

Listening to the Locals, Promoting His Presidential Agenda: Lord Killanin's 1973 Latin American Tour

Cesar R. TORRES

SUNY Brockport - Department of Kinesiology, Sport Studies, and Physical Education

crtorres@brockport.edu

Abstract

In 1972, Lord Killanin succeeded Avery Brundage as president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Early in his tenure as IOC president, Killanin received an invitation to attend the twelfth congress of the Pan-American Sports Organization to be held in Santiago, Chile in late May 1973. He embraced the opportunity and transformed the trip to Chile into a tour that included several Latin American countries. This article traces Killanin's Latin American tour, touching upon the major developments of each stopover, including accomplishments and complications, and their significance. In doing so, this article shows that by heeding the concerns, successes, and projects of those in charge of regional Olympic and sport bureaucracies, Killanin gained a thorough understanding, and formed an opinion, of the organization as well as the state of Olympic and sport matters in the region. At the same time, this article also demonstrates that Killanin took advantage of the journey throughout Latin America to consolidate and enlarge his network of contacts in the region and to familiarize regional Olympic, sport, and political leaders, and the general public, with his vision for the Olympic Movement.

Keywords

Lord Killanin, Latin America, 1973, Reforms, International Olympic Committee

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In 1972, Irishman Michael Morris, also known as Lord Killanin for his nobility title, succeeded US American Avery Brundage as president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). As Robert K. Barney explained, Brundage, who held the presidency for twenty years, “might well qualify as the most controversial, authoritarian, and at times challenged President in IOC history” (2024, p. 9).¹ Killanin would likely agree with this assessment. He affirmed that the 1972 presidential election was riddled with “manoeuvring and restlessness, which had already lasted several years[,]” caused by “the character of my predecessor—his rocklike conservatism, strong prejudices, and spirit of tough independence” (1983, p. 57).² At the beginning of the 1970s, the IOC, and more generally the Olympic Movement, was ready, and perhaps eager, for a change of leadership.³ After his election in August 1972, Killanin tried to live up to this expectation for renewal, admitting that “his [Brundage’s] autocratic ways in running the Olympic Movement were different from my own” (1983, p. 59). He made a point of listening to the different stakeholders of the Olympic Movement as well as to let them know his position in a number of pressing issues affecting it, which diverged from that of Brundage’s.

Early in his tenure as IOC president, Killanin received an invitation to attend the twelfth congress of the Pan-American Sports Organization (PASO) to be held in Santiago, Chile in late May 1973. He embraced the

opportunity and transformed the trip to Chile into a tour that included several Latin American countries. Killanin’s visit to the region created much expectation. For instance, before landing in Brazil, the first stopover of the tour, *Folha de São Paulo*, a newspaper based in that city, described Killanin, in comparison to Brundage, as noteworthy for his “irreverence and revolutionary ideas” and expected him to reveal his intended reforms for the Olympic Movement during his stay in the country.⁴ Similarly, towards the end of the tour, *El Tiempo*, a Colombian newspaper based in Bogotá, highlighted Killanin’s belief that the reforms were needed and his declaration that he was not a dictator but rather perceived himself to be an “orchestra director that wants to put all instruments in order, to be able to interpret good music.”⁵ In over two weeks, he met with regional Olympic, sport, and political leaders, visited numerous institutions, held several press conferences, and participated in functions honoring him.

This article traces Killanin’s Latin American tour of May and June 1973, touching upon the major developments of each stopover, including accomplishments and complications, and their significance. In doing so, this article shows that by heeding the concerns, successes, and projects of those in charge of regional Olympic and sport bureaucracies, Killanin gained a thorough understanding, and formed an opinion, of the organization as well as the state of Olympic and sport matters in the region. At the same time, this article also demonstrates that Killanin took advantage of the journey

1 For a biography of Brundage see Guttman (1984).

2 For overviews of Killanin’s presidency, see Berlioux (2015) and Martyn & Wenn (2008).

3 For a general account of this period of Olympic history, see Guttman (2002).

4 “O irônico Lorde Killanin dia 21 aqui”, *Folha de São Paulo* (São Paulo), May 14, 1973, p. 24.

5 “El amateurismo necesita reformas”: Lord Killanin”, *El Tiempo* (Bogotá), June 2, 1973, p. 3C.

throughout Latin America to consolidate and enlarge his network of contacts in the region and to familiarize regional Olympic, sport, and political leaders, and the general public, with his vision for the Olympic Movement. In short, in the tour, Killanin engaged diverse voices from across Latin America's Olympic, sport, and political circles in conversation to learn about them, but also for them to become acquainted with his presidential agenda. In that initial period of his presidency, Killanin, still all hopeful, had not yet realized, to use his words, "the burdens that lay ahead" (1983, p. 62). It is worth noting that the tour has been overlooked in the Olympic studies literature and that, to accomplish its goal, this article draws primarily on newspapers and magazine articles, documents from the IOC Archives, and Killanin's biography.

Brazil

Killanin started the Latin American tour in Rio de Janeiro, where he arrived on May 21. João Havelange, a Brazilian IOC member and the president of the *Confederação Brasileira de Desportos* (Brazilian Sports Confederation [BSC]), and a delegation of the *Comitê Olímpico Brasileiro* (Brazilian Olympic Committee [BOC]) met him at the airport. As he put it, "a very full program of activities was arranged[.]"⁶ enabling him to meet with national Olympic, sport, and political leaders. The following day, Killanin spent several

hours visiting the BSC in the company of Havelange. According to the press, he was enthusiastic with what he witnessed there and commended the organization of Brazilian sport, accentuating the work of the BSC.⁷ Killanin later explained that the latter was "a semi-Governmental Body financed by the Minister of Education."⁸ On May 23, the BOC convened a special meeting, led by Sylvio de Magalhães Padilha, its president and also a Brazilian IOC member, "to express our feelings of gratitude for this honourable visit and the privilege of our country having been the beginning of this visit to the American Continent."⁹ In the name of the BOC, Magalhães Padilha awarded Killanin "the Medal of the Olympic Order" and expressed certainty that the new IOC president "will attain the great aim which you already proclaimed 'To structure the reform of olympism of the year 2000 and to guarantee in this manner the continuity of this gigantic and irreplaceable work.'"¹⁰ In turn, Killanin gave a speech and, while it was not written out, he thought that "it seemed to be well received, especially the fact that I stressed that we had more to do than just run the Olympic Games, or for NOCs [National Olympic Committees] only to be responsible to making entries."¹¹

7 "Olímpicas," *Diario de Noticias* (Rio de Janeiro), May 23, 1973, p. 11.

8 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 1.

9 Speech by Sylvio de Magalhães Padilha, "A-P06/077 IOC Presidents-Michael Killanin," IOC Archives.

10 Ibid.

11 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 1.

6 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 1, "A-P06/077 IOC Presidents-Michael Killanin: Trip programmes, Central America and South America trips: Correspondence, programme, publication and reports" (hereafter "A-P06/077 IOC Presidents-Michael Killanin"), International Olympic Committee Archives (hereafter IOC Archives).

Following Killanin's speech to the BOC, he held a press conference. Apparently, the questions were submitted and selected in advance.¹² For the press, Killanin minced words. While he agreed that international amateur sport was going through a difficult stage, he reasoned that the issues could be solved with the help of the NOCs. Killanin referred to three main problems. One was whether professional athletes should be allowed to participate in the Olympic Games. In this regard, Killanin said that the IOC was going to review rule 26 of the *Olympic Charter*, which detailed the "eligibility code" for athletes at the Olympic Games, to adapt it to the changing times, but clarified that no concessions that could harm Olympism would be allowed.¹³ The second problem was the size of the Olympic Games. He elaborated that the IOC was studying ways to cut the cost of the event and contain its growth. The last problem was political: the development of sport. Killanin stressed that governments should support sport at all levels and for all people. These three main problems would be reiterated along the Latin American tour. Asked about racism, and specifically the circumstances in South Africa, he argued that it was a universal problem that did not affect Brazil. Without any elaboration, he wrote that "It would appear that in Brazil, which is a multi-racial country, the situation in regard to Latin America and South Africa is somewhat different to the other countries which are less multi-racial."¹⁴ Killanin also said that the

12 "Olímpicas," *Diario de Noticias*, May 23, 1973, p. 11.

13 See International Olympic Committee (1973).

14 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 3.

return of China to the Olympic fold should follow the established procedure and that until then the Soviet Union was the only candidate to host the Olympic Games in 1980.¹⁵

On May 24, Killanin flew to Brasília on a chartered plane with Havelange, along with Jerônimo Bastos, president of the *Conselho Nacional de Desportos* (National Sports Council), and Eric Tinoco Marques, a sport official, to meet with Jarbas Passarinho, the minister of education of the Brazilian military government, who oversaw national sport. It was announced that in the evening of the same day, Killanin would attend a gymnastics demonstration with President Emílio Garrastazu Médici.¹⁶ It was also announced that the latter could request of Killanin that São Paulo become the host city of the Olympic Games in 1980.¹⁷ It is unclear whether the two men met or not and whether the request was made, but Killanin had a positive impression of his trip to Brasília, observing that "it appears again that the close liaison between the voluntary bodies and the Ministry [of Education] are excellent and there was no question of any sort of Government domination."¹⁸ Satisfied with the first stopover of the Latin American tour, the next day Killanin took off to Montevideo, Uruguay from Rio de Janeiro. Before boarding

15 "Olímpicas," *Diario de Noticias*, May 24, 1973, p. 11 and "Killanin fala, mas mede bem suas palavras," *Jornal do Sports* (Rio de Janeiro), May 24, 1973, p. 9.

16 "Olímpicas," *Diario de Noticias*, May 23, 1973, p. 11; "Olímpicas," *Diario de Noticias*, May 24, 1973, p. 11; and "Na maneira de ser, un verdadeiro britânico," *Jornal do Sports*, May 24, 1973, p. 9.

17 "Lord vai contact como vê os jogos," *Jornal do Sports*, May 23, 1973, p. 9.

18 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 2.

the plane, he went with Havelange to the airport's chapel to pray, "showing himself to be," as stated in a newspaper's article, "a fervent Catholic."¹⁹ On the occasion, Killanin also condemned the internecine strife in his country between Catholics and Protestants.²⁰

Uruguay

Héctor Payssé Reyes, its president, and other members of the *Comité Olímpico Uruguayo* (Uruguayan Olympic Committee [UOC]) welcomed Killanin at the airport in Montevideo. Right after his arrival, he paid protocolar visits to several government officials. These included democratically elected Vice president Jorge Sapelli because President Juan María Bordaberry was in Buenos Aires, Argentina for the presidential installation of Héctor J. Cámpora, who had won the elections in March, taking place that same day, May 25. Killanin's impression of the meetings with government officials as well as national Olympic and sport leaders was favorable, manifesting that "again there appeared to be the most correct and wise co-operation between the Government administration and the National Olympic Committee, which is quite independent."²¹ Before being honored by the UOC, Killanin held a press conference. In his judgement, "the press here again was similar to those in Rio. In addition to local questions, some of a slightly political nature, there were the usual

19 "Olímpicas," *Diario de Noticias*, May 26, 1973, p. 11.

20 *Ibid.* See also *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro) May 26, 1973, p. 11.

21 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 2.

routine questions regarding Eligibility, China, South Africa."²² He told reporters that he was against professionalism at the Olympic Games. He also told them that it was inevitable that politics and sport converged, adding that what he did not like was being pressured by political cliques. For him, the decisions of the IOC should be sport decisions, not political decisions. As for expanded representation in the IOC, he expressed that if it ever became an organization similar to the United Nations, it would not be in the best interest of the youth of the world.²³

The following day, Killanin barely had time to draw breath. From early in the morning to late at night, he visited sport clubs and venues, attended a show jumping exhibition and a rugby match, met with Alfredo Inciarte, an Uruguayan IOC member, and participated in social functions. Killanin noted that, "as in Brazil, I visited many sports installations and felt that there was a very different situation between the two countries. This I think is largely economic."²⁴ He specified that "Rio, with its very large population and growing economy has of course far better facilities than Uruguay, which is in [a] more difficult economic situation."²⁵ In another comparative observation, he recalled sensing a "'class' distinction in Uruguay where the best facilities are all in privately owned clubs

22 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

23 Con Lord Killanin. *Conceptos de nuevo Presidente del Comité Olímpico Internacional*, vertidos en Conferencia de Prensa, "A-P06/077 IOC Presidents-Michael Killanin," IOC Archives.

24 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 2.

25 *Ibid.*

of a somewhat colonial nature.”²⁶ He was confident that his thoughts were well founded because during his visit he had “covered a fairly large section”²⁷ of Uruguayan Olympic and sport terrain.

After his ample visit to Uruguay, Killanin was supposed to depart for Buenos Aires on May 27 and spend the night in the Argentine capital to fly to Santiago the following morning. However, that plan changed abruptly. Argentine Fernando Madero, president of the *Comité Olímpico Argentino* (Argentine Olympic Committee [AOC]), who had travelled to Montevideo to accompany Killanin, in consultation with Buenos Aires, thought imprudent he visited the city two days after Cámpora assumed the presidency. Killanin explained that “it was obviously not very advisable of me to go to the Argentine where my presence would only give additional problems to the Police.”²⁸ Perhaps Madero was also influenced by the massive mobilizations taking place in Buenos Aires, and the whole of Argentina those days, celebrating that a Peronist politician was again president of the nation after Juan Domingo Perón’s party had been proscribed since 1955.²⁹ At any rate, Killanin enjoyed an extra day in Montevideo. He went shopping, followed by a dozen plainclothes policemen, but an inferiority complex overcame him “when it come to going into shops and buying small souvenirs for half a dollar; I felt my escorts would be

expecting the IOC president to be patronizing at the Asprey or Hermés of Montevideo” (1983, 51).

Argentina³⁰

Due to the abrupt change in his itinerary, Killanin was supposed to have only a brief layover in Buenos Aires of less than two and a half hours on his way to Santiago. However, the ordinary incidents of commercial air travel converted the brief layover into a short stay of eight hours at the airport. The flight from Rio de Janeiro that would take him to Santiago was delayed because of weather conditions. Killanin was greeted at the airport by Madero, Otto R. Schmitt, secretary general of the AOC, and his wife, and Mario L. Negri, an Argentine IOC member, and his wife and son. Negri, who was 84 years old and had then some medical difficulties, was contemplating resigning from the IOC. He discussed with Killanin a potential successor.³¹ Killanin had a pleasant afternoon with the Argentines, but the VIP treatment he was extended caused an amusing problem. His passport was taken from him to avoid queuing at the immigration checkpoint. Claiming that “there was a lot of shooting in the city that day,” maybe justifying the change in his itinerary, Killanin “felt that my Argentine friends might wish to get home as early as possible” (1983, p. 51). Thus, he told them not to await his departure and his passport was duly returned to him. When he went through the immigration checkpoint, Killanin was told that he could not leave the country because he had not formally

26 Ibid., p. 3.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., p. 4.

29 For introductory accounts of this period of Argentine history, see, among others, Novaro (2016) and Romero (2013).

30 Torres (2023a) describes this stopover.

31 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 4.

arrived. "They had forgotten to stamp my passport on my arrival in Buenos Aires," he recounted, "and a somewhat bureaucratic emigration officer said he couldn't stamp my passport to allow me to leave Buenos Aires as I hadn't arrived!"³² After some time, a superior stamped his passport to show that he had passed through the immigration checkpoint in the morning before departing that evening. This episode delayed the flight to Santiago for at least another hour. Killanin landed in Buenos Aires at 10:30 a.m. and took off at 6:30 p.m. Lamenting Killanin's misadventure in his city, Negri wrote to Monique Berlioux, the director of the IOC, with a touch of sarcasm, that "Lord Killanin did not visit Bs. As. and instead knows the Ezeiza airport very well (sic!)."³³

Chile³⁴

Eventually, Killanin arrived in Santiago late at night on May 28. Venezuelan José Beracasa, president of the PASO and an IOC member, along with a group of IOC members and officials of the PASO and the *Comité Olímpico Chileno* (Chilean Olympic Committee [COC]) were waiting for him at the airport. He was driven right away to a reception at the mayor's house. In the morning, he attended the opening of the twelfth congress of the PASO, the most relevant happening of the tour. Democratically elected President Salvador Allende could not be present at the ceremony

32 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 5.

33 Mario L. Negri to Monique Berlioux, June 25, 1973, "A-P06/077 IOC Presidents-Michael Killanin," IOC Archives.

34 Torres (2023b) describes this stopover.

but sent him a commemorative plaque through his minister of defense, José Tohá, who represented the government. Tohá told those assembled that "sport is a necessity and a right in the community."³⁵ Killanin considered that Tohá "made an excellent speech completely in line with the best co-operation between the voluntary bodies and the Government."³⁶ Beracasa and Sabino Aguad, president of the COC and general director of sports and recreation, also spoke at the opening. In line with previous remarks related to other Latin American countries, Killanin affirmed that "it would appear that the co-operation between the National Olympic Committee and the Government sports body in Chile is good."³⁷

In the afternoon, Killanin delivered a speech at the inauguration of the works of the twelfth congress of the PASO in front of the entire hemispheric Olympic leadership. He started pronouncing, "I come here more to learn than to preach" hoping that "by being here I am able to make some of the contacts that will help us all to cooperate in the future of the Olympic Movement" (1973, p. 248). While he declared that this was not a major policy speech, he "raise[d] certain points which we will have to solve between ourselves and in close conjunction with the International [Sport] Federations [ISFs]" (1973, p. 248). Killanin then explained that the Olympic Movement was tripartite, including the IOC, the ISFs, and the NOCs. He continued stating that the relation between these entities, as well

35 Carlos Guerrero (Don Pampa), "Reconfortante y diferente," *Estadio* (Santiago), June 5, 1973, p. 16.

36 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 5.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

as the definition of the Olympic Movement and its future, and that of the Olympic Games, would be discussed at an Olympic Congress in September, at which he wished to see “the Pan-American Groups” for them “to listen and to express their views” (1973, p. 249). Killanin then offered his thoughts on three “Olympic points which make the daily news”: competitive eligibility, the Olympic program, and political freedom (1973, p. 250). On the first point, he repeated that the IOC would discuss rule 26 of the *Olympic Charter* and that “It is *not* the intention of the IOC to open the Games to professionalism” (1973, p. 250). As for the second point, he linked it to the cost of the Olympic Games and argued that the Olympic Movement should not “scatter around the world monuments which are not used for the sake of youth from the day the Games close” (1973, p. 251). In relation to the third point, Killanin insisted that the Olympic Movement “must be free from political interference or dictation[,]” clarifying that this differed from receiving assistance from governmental sources or cooperating with governments (1973, p. 251). He ended his speech expressing that he would be happy to discuss any matters affecting the hemispheric NOCs or any Olympic matters during his stay in Santiago. Afterwards, Killanin “left the meeting for obvious reasons of discretion.”³⁸ His presidential agenda was clearly articulated and laid out.

According to his account, several presidents and secretary generals of the hemispheric NOCs took up his offer and approached him to discuss certain problems. A prominent one was the appointment of IOC members in

38 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 6.

Latin America and the Caribbean, but also in South Africa.³⁹ Another concern he most probably heard about was the significant delays in the preparations of the VII Pan-American Games awarded to Santiago in 1969 and scheduled for 1975. In their speeches, Tohá and Aguad, president and honorary president of the event’s organizing committee, asserted that Chile would deliver in 1975. After its evaluation commission visited the facilities during the twelfth congress, the PASO confirmed Santiago as the host of the VII Pan-American Games. A sport magazine wrote that the PASO had shown faith that everything would be ready on time.⁴⁰ Killanin was as optimistic as he was prophetic. He

educated, there has been considerable doubt whether Santiago will be able to host the 1975 Pan American Games due to the political situation. My own discreet enquiries lead me to believe that there will not be a problem as long as the present Government under President Allende stays together and these games unite the people of Santiago. However, there is of course a risk of a counter move towards the Government in which case the situation could alter.⁴¹

With respect to the last point, Killanin was told of an incident that he judged important enough to record it. During the second leg of the final of soccer’s Libertadores Cup between Colo-Colo, of Chile, and Independiente, of

39 Ibid., 6-7.

40 Guerrero, “Reconfortante y diferente,” p. 16.

41 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 8.

Argentina, played during the first night of the twelfth congress of the PASO at the National Stadium in Santiago, “President Allende was whistled and cat-called when he appeared in the Presidential box.”⁴² A month after the PASO’s delegations had left Santiago for their homes, there was a failed coup d’état against Allende. Nonetheless, in September, he was finally ousted by another coup d’état, which installed a ferocious military dictatorship that lasted until 1990.⁴³ Despite Beracasa’s efforts, supported by the COC and the organizing committee, the military junta reneged on the organization of the VII Pan-American Games, which were transferred to Mexico City, Mexico. Unfortunately, the risk pointed out by Killanin based on the political environment in Chile materialized. While well-informed through his discreet enquiries, by the time Killanin left Santiago, on June 1 after the conclusion of the twelfth congress of the PASO the day before, the future of Allende and the event was a matter of speculation. For the IOC, “The Chilean organization [of the twelfth congress of the PASO] entrusted to Mr. Sabino Aguad . . . was remarkable” (Anonymous, 1973, p. 247). The national press was equally exulting. Highlighting the presence of Killanin in Santiago, it quoted a hemispheric Olympic leader who, oblivious to his prediction, contended that “if the [VII Pan-American] Games have the same efficiency than this congress, success is guaranteed.”⁴⁴

42 Ibid.

43 For introductory accounts of this period of Chilean history, see, among others, Huneus (2006) and Jocelyn-Holt Letelier (1998).

44 Guerrero, “Reconfortante y diferente,” p. 16.

Peru, Colombia, and Panama

The final destination of the tour was Mexico City. Nevertheless, Killanin briefly stopped at three other countries along the way there. He started the trek to Mexico City from Santiago accompanied by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, a Mexican IOC member and president of the *Comité Olímpico Mexicano* (Mexican Olympic Committee [MOC]), other Mexican Olympic officials, and Julio Gerlein Comelín, a Colombian IOC member. During the layover in Lima, Peru, he met with Eduardo Dibós, a Peruvian IOC member, who had been in Santiago. They discussed the issue of membership in the IOC and Dibós informed Killanin of the overall situation in the *Comité Olímpico Peruano* (Peruvian Olympic Committee), “which,” he related, “seems to be in order.”⁴⁵ As in Buenos Aires, the layover in Lima was also prolonged for reasons beyond Killanin’s control. This time there was a mechanical problem with the airplane. Even more troubling, the hijacking of a Colombian commercial plane on May 30 that lingered on for several days, caused problems in regional air traffic.⁴⁶ Killanin ended up arriving in Bogotá, Colombia much later than expected. He was met at the airport by Humberto Zuluaga Monedero, the president of *Coldeportes*, the governmental institution in charge of sport. Albeit it was late, Killanin held a press conference there in which he broached “the usual three subjects- Giganticism [sic], Rule 26 and Politics.”⁴⁷ He repeated what he had

45 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 9.

46 See Di Ricco (2020).

47 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 9.

elaborated upon in other press conferences during the tour and especially during his speech at the inauguration of the works of the twelfth congress of the PASO. Noticeably, he underlined that “I have never imagined, not even kidding, what an Olympic Games would be like with the participation of professional athletes.”⁴⁸ He also insisted that “he wanted to be a partisan of an evolution and not a revolution of the Olympic Movement” (Anonymous, 1973, p. 247). Subsequently, he was offered dinner by the *Comité Olímpico Colombiano* (Colombian Olympic Committee) and *Coldeportes*. His impression of these institutions was favorable, indicating that, “Here again, there seems to be a very clear dividing line between the two bodies and close cooperation, although at times the Minister [Zuluaga Monedero] did tell me there were clashes.”⁴⁹ What these clashes were about Killanin did not specify.

Before catching an early flight to Panama City, Panama on the morning of June 2, Killanin visited sport venues, “which seemed to show a visible advance in sport in Colombia.”⁵⁰ He was met in Panama City by Virgilio de León, a Panamanian IOC member, and was taken to lunch with members of the *Comité Olímpico de Panamá* (Panama Olympic Committee [POC]) and representatives of the governmental institution in charge of sport. Killanin was asked about some difficulties within the POC. As he claimed, Carlos A. Vásquez, its president, “was suspected of trying to place the Olympic Committee under more

48 “‘El amateurismo necesita reformas’: Lord Killanin.”

49 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 9.

50 Ibid.

Government control and a threat of expulsion [sic] was instituted by the IOC.”⁵¹ The IOC president appeased his interlocutors stating that “This threat seems to have worked.”⁵² From Panama City Killanin flew to Mexico City via Guatemala City, Guatemala, where he changed planes and did not meet anybody related to the Olympic Movement.

Mexico

There were various persons waiting for Killanin, and the Mexicans who had been accompanying him since departing from Santiago, at the airport in Mexico City on June 2. He was greeted by Marte Gómez, a Mexican IOC member, and his wife, José García Cervantes, president of the *Confederación Deportiva Mexicana* (Mexican Sport Confederation [MSC]), Manuel Valle Alvarado, vice president of the MOC, and Ramírez Vázquez’s wife. Killanin held a press conference right upon arrival. He did not seem to have added anything new to what he had already expressed in his other press conferences and speeches during the tour. He also gave an interview to *Excelsior*, a newspaper based in Mexico City. It is interesting to mention that in it, Killanin indicated that he understood the youth because when he was

51 Ibid., p. 10. The minutes of the March and July 1971 meetings of the IOC’s Executive Board mention problems of political interference in the POC. The minutes of the September 1971 meetings state that the problems had been solved, but also that there were other issues affecting the POC. According to the minutes of the February 1973 meetings, the latter were still persistent. None of these minutes, which can be consulted in the IOC Archives, mention the threat of expulsion.

52 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 10.

young “he wanted to revolutionize the world” (Anonymous, 1973, p. 245). While it is up to interpretation what message he wanted to convey with this declaration, it could be read as another sign that his agenda for the Olympic Movement only included moderate and gradual reforms. What is clear is that he felt particularly at ease in Mexico City, which he had not visited since the Olympic Games there in 1968, when he was a vice president of the IOC. For him, this stopover was an opportunity to renew many old acquaintances. The hosts of Killanin’s stay in Mexico City, which included three nights, prepared a full program for him. However, as the IOC communicated, “the most important moment without doubt, was the interview given [to Killanin] by the President of the Mexican Republic, Mr. Luis Echevarria [sic]” (Anonymous, 1973, p. 247).

Echeverría, a democratically elected president, received Killanin, who came along with Gómez, Ramírez Vázquez, and García Cervantes, at his residence on June 4. This made the newspapers’ headlines the following day.⁵³ Gómez pinpointed that the presidents of Mexico and of the IOC had “a very constructive exchange of points of view and full agreement was expressed with regard to the Olympic principles and trend on which the Olympic movement has to be directed in the future.”⁵⁴ Killanin was quite pleased with the meeting, accentuating that “it was very interesting for the first time not to have to explain to a Head of State what

the Olympic Movement is all about.”⁵⁵ It is worth mentioning that Echeverría was secretary of interior, a prominent post, in the administration of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, his predecessor, who oversaw most of the preparations for the Olympic Games in Mexico City in 1968.⁵⁶ For Killanin, the fact that Echeverría was informed about Olympic matters facilitated the work of the Mexican Olympic officials “and [consequently] the Olympic Movement obtains all the support and assistance it requires.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, this also resulted in a close collaboration between the government and the MSC, which Killanin also deemed significant to underscore.⁵⁸

Killanin’s visit to Mexico City assured him that the Olympic Games in Mexico City in 1968 were greatly beneficial to the Mexican people as the sport facilities are “widely used, although not necessarily for their original purpose.”⁵⁹ He highlighted that one of the greatest legacies was the training center of the MOC, with which he was impressed. Athletes were brought there to train before international competitions. There were athletes in residence and also commuters, and the coaches were of many different nationalities. Killanin speculated “that some of the more conservative people would not like this system but to my mind it is essential for

53 See, for example, *La Prensa* (Mexico City), June 5, 1977, p. 1.

54 Marte Gómez to Monique Berlioux, June 8, 1977, “A-P06/077 IOC Presidents-Michael Killanin,” IOC Archives.

55 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 12.

56 See, among others, Blutstein (2021) and Whitterspoon (2008).

57 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 12.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., p. 13.

high performance athletes who in their turn inspire sportsmen throughout the country.”⁶⁰ An uncommon feature of the training center, which caught Killanin’s attention, was “the fact that it has a design group working there for the purpose of posters, and all publications.”⁶¹ Perhaps this was a heritage of the Olympic Games in Mexico City in 1968, whose identity design has been hailed as innovative.⁶² In any case, for Killanin, this is “something which is frequently forgotten, even, I regret to say, by the IOC, and is something to which I think we should draw more attention, because it is a prerequisite if we are to have a modern image.”⁶³ Evidently, Killanin found that the Mexican Olympic Movement had established some valuable structures worth considering. As far as Gómez could see, Killanin was “especially friendly to Mexico”⁶⁴ during the Latin American tour. In turn, he was thankful for the arrangements and courtesies extended to him in Mexico City by his hosts, which were, as Marte put it, “only a proof of the respect we have to your category, and also a token of our solidarity in the IOC ranks.”⁶⁵

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 See, among others, Elías (2021) and Castañeda (2014).

63 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 13.

64 Marte Gómez to Monique Berlioux, June 8, 1977.

65 Marte Gómez to Lord Killanin, June 27, 1977, “A-P06/077 IOC Presidents-Michael Killanin,” IOC Archives.

Back in Ireland

After over two weeks touring Latin America, Killanin arrived back home in Dublin on June 6. After taking some time to ruminate about it, he drafted a report of his journey. Killanin’s conclusion was that throughout the region “there is considerable interest in sport, of which the Olympic Movement is obviously considered the highest ideal.”⁶⁶ He commented that there were governments of various stripes “from left to right wing dictators, military governments and normal democracies.”⁶⁷ Approvingly, Killanin elucidated that, with one or two exceptions, in each country appeared to be a ministry

66 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, pp. 10-11.

67 Ibid., p. 14. While interesting and important, it is beyond the scope of this article to explore whether the various political regimes of the Latin American countries Killanin visited during the tour favored or posed challenges to his plans as IOC president. On the surface, the picture appears far from straightforward. Consider, for example, the reaction to the boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980, at the dusk of Killanin’s presidency, led by the United States. The NOCs of Argentina, Chile, Panama, and Uruguay joined the boycott. At the time, all those countries were governed by dictatorships. On the other hand, the NOCs of Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru sent delegations to Moscow. While Brazil was governed by a dictatorship, the other three countries were led by democratically elected officials. In his autobiography, Killanin suggests that the Chilean IOC member had reservations to support a statement declaring “that the Games must be held in Moscow as planned” (1983, p. 187) because of his government’s antipathy to such a position after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. More research is needed to better understand the positions, debates, and decisions of each of the countries Killanin visited during the tour, as well as the rest of Latin America, regarding the boycott. For details of the Argentine and Brazilian cases, see Torres (2015 and 2020) and Almeida Lico & Rubio (2012), respectively. There is abundant literature analyzing the boycott. Sarantakes (2011), among many other scholars, provides a strong analysis of this controversy.

or government agency in charge of sport, leisure, and/or recreation. This created close cooperation between the NOCs and these institutions. However, he admonished, emphasizing the necessary autonomy he had laid stress on during the tour, that this “is a situation which must be carefully watched and has already given rise to anxiety in certain countries.”⁶⁸ The ones to watch it, he proposed, were the regional IOC members. Killanin also recognized that in almost every country there was a sport confederation with a wider covering than the NOCs, which were “normally limited to Olympic sports or sports taking part in the Regional Games.”⁶⁹

Besides gaining a thorough understanding, and forming an opinion, of the organization as well as the state of Olympic and sport matters in the region, Killanin consolidated and enlarged his network of contacts in the region. He reported being pleased with having “an opportunity of meeting and shaking hands with the Presidents and secretaries of practically all the National Olympic Committees,”⁷⁰ hearing, as he told his fellow IOC members, their preoccupations and views.⁷¹ In this regard, the IOC publicized that “having multiplied on the one hand the contacts with the sporting leaders and those responsible for education, and on the other with the journalists, Lord Killain did the job of

a propagandist.”⁷² He not only propagated the mission and values of the Olympic Movement, but also his vision for it. While he mentioned others, Killanin concentrated on three main pressing issues: the eligibility to participate in the Olympic Games, gigantism, and political freedom. In a nutshell, he said that he did not envision professional athletes at the Olympic Games; that the Olympic program had to be reduced to control their size and cost; and that, while the IOC welcomed governmental aid to sport, it deplored the use of sport for political purposes.

Throughout Latin America, the press portrayed Killanin as good-humored, affable, extemporaneous, experienced, and intelligent.⁷³ For instance, *Estadio*, a Chilean sport magazine, narrated that during the farewell festivities of the twelfth congress of the PASO, Killanin sang traditional songs of the country and danced to the tune of them.⁷⁴ This contrasted with the stern image of Brundage, his predecessor. Yet, even though many, if not most, in the region seemed to have agreed with his presidential agenda, his signaling of moderate and gradual, rather than drastic and prompt, reforms was not gratifying for others. In this regard, after Killanin left Brazil, the paulista newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, disappointed, titled an article on his visit, “Lord Killanin came, who did not come

68 Draft Report by the President of the IOC on His Visit to South America for the Meeting of ODEPA-PASO May 1973, p. 14.

69 Ibid., p. 15.

70 Ibid., p. 6.

71 Minutes of the meetings of the IOC Executive Board, Lausanne, 22nd-24th June 1973, IOC Archives.

72 “Lord Killanin, President of the IOC: Two Weeks’ Survey in South America,” p. 243.

73 See, for example, Guerrero, “Reconfortante y diferente,” p. 16; “O irônico Lorde Killanin dia 21 aqui;” and “Lorde Killanin veio, quem não veio foi a sua revolução,” *Folha de São Paulo*, May 28, 1973, p. 25.

74 Guerrero, “Reconfortante y diferente,” p. 16.

was his revolution.”⁷⁵ The disappointment was likely out of place, as Killanin, describing himself as a realist,⁷⁶ had promised reforms, not a revolution. He planned to push the former at the tenth Olympic Congress in Varna, Bulgaria scheduled for later in 1973, the first in more than forty years. Tellingly, the event’s main theme was “The Olympic Movement and its Future.”⁷⁷ Gómez promised to be there “to give our support in the difficult task you are facing.”⁷⁸ The rest of the Latin American IOC members, now familiar with Killanin’s vision for the Olympic Movement, seemed to have followed suit. For the IOC, he “directed the meetings with skill and dignity” (n.d.). The “unanimous opinions” of the final statement of the meetings, Killanin would later reminisce, “are the guidelines on which I, as President, endeavoured, not always with success, to conduct the affairs of the Olympic family during my Presidency” (1981, p. 608). Whether, and to what extent, the Latin American tour he completed in mid-1973 had a lasting impact on Killanin’s knotty tenure as IOC president remains to be investigated. However, the unanimous backing of his platform to lead the Olympic Movement garnered in Varna indicates that the Latin American IOC members stood by him, at least at the outset of his eight years at the helm. It also implies that the tour served as an initial but effective platform for Killanin to advocate for and gather such backing.

75 “Lorde Killanin veio, quem não veio foi a sua revolução.”

76 “Esporte Amador: Nova estrutura,” *Diario de Paraná* (Curitiba), May 25, 1977, p. 8.

77 See Anonymous (1972).

78 Marte Gómez to Lord Killanin, June 27, 1977.

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Author

Dr. Cesar R. Torres is a professor in the Department of Kinesiology, Sport Studies, and Physical Education at SUNY Brockport. He is a former president of the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport (IAPS) and the founding president of the Asociación Latina de Filosofía del Deporte (ALFiD). Torres is also a fellow in the National Academy of Kinesiology of the United States and a recipient of the State University of New York's Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activities. He has been awarded the Warren P. Fraleigh Distinguished Scholar Award by IAPS. Torres is a vice-president of the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE).