

# “Isn’t it true that the top of Mount Olympus is covered in snow?” Pierre de Coubertin and the Winter Olympic Games

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## Abstract

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This article examines the development of the Olympic Winter Games and Pierre de Coubertin’s views towards winter sports and the Winter Games in particular. While ice skating in principle had been on the list of desirable Olympic sports since the inaugural Olympic Congress at the Sorbonne in 1894, the lack of suitable facilities in most of the early host cities did not allow for skating competitions. The establishment of the Nordic Games in Sweden in 1901, Coubertin’s friendship with their founder Viktor Balck and the enduring resistance of the Scandinavian countries against Olympic Winter Games, delayed their development considerably. To Coubertin, the Winter Games, apparently were not a priority when seen in the bigger picture of his vision of Olympism. To him, the timely development of the Games to step by step implement new building bricks of his philosophy and the building of the Olympic Movement in order to achieve these goals took precedence. He did nonetheless follow a practical approach when the development and internationalization of winter sports, as well as the decline in Scandinavian resistance, brought forward the demand and opportunity to create the Olympic Winter Games.

## Keywords

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Pierre de Coubertin, Viktor Balck, Olympic Winter Games, Nordic Games, Olympism, Universalism

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## Introduction

Traditionally, the Olympic Winter Games and their genesis have received substantially less scholarly attention when compared to their «bigger brother», the Summer Games. For a long time, it has been a common understanding among scholars that the French 'Founding Father' of the modern Olympic Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937) generally did lack interest in winter sports, due to the comparably little amount he did write on this topic. Some assumed that he did not like the idea of their inclusion into the Olympic platform at all (cf. Krüger 1996, p.103). This argument was supported by the fact that Coubertin had been deeply fascinated and inspired by the Ancient Olympic Games, which had been held in Ancient Greece between 776 BC and 393 AD, - and which, for obvious reasons, did not comprise any winter sports. The consequential claim was that Coubertin, the «Hellenophile», wanted to shape his modern Games as close to their ancient precursor as practically possible. Supposedly further proof was provided by the fact that it had taken almost 30 years from the modern revival of the Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 until the Olympic Winter Games finally saw the light of day in Chamonix in 1924. And even more so because it only happened right at the very end of Coubertin's 29-year-long presidency of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Most of what we know about Coubertin's attitude towards establishing the Olympic Winter Games was written by him in retrospect of the events. In his Olympic memoirs, Coubertin gave a short epitome of the development of the Winter Games and their various challenges when he wrote about the Olympic Congress in Lausanne

in 1921, which paved the way towards the establishment of the Winter Games:

*«The series of «Olympic Congresses and Conferences» opened in an atmosphere of goodwill and understanding [...] in spite of some tricky questions that were raised and the heated discussions that were bound to follow. First among these was the problem of the «Winter Games». The Scandinavians did not want them at any price. In 1894, skating had been included in the list of desirable events. London, which possessed an «ice palace», had been able in 1908 to organize satisfactory events. But in 1912, Stockholm eagerly seized the argument that it had no suitable premises, in order to rid itself of the burden of organizing this event. However, in the last twenty-five years, winter sports had not only developed in a number of other countries but they were so truly amateur, so frank and so pure in their sporting dignity, that their complete exclusion from the Olympic program deprived it of much force and value. On the other hand, how were they to be organized?» (Müller (Ed.), 2000, p.488)*

## Winter Sports as Part of the Olympic Revival

A man who was to play a crucial role in the development of winter sports on the Olympic platform was Viktor Balck (1844-1924). Pierre de Coubertin first met the Swedish military officer at the congress for Physical Exercise during the World Fair in Paris in 1889 (cf. Kühn, 2019, p.97). Balck soon became a close confidant and friend of Coubertin. When the IOC was founded at the inaugural Olympic Congress at the Sorbonne in 1894, Balck was one of the apparent founding members. From early on, he belonged to the inner circle around Coubertin and remained there for more than 30 years. Balck was also president of the International Skating Union (ISU) and since ice skating already had established

international championships before the invention of the modern Olympic Games, it was decided to include them in the Olympic programme (cf. Krüger, 1996, p.103).

While the city of Athens did not have an artificial ice rink to arrange such skating competitions when the first edition of the modern Olympic Games was held in 1896, the organisers of the subsequent Games in Paris in 1900 discarded their initial plans to include ice skating in the programme as *«it was rarely practised in Paris»* (Mérillon 1901), even though the city had two artificial ice rinks (cf. Krüger 1996, p.103).

Due to the lack of suitable facilities, it took until the London Games in 1908 before ice skating events could eventually be included in the sports programme. The so-called «Winter Games»-portion of the London Games programme took place in October, months after most of the other Olympic competitions had been held. It comprised boxing, football, hockey and lacrosse alongside the only actual ice sport, a figure skating competition held at the 'Prince's Skating Club' in Knightsbridge.

### Nordic Games

Coming from Sweden, with its strong traditions in winter sports, Viktor Balck had proposed to Coubertin to arrange 'Winter Games' in Stockholm for the year 1900 as early as in 1897. Coubertin rejected this proposal (cf. Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano, 2021, p.1313). Balck, however, saw the opportunity to realise the idea in a Scandinavian context. Together with the main figures in Sweden's 'Central Association for the Promotion of Sports' (Sveriges Centralförening för Idrottens Främjande), he went on to initiate the installation of the «Nordic Games» as an international multisport event with anchoring

in winter sports, tourism and Swedish and Nordic culture. They did not conceal where the inspiration had been found, and about the ideas of their founding fathers, Balck wrote:

*“We agreed, that we in the Nordic countries had the resources in our winter sports to achieve competitive Games as valuable and voluminous as the Olympic ones, and that these would be called Nordic, partly to signify that they would belong to the Nordic countries as a united fellowship, partly also to show to the rest of the world, that the North in itself was a sporting power factor to respect, an independent people with veritable force.”* (Balck 1931, p.125)

The obvious equation to the Olympic Games was certainly not coincidental and was even used mutually: When Pierre de Coubertin reported of the first edition of the Nordic Games in Stockholm in 1901, which had turned out to be very successful, he described them as *«l'olympiad Scandinave»* and *«Olympiades Boréales»* (Kühn, 2019, p.100). Krüger (1996, p.105), argues that for Coubertin there was no need to have Winter Games at all, as their function and periodicity were established with the Nordic Games.

According to the initial plans of their Swedish founding fathers, the Nordic Games should alternate between the Scandinavian capitals of Stockholm, Kristiania and Copenhagen (cf. Jönsson 2001). This alternating cycle was most probably also inspired by the Coubertinian concept of the Olympic Games to - unlike their paragon in Ancient Olympia - be arranged in different cities of the World in order to foster international understanding and to disseminate the philosophy of Olympism. In this Scandinavian context, it was tailored to contribute to the mutual understanding between the people of the Nordic countries and help to build and strengthen a common Nordic identity, and not least to counteract

separatism on the Norwegian side. In the first place, however, the Nordic Games were formed with a goal of creating publicity for Sweden on the international arena: Sweden, as a strong nation and as a site of tourism, was to be advertised (Ljunggren 1996, p.36).

Despite the Swedish aspirations to strengthen Scandinavian unity, the Nordic Games soon became a political platform for the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian Union when the Norwegians boycotted the Nordic Games in 1905. After the Norwegians broke away from the Swedish crown, the Swedish hosts answered by not inviting them to the next edition in 1909 (cf. Kühn, 2019).

Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano (2021, p.1317) refer to Coubertin's friend Messerli who claimed that Coubertin actually started considering the viability of the IOC holding Winter Games, separate from the Summer Games, in 1910 on the face of Sweden's decision to exclude Norway from the Nordic Games *«as Sweden's actions reduced the function of the Games from a truly international event ... to a national political vehicle»*.

### Stockholm 1912

With Balck being the driving force behind the bid, the decision was taken during the IOC session in Berlin in 1909, that the Olympic Games in 1912 were to be celebrated in Stockholm. During his speech proposing to the IOC-members to elect the Swedish capital as the next host city, Coubertin highlighted the ability of the Swedish to successfully organize the Nordic Games, which could even serve as a model for the Olympic Games (cf. Jönsson, 2002, p.66).

With the Nordic Games and the strong position of winter sports in the hosting country as a background, the question of their inclusion

into the Games programme in Stockholm arose quite naturally. At the IOC session held in Luxembourg in 1910, the programme for the upcoming Games was on the agenda. The British IOC member Courcy-Laffan asked Balck whether winter sports were considered. Balck answered that none were planned due to the Nordic Games already being scheduled for February 1913. Following the protests from several members, Balck declared that he could prepare a winter sports programme for 1912 and present it at the next IOC session in the following year (cf. Edgeworth, 2009, p.71). But when the Italian member Count Brunetta D'Usseaux picked up again on the issue at the IOC Session in Budapest in May 1911 and reminded Balck of his promise from the previous session to examine the possibilities of a winter sports programme, the answer still remained the same: Winter sports could not be considered, because of the Nordic Games already being scheduled for 1913. Several members were not satisfied and questioned the Swedish position. Brunetta D'Usseaux then came up with the proposal to 'annex' the Nordic Games to the official programme of the Stockholm Games. But again, Viktor Balck rejected the proposal and on the face of the independence of «his» Nordic Games being threatened, Balck insisted: "Organisationally, the Nordic Games is, and must remain, a Nordic affair." (Jönsson, 2002, p. 66).

The lively discussions, however, revealed that a substantial number of IOC members were now in favour of the inclusion of winter sports into the programme. According to Jönsson (2002, p.66), Coubertin intervened, knowing that this matter was of the utmost importance to his friend Balck: It was decided that the Nordic Games could not be made a part of the Stockholm Games. Here, Coubertin provided

a pragmatical leadership as he certainly did not want to snub the Swedish hosts. He was well aware that he himself was dependent on them for the realisation of two of his own pet projects that arguably were closer to his heart than the winter sports: The introduction of the art competitions and the modern pentathlon into the Games programme in 1912. «*Not including them would mean 'the failure of the Olympics' for Coubertin and would mean losing his interest in the Games, as he wrote in 1911 to Blonay and Balck.*» (Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano, 2021, p.1318)

Such, the Olympic Games took place in the 'country of winter sports' but did not involve any of them, due to competition with the Nordic Games (Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano, 2021, p.1314).

### **1916 - The first «Winter Games» that never happened**

At the IOC session held in conjunction with the Games in Stockholm, Berlin was elected to host the next edition of the Games scheduled for 1916. In the first drafts of the programme, the organisers planned for a separate winter sports week at Feldberg in the Black Forest in Southern Germany to take place in February 1916, a couple of months ahead of the actual Olympic Games in Berlin.

Somewhat ironically, it was the Norwegian delegation to the Olympic Congress in Paris in 1914 who formally proposed to take it a step further and make the proposed 'Winter Sports Week' at Feldberg a fully officially recognised Olympic event. This happened to be the only time a Scandinavian country ever advocated the establishment of an Olympic winter sports event (cf. Kleppen, 2014). Up to this point, and soon after again, the Norwegians, together with the Swedes, had been the most hard-

fought opponents of the idea of winter sports on the Olympic platform, in fear of their prestigious Holmenkollen Ski Festival. Despite being an episodic exception, the Norwegian proposal was approved with a vast majority by the members of the Paris congress. Such the stage was set for the first official and separate Olympic winter sports event to take place in Germany in 1916.

The outbreak of WWI only a short time after this decision had been taken in 1914, however, spoiled the plans for the Olympic Games in 1916 and for what probably could have become the first edition of the Olympic Winter Games.

After the end of WWI, the decisions taken at the Paris Congress in 1914 were not followed up upon. Regarding the preparations for the Games in Antwerp in 1920, the IOC concluded that the decisions taken in 1914 concerning the Olympic programme were not binding, which also affected the status of winter sports within the Olympic framework (cf. Krüger, 1997).

### **Coubertin, the winter sports and priorities**

But why was Coubertin so reluctant to follow up on the decisions taken in 1914? Particularly in regard to the Olympic Winter Games, which due to the vote of the congress most probably would have seen their debut in 1916? Was it because he was against the idea of Winter Games in general? Did he see the forced halt in the proceedings as an opportunity to make away with some unbeloved decisions made concerning the future programme of the Games as some have suggested (cf. Kleppen, 2014, p.86-89)?

One crucial factor that has not been considered quite enough in the literature regarding the

establishment of the Winter Games, is that the Olympic Movement still was premature and quite vulnerable at this particular point in time. The early years had been exceptionally challenging, and the Games in Paris, St. Louis and London had all suffered from being held in conjunction with the World Fairs. It was the Games in Stockholm in 1912 that had come to the rescue. Today, they are widely considered to be the breakthrough for the Games after the troubling early years (cf. Molzberger, 2012, p. 7f.). Obviously, this sought-after success was put into considerable danger when the following edition of the Games had to be canceled due to the outbreak of WWI instead of building upon the recent achievements of the Stockholm Games. Further, the war situation had also brought some significant changes to the Olympic realities, such as the relocation of Coubertin and the office of the IOC from Paris to Lausanne in Switzerland, due to the country's neutrality and safety regulations concerning private entities. In this vulnerable situation, further spreading of the activity beyond the core of the Games could have posed an enormous risk.

At the same time, Coubertin had a clear plan of which steps he wanted to take in order to further refine his vision of the Olympic Games, as for example with the introduction of the art competitions and the modern pentathlon in Stockholm in 1912. To him, the timely development of the Games to step by step implement new building bricks of his philosophy and the building of the Olympic Movement in order to achieve these goals took precedence.

As of Coubertin's personal thinking concerning the fit of winter sports into the Olympic platform, Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano (2020, p.1316) have examined that it

evolved slowly. One might want to add that it evolved alongside the general development of winter sports in Europe and Northern America, as it became evident in the growing demand within the IOC for their inclusion, too.

In an article published in the *Revue Olympique* in 1908, Coubertin elaborated on the value of winter sports. Coubertin clearly preferred sports with military or aesthetic value, as well as individual merit over team sports. As for luge and bobsleigh, Krüger (1996, p.104) writes that despite Coubertin being fascinated by speed and knowing everything about their development, he regarded them as «*completely useless*» as they lacked any utilitarian application (Krüger, 1996, p. 104). The alpine skiers, he considered to be *fétards*, fun-seekers, hipped on elitism and tourism and therefore unworthy of Olympic recognition (cf. Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano, 2021, p.1316).

Some winter sports though, had clearly desirable attributes, such as ice skating because of its elegance and the pursuit of the «perfect» aesthetic movement and Nordic Skiing (Cross Country) for its purity, the strive of man against the elements and the military utility (cf. Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano, 2021, p.1316). The awarding of the polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen with the Olympic Diploma by Coubertin in 1905 for his outstanding accomplishments (on skis) confirms this understanding (cf. Kühn, 2019, pp.101-104). As for ice skating, Krüger (1996, p. 103) argues that Coubertin had practised it himself and that for him it had become «*an almost universal exercise*».

And did Coubertin disapprove of winter sports in the Olympic Games? He described his vision of a «*modern Olympia*» in a series of articles in the *Revue Olympique* published

between October 1909 and February 1910. About the desirable programme he wrote:

*«When the Olympic Games were restored in 1894, it was stipulated that to the extent possible, they should include all the forms of exercise in use throughout the modern world. This hope was fully realized at the Fourth Olympiad, held in London in 1908.»* (Revue Olympique, Le Programme des Jeux, December 1909, pp.184-187).

This obviously includes winter sports. Although they were not mentioned among the five major divisions of sports identified by Coubertin (athletic and gymnastic sports, sports of combat, water sports, equestrian sports and games), he further wrote: *«It would be better to adopt a solution in which these special sports are grouped together in winter, under the title ‘Northern Games’»* (Revue Olympique, Le Programme des Jeux, December 1909, pp.184-187).

### Antwerp 1920

After the end of the war in 1918, the Olympic Games were successfully resumed in Antwerp in 1920. Apart from featuring a number of prominent and enduring novelties to the Olympic ceremonial like the Olympic Flag, the athlete’s oath, and the release of white doves as symbols of unity, respect and peace in the sense of Coubertin’s enforced concept of Olympism, these Games also featured the return of figure skating and the introduction of an ice hockey tournament into the Olympic programme. According to Renson (1996, p.150), the cheer existence of the city’s ice rink, the ‘Palais de Glace d’Anvers’, can be seen as the sole – and somewhat random-reason why winter sports featured on the Games programme for the second time after London 1908. Otto Schantz (1995) has argued that this conclusion falls short of the sport political dimension in the light of the

different positions within the IOC in regard to winter sports.

### IOC congress in Lausanne in 1921

The IOC congress in Lausanne featured the issue of winter sports prominently in 1921 and marked the most significant milestone for the creation of the Olympic Winter Games. A proposal by the French, the Swiss and the Canadian IOC members to organise winter sports competitions under the patronage of the IOC in all host countries that were able to organise such events, was adopted (cf. Krüger, 1996, p.108).

While the resistance among the Scandinavian sports administrators remained unbroken, the strongest opponent of Olympic Winter Games within the IOC, Viktor Balck, had retired from his membership earlier the same year. He was succeeded by his compatriot (and later IOC president) Sigfried Edström (1870-1964), who in his role as vice-president of the organising committee had been prominently involved in the success of the Stockholm Games in 1912. In this function, he also participated in the IOC sessions in 1910 and 1911 as a guest (cf. Molzberger, 2012, p.49). Hence, he must have been very familiar with the history of the discussions regarding the status of winter sports within the IOC. Edström was more amicable towards the idea of Olympic Winter Games. Under his mediation, a compromise was found in which the IOC would grant its patronage to an ‘International Winter Sports Week’ in Chamonix in 1924, *«but without forming an integral part of the Olympic Games»* (cf. Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano, 2021, p.1321).

Thus, a convention of speech was necessary to secure Scandinavian participation in Chamonix, which Edström realised was crucial for the success of the event (Pérez-

Aragón & Viuda-Serrano, 2021, p.1322). Only upon the condition that the competitions under no circumstances be associated with the term 'Olympic', the Scandinavians would participate. Further, visually distinctive medals and diplomas were to be awarded and had to differ from the ones for the Summer Games in Paris (Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano, 2021, p.1323).

### Chamonix 1924

Accordingly, the 'International Winter Sports Week' was successfully carried out in Chamonix between January 25th and February 4th 1924. Around 260 athletes from 16 different nations participated. The programme encompassed competitions in Nordic skiing, speed skating, figure skating, ice hockey, military patrol (a predecessor of today's biathlon), curling and 4-man bobsleigh. For Norway, the competitions turned out to be a huge sporting success. Despite their resistance towards the event, they were eager to send their best athletes for the fame of the nation. At home, a well-known Norwegian sports newspaper rejoiced in a headline that still has iconic status in Norway today: *«We have shown the world the winter way»* (Norsk Idrætsliv, February 1 1924, p.1).

Despite the public enthusiasm about the results, the competitions at Chamonix were not yet part of the official Olympic programme, and the reservation among the Scandinavian sports officials against such new constellations remained prevalent.

During the closing ceremony of the Winter Sports Week, however, IOC president Coubertin already set the stage for the coming manifestation of the Winter Games as an integral part of the Olympic platform when he said:

*«Winter sports are amongst the purest, and that is why I was so eager to see them take their place in a definitive way amongst Olympic events. They will help us to keep a watchful eye on the athletic ideal, to keep it from all evil. In practice, there are, of course, great difficulties in carrying out this plan, but an initial experience like this one we just have had is a precious advantage.»* (Müller (Ed.), 2000, p.524)

Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano (2021, p.1323), instead, point out that Coubertin's claim of long-time support for winter sports did not align with his actions. On the contrary, they portray Coubertin himself as the main obstacle to the development of the Winter Games by enabling Balck to create the Nordic Games, not being interested in winter sports while prioritising his own projects at the expense of the Winter Games.

Nonetheless, it has to be acknowledged that Coubertin proved to be a strategic mind and followed his own master plan for the consolidation of his Olympic project. When the development and growing internationalisation of winter sport finally forced the establishment of an Olympic event, he showed his outstanding rhetorical talent by taking ownership of the success and by making the Winter Games look like the most natural addition even to the hellenophile traditionalists within the IOC:

*«Thanks to the Olympic Winter Games [...] the winter sports became an integral part of the Olympic Games. Since 1884 this possibility has been taken into consideration and partly realised. And why not? The top of Mount Olympus is covered with snow, isn't it? ...»* (Coubertin, 1928, p.6)

### Finally «Olympic»

At the IOC session in Prague in 1925, Pierre de Coubertin retired as IOC president and Henri Baillet-Latour (1876-1942) was elected



to succeed him. In regard to the Winter Games, the decision was taken to continue with the form of separate events for winter sports and assign the new Games their own individual cycle. At the same time, it was proposed to make the Winter Sports Week in Chamonix the official starting point for this cycle in hindsight. Finally, at their 1926 meeting in Lisbon, the IOC assigned the Chamonix Winter Sports Week the title of “1st Olympic Winter Games” and awarded St. Moritz with the organisation of the upcoming second edition in 1928 (cf. Pérez-Aragón & Viuda-Serrano, 2021, p.1323).

As Arnd Krüger (1996, p. 109-110) rightfully asserts, the Scandinavians would very probably have refrained from participating in the ‘International Winter Sports Week’ at all, if they had known in advance that these events would eventually become Olympic Winter Games. And indeed, the Scandinavian reactions to the developments were not friendly. The newly elected IOC president Henri Baillet-Latour invited the international winter sport federations to collaborate for the continuing success of the Winter Games and addressed the Scandinavian resisters directly: *«The winter sports cannot remain exclusively in the hands of the northern countries, when those countries themselves have made the world appreciate their qualities.»* (cf. Kleppen, 2014, p.129)

### **Cease of the Nordic Games**

The rise of the Olympic Winter Games contributed at the same time to the demise of their most prominent precursor. According to Edgeworth (2009, p. 73), the cease of the Nordic Games after their seventh and final edition in 1926 can be linked to three factors: Firstly, the recent installation and growth of the Olympic Winter Games, the death of

their primus motor Viktor Balck in 1928, and finally the growth of the Fédération Internationale de Ski (FIS) which had been founded in connection to the Chamonix Games in 1924. Several attempts to revive the Nordic Games after 1926 failed (cf. Jönsson, 2001, pp. 304-316).

### **Coubertin's Posthumous Influence on the Winter Games**

The road towards the consolidation of the Winter Games as an Olympic event in its own right had proven to be long and winding. However, the turmoil surrounding them did by no means end there, and Coubertin's alleged attitudes towards the Winter Games continued to play an important role still after his death in 1937.

The IOC presidency of American Avery Brundage between 1952 and 1972 was characterised by boundless ideologization regarding the Coubertinian understanding of Olympic virtues and the question of amateurism in particular. This conflict spectacularly culminated in the exclusion of Austrian Alpine skier Karl Schranz from the Winter Games in Sapporo in 1972, due to an alleged violation of the rigid amateur regulations. To Brundage, the question of amateurism had become the single biggest threat to the Olympic idea in general and the Winter Games in particular. As his biographer Allen Guttman (1984) put it, Brundage *«went on a crusade to do away with the Winter Games»*. Brundage, interestingly, would refer regularly to Coubertin in his agitation against the legitimacy of the Winter Games. He was deeply convinced that Coubertin had always been against the Winter Games and put forward two main arguments to illustrate the incompatibility of the Olympic ideal and the

Winter Games: To him, they neither met the fundamental Olympic values of amateurism nor universalism. Coubertin himself, on the contrary, admitted in his Olympic memoirs that the question of amateurism had never been of particular interest to him and that it only had served him as a plug to catch the interest of his contemporary sports administrators, who were quite concerned about it, for his Olympic idea (cf. Coubertin, 1936, p.109).

According to Schantz (1995), the banning of Karl Schranz from the Sapporo Games *«was intended to set an example, but proved in reality to be nothing but a last unsuccessful attempt to defend an Olympic ideal which had long been irreconcilable with social realities»*. Schantz further asserted that, ultimately, there were only two logical solutions: *«either to adapt the Olympic ideal to the changed conditions of modern sport or to abolish the Winter Games altogether»*.

During the subsequent presidencies of Lord Killanin (1972–1980) and Juan Antonio Samaranch (1980-2001), the IOC gradually turned away from the ideological turf battles of the Brundage years and followed an increasingly more pragmatic approach in an attempt to adapt the Olympic regulations to the demands and realities of modern sports.

While the concept of Olympic amateurism today is no longer an argument against the compatibility of the Winter Games with the Olympic idea, the question of universalism remains very much relevant up to today and has been subject to criticism. Martínková & Parry (2020) raise the point that the very narrow definition of winter sports, as it is laid down in the Olympic Charter, undermines some central values of the Olympic Movement. By encompassing *«only sports that are practised on ice and snow»*, they argue that the definition of

sports in the Winter Games fails to cohere with the values of universalism, internationality and inclusion by effectively excluding participants from areas without natural preconditions or infrastructure to practise such sports. In this regard, the «Winter Games» section of the London Games in 1908, containing, for example, football, hockey and boxing, could be an example of a more global and universal approach to the Olympic Winter Games.

## Conclusion

Although winter sports, and in particular ice skating, had figured on the list of desirable sports for the Olympic programme already since the inaugural Olympic Congress at the Sorbonne in 1894, it took until the middle of the 1920s before they were to find their final position among Olympic sports through the establishment of their own Olympic Winter Games cycle. While climatic and technical limitations had stopped the realisation of skating competitions in most of the early editions of the Games, the establishment of the Nordic Games in Sweden in 1901 and the enduring resistance of the Scandinavian countries against an Olympic Winter Sports event in fear of their own national winter sport events, as well as Pierre de Coubertin's restraint to push forward with the Winter Games have delayed this process considerably. To Coubertin, the inclusion of winter sports into the Olympic Games programme, apparently was not a priority when seen in the bigger picture of his vision of Olympism. To him, the timely development of the Games to step by step implement new building bricks of his philosophy and the building of the Olympic Movement in order to achieve these goals took precedence. Therefore, he was more concerned with the consolidation

of the Games through their challenging early period, their survival after WWI and - not least, the realization of other aspects of his eurythmic Olympic vision. While he clearly acknowledged the inherent value of some of the winter disciplines in regard to his educational ideas, he did not actively encourage the organisers to include any of them in the Olympic Games. He did nonetheless follow a practical approach when the development and internationalization of winter sports, as well as the decline in Scandinavian influence and resistance, brought forward the demand and opportunity to create the Olympic Winter Games and facilitate them into his broader framework of Olympism.

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