Spain, was a strategic choice, as he had quickly realised that he could never break through in a more established sport such as boxing or football, which he also played at a low level. Thanks to his family's fortune, he was able to raise himself to the top of roller hockey, both nationally and internationally, thereby allowing him to become an important figure in Spanish sport. He used his positions to make himself known and obtain favourable coverage from the press via contacts he cultivated from a very young age with the media. He even wrote a sports column for the Barcelona daily *La Prensa*. He was elected to the IOC in 1966 and, supported by the IOC's president (Brundage) and directors general (Mayer, then Berlioux), he quickly began climbing the ladder to the presidency. Samaranch achieved his goal in 1980, thanks

to votes from the Soviet bloc, which was grateful for his help in saving the Moscow 1980 Games from disaster following the American boycott.

During his long presidency of the IOC (1980–2001) he achieved an “Olympic Revolution” in which the Games became a truly global event (by welcoming every country, including China and post-apartheid South Africa, and all the best athletes, including professionals) and the IOC became a powerful NGO (with solid private finance), while pacifying internal discord, especially financial arguments between stakeholders (to foster the “unity of the Olympic Movement”). Thus, he implemented long-awaited reforms that his presidential predecessors (Brundage, then Killanin) did not want to or were unable to accomplish. Towards the end of his term, at the turn of the century, he even managed to modify the structure of the IOC, helped by pressure from the media and sponsors, which gave him the two-thirds majority of IOC members needed to make such profound changes and which even Samaranch sometimes found difficult to obtain. His successor wanted to depart from the IOC’s lenient culture under Samaranch, but did not achieve the necessary changes to maintain the IOC in the high position established by Samaranch.

Throughout his life, Samaranch took inspiration from Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Olympic Movement, who was an unequalled communicator and very pragmatic. Samaranch was similar to Coubertin in that he was a small man, he was always perfectly turned out (suit and tie), and he became honorary life president of the IOC (although Coubertin did not attend any of the Games after his retirement from the presidency in 1925). Samaranch used amateurism to his own ends, without really believing in it. He inaugurated an Olympic Museum in Lausanne, a city he liked so much he made it the administrative centre of world sport (bestowing on it the title “Olympic Capital”). He presided over the IOC by confiding the most difficult tasks to highly qualified lieutenants, most notably Richard Pound, Alexandre de Mérode, Mario Vázquez Raña, Primo Nebiolo, Keba Mbaye and Jacques Rogge, who he kept out of the media spotlight. Only Rogge would go on to become IOC president, overseeing a period of mere consolidation after the great entrepreneurial expansion of the IOC achieved by Samaranch.

Key Dates

- 1920: Born on 17 July in Barcelona.
- 1940: Recognition of his business degree obtained under the Spanish Republic.
- 1943: Coach of the roller hockey team of R.C. Español in Barcelona.
- 1947: Head coach of the Spanish roller-hockey team.
- 1950: Member of the International Roller Hockey Federation Executive Committee.
- 1951: Spain wins its first roller hockey world championships (in Barcelona).
- 1954: Spain becomes world roller hockey champion for the second time (in Barcelona).
- 1954: Municipal councillor of Barcelona.
- 1955: Vice-president of the organising committee of the second Mediterranean Games (in Barcelona).
- 1955: Marriage to María Teresa Salisachs Rowe.
- 1956: Catalonia's representative to Spain's national sports delegation.
- 1956: Member of the Spanish Olympic Committee.
- 1959: Birth of his son, Juan Antonio Jr., a future member of the IOC.
- 1961: Founder and president of the Spanish boat show in Barcelona.
- 1966: Member of the IOC for Spain.
- 1966: National delegate for sport (until 1970).
- 1967: President of the Spanish Olympic Committee.
- 1967: Elected member of the Cortes (lower house of the Spanish Parliament) with the biggest majority, he swears allegiance on the Bible in front of General Franco.
- 1968: IOC head of protocol.
- 1970: Elected member of the IOC Executive Board.
- 1971: Re-elected to the Cortes.
- 1973: Named president of Barcelona Provincial Council (Deputación) (until 1977).
- 1974: Elected IOC vice-president.
- 1977: Ambassador to the Soviet Union and Mongolia (with residence in Moscow).

- 1980: Elected IOC president on 16 July.
- 1985: Signs the TOP sponsorship contract with ISL (International Sport and Leisure) AG.
- 1986: Barcelona chosen to host the 1992 Olympic Games.
- 1987: President of La Caixa (until 1999).
- 1993: Opening of the Olympic Museum in Lausanne.
- 1994: 100th anniversary of the IOC and Centennial Olympic Congress in Paris.
- 1998: Start of the 'Salt Lake City scandal', which continued until 1999.
- 1999: IOC reform and testimony at the US Congress.
- 2000: Declares the Sydney Games "the best Games ever".
- 2001: Leaves the IOC presidency on 16 July and becomes IOC honorary life president.
- 2001: President of the Olympic Museum Foundation.
- 2010: Death in Barcelona on 21 April.

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