

Title:

'Political Celebrity and the Olympic Movement: Exploring the charismatic authority of IOC Presidents'

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Abstract:

In this paper, we explore the modernization of the role of President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) by analyzing the actions of three men who held the position during the 20th century: Pierre de Coubertin, Avery Brundage, and Juan Antonio Samaranch. Employing Weber's concept of charismatic authority, and considering its connections to, and congruence with, contemporary understandings of political celebrity, we examine how each of these men mobilized their influence and authority to reinvigorate the political energy of Olympic sport and benevolent Olympism, particularly in times of crisis and/or apathy. In turn, we illustrate how the IOC under Samaranch came to embrace celebrity culture and spectacle in a way that solidified the organization's legitimacy, power and influence amidst the challenges of governance posed by late modernity. Our central argument is that all three of these men were charismatic leaders, in the Weberian sense, and that they mobilized this authority using the forms, means and opportunities of power particular to their respective time periods. In turn, the extent to which they can be considered political celebrities should be considered against the 'routinized authority' that has become ascribed to the position of the IOC President itself.

Introduction:

The Olympic Movement, as overseen by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), has come to be viewed as the 'pre-eminent international cultural movement in global society' (Roche, 2002, 165). Its influence on the world of sport is unquestionable, as is its international profile and brand recognition (Wall, 2001). In addition, the Olympic Movement and IOC are notable for having attained broad levels of political significance, authority and clout that are unprecedented and unmatched within global sport. For example, in 2009, the IOC, under current

President Jacques Rogge, was awarded permanent observer status by the United Nations (UN) affording it the opportunity to take the floor at the UN's General Assembly and participate in consultations. With this in mind, it is reasonable to view Rogge as something of a 'political celebrity,' meaning a political actor who engages with and trades upon popular culture in order to achieve pre-determined political goals (Marsh et al, 2010, drawing on Street, 2004).

In this paper, we explore the historical timeline that has led to this outsized political power currently enjoyed by Rogge and the Olympic Movement. To do so, we focus on the efforts and actions of three of the IOC's previous and iconic presidents: Pierre de Coubertin, Avery Brundage, and Juan Antonio Samaranch. Framed by Weber's notion of charismatic authority and debates regarding its applicability to politics and celebrity, we illustrate how each of these men drew on the specific privilege and opportunities of their time period in order to (re)position and (re)invigorate the Olympic Movement as a legitimate political entity. Indeed, under Samaranch, the Olympic Movement eventually came to embrace fully the emerging media-driven celebrity culture of the late 20th century. An effect of this has been the celebritization of the position of the IOC president, through many of these same media processes, such that it can now be viewed as imbued with 'routinized charisma' that further cements the organization's political status and authority.

We argue that understanding this political trajectory must account for the particular charismatic authority of each of these three former presidents, rather than a presumption of their strict celebrity status, particularly given the specificities of their actions and the time periods in which they lived. In this way, we concur with the claim that 'celebrity is a new form of objectivized charisma, but does not replace it' (Hughes-Freeland, 2007, p. 193). In our view, the groundwork for the political authority and celebrity of Rogge was laid by these previous IOC presidents through their charismatic abilities and rather tireless efforts to secure the international political legitimacy of Olympic sport.

The remainder of the paper is organized into three parts. The next section offers a theoretical overview of Weberian charismatic authority and its implications for the relationship between politics and celebrity. This is followed by a critical analysis of Coubertin, Brundage and Samaranch and their actions as IOC presidents. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of considering these men, and other IOC presidents and international sporting figures, as political actors produced by, reliant upon, and ultimately inseparable from the celebritization of Olympic sport.

Theoretical framework:

The relationship between celebrity culture and politics is complex. Much has been written in recent years of the twin phenomena of celebrities who become political actors and politicians who go on to achieve celebrity status (e.g. Marsh et al, 2010; Kellner, 2010, 2009; Hughes-Freeland, 2007; Drake and Higgins, 2006; Street, 2004; West and Orman, 2002; Marks and Fisher, 2002). Most analysts acknowledge

the increasing overlap between celebrity and politics, given the substantial entrée into the political sphere of various celebrities from sport and entertainment (i.e. celebrity politicians) as well as the celebrity status that some politicians have come to achieve (i.e. political celebrities) (see Drake and Higgins, 2006). This latter category is best exemplified by Barack Obama who attained a level of 'supercelebrity' underpinned by media spectacle in his successful run for US President (Kellner, 2009, 2010). Indeed, Obama is illustrative of the extent to which contemporary 'celebrity is dependent on both constant media proliferation and the implosion between entertainment, news and politics' (Kellner, 2009, 716).

Yet, while the intensity, breadth and depth of current media spectacle makes possible political celebrities like Obama, the relationship between celebrity and politics is not entirely recent. Drake and Higgins (2006, p. 87) state that 'the influence of celebrity upon the political process... has been a concern for much of the twentieth century.' Indeed, politicians have made themselves into staged celebrities since US President Andrew Jackson in the early 1800s (Rojek, 2001). Of central import, then, is less the contemporary novelty of this phenomenon, and more the ways in which celebrity and politics have become blurred and the implications for governance and democracy of this process (Marsh et al, 2010).

Our argument is that Coubertin, Brundage and Samaranch all worked to assert themselves as legitimate political actors through their charismatic authority and in doing so embraced a form of recognition and importance akin to that of a political celebrity. Turner (2004) defines a celebrity as a public figure who, through various media representations, becomes known for exploits beyond the strict confines of his/her role as athlete, singer, politician, etc. Coubertin, Brundage and Samaranch all fit this basic definition to the extent that they came to enjoy, and were even seen to be entitled to, greater political agency on an international scale than would be expected (or even accepted) on first analysis of the leader of a sports organization like the IOC. As we describe below, they did so by effectively promoting and marketing themselves, a key feature of the political celebrity phenomenon (Street, 2003).

Clearly, media, commerce, spectacle and celebrity are relevant to this process, particularly for the IOC under Samaranch in the late 20th century when the Olympics became increasingly commodified and media-driven. However, considering that Coubertin revived the modern Olympics decades before the era of significant mass media, and that Brundage generally eschewed the vapidness of spectacle, a further theoretical model is required to make sense of their activities. Here, we take up the notion of charisma as developed by classic social theorist Max Weber (1966, 1978).

Weber identified three types of political authority: rational/legal, traditional and charismatic. He described charisma as:

“a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.”

These special qualities of charismatic authority are not inherent or apolitical but proceed from social stratification that Weber articulated along the lines of status, class and party. Party for Weber referred to the various means of political access afforded through the organization of power, and class to ownership and material advantages. Both can be seen to underpin the political agency of Coubertin, Brundage and Samaranch to varying degrees. In addition, status features prominently when discussing authority, particularly in relation to politics. According to Milner (2010, 381), Weberian “status is the accumulated approvals and disapprovals that people express toward an individual, collectivity or an object” and is often manifest as a status group (an ideal type) within a status system of broader social relations.

This Weberian theorizing illuminates the sources of authority and privilege that afforded IOC presidents some measure of political import. It also suggests a theoretical link to celebrity. In Ferris’ (2007, p. 372) words, “celebrity is the site of a surplus of contemporary society’s charisma – by its very nature it involves individuals with special qualities.” This perspective supports our argument, discussed further below, that the contemporary political celebrity of the position of IOC President stems in large measure from the routinization of the charismatic authority put in place by previous presidents, starting with Coubertin.

Still, a direct application of Weber’s charismatic leader to celebrity has often been viewed as limited, and has therefore sometimes been dismissed, given that modern societies are deemed too specialized to allow stars the kind of institutionalized power that the concept demands (O’Guinn, 1991). Similarly, Kurzman et al (2007), suggest that contemporary celebrity contradicts Weber’s analysis of status because Weber projected a downward trajectory of status groups and the slow ‘inbreeding’ of genealogical status over subsequent generations. Indeed, if Weber is read in a strictly evolutionary or deterministic manner, then the specific relevance of charisma to political celebrity becomes increasingly tenuous and fades over time as social relations become more diffuse and multifaceted.

It is important to appreciate, then, the ambivalence in Weber’s own theorizing between political processes of bureaucratization versus those of discipline more akin to the work of Michel Foucault. Specifically, genuine charismatic authority as a foundation of political leadership calls for complementary understanding of how it constructs the duty of followers to recognize it (Hughes-Freeland, 2007). This relationship can be understood specifically through Weber’s notion of ‘routinized charisma,’ by which charismatic authority is transferred from personal qualities into roles that are recognized, and ultimately supported and maintained by political followers (Marshall, 1997, cited in Hughes-Freeland, 2007). As such, political celebrity is best understood as a new form of this routinized or

objectified charisma, but not necessarily its replacement (Hughes-Freeland, 2007) as suggested by some theories of contemporary celebrity (see Rojek, 2001).

The implications of this relationship are significant and call for understanding of the context in which charismatic actors enjoy political influence and agency and the role that these actors fulfill within the broader political sphere. Marks and Fisher (2002) suggest that it is now possible to identify a language of political celebrity power that deploys celebrities in the service of constructing political consent that is effectively simulated. This consent is required to maintain and reinforce the current political order in the face of sustained public apathy towards participatory democracy. To construct their framework, Marks and Fisher connect Weber's notion of charismatic power as situated in the compelling or monarchic leader, to theories put forth by Foucault in which power is diffused throughout the body politic (also see Keyes, 2002, cited in Hughes-Freeland, 2007). In turn, they embrace the work of Jean Baudrillard, for whom true political engagement in contemporary media-saturated societies is next to impossible and apathy not only reigns, but is even to be embraced or celebrated. From Baudrillard's perspective, in such a mediated culture, the premier threat to political elites – and thus its political utility to the masses – is withdrawal from the political process altogether. In response, the cultural/political role of the political celebrity has become to energize the masses through the use of Weberian charisma in order that they might be encouraged to participate through (manufactured) political consent and the subversion of apathy. Thus, for Marks and Fisher the political authority of charismatic leaders (and celebrities) stems from their ability through privilege and personality to imbue themselves as legitimate political leaders and ideologues. Particularly in late modernity, characterized by reflexive citizens who need to be persuaded about the effectiveness of governance and encouraged to participate politically, it can be useful for political actors to trade on celebrity by manipulating media and spectacle (Marsh et al, 2010).

Importantly, this relationship between authority and politics is often tautological: authority validates the ability of the political celebrity to reinvigorate the political order, and yet authority proceeds from the ability to transcend the limitations or 'noise' of participatory democracy (Marks and Fisher, 2002). As Marks and Fisher (2002, 392) contend, for political celebrities: "It seems that the aura of importance they have created for themselves provides whatever legitimacy is necessary to act in a political capacity."

In sum, we argue that the kind of theoretical framework put forth by Marks and Fisher holds purchase for the study of Coubertin, Brundage and Samaranch as it encourages analysis of the strategies through, and methods by which, these men transcended the 'messiness' of democracy, and the various threats to the sanctity and global leadership of Olympism, in order to position the IOC as a force for positive change on a global scale (see Peacock, 2011). As we will demonstrate, the IOC and Olympic Movement experienced a series of peaks and valleys with regards to its legitimacy and importance throughout the 20th century. In the face of these

challenges, the charismatic authority of Coubertin, Brundage and Samaranch, supported by the emergent commodification and spectacularization of the Olympics and western culture more broadly, proved invaluable for reinvigorating and reestablishing the Olympics' political authority. In turn, we argue that the power ascribed to the IOC president can be understood as an effect of this charisma in its routinized form.

Analysis:

The outsized influence, power, and autonomy enjoyed by the IOC in world society have made the organization the subject of significant academic and popular interest (e.g. MacAloon, 1981; Barney, Wenn, and Martyn, 2002). In this section, we focus on the means by which the IOC, under the stewardship and charismatic authority of Coubertin, Brundage and Samaranch, maintained this power (albeit unevenly). Particular attention is paid to the recent cooptation and instrumental use of celebrity culture over the past three decades to simulate global consent and participation within the ritualism of the Olympic Games.

Coubertin

As with most influential movements, whether political, religious, or social, the modern Olympic movement and the restoration of the quadrennial Olympic Games was due, in large part, to the charismatic authority of an individual: the Baron Pierre de Coubertin. Previous attempts to stage modern re-creations of the Olympic Games had occurred (most notably in Greece and England) with varying degrees of interest in the permanence and accuracy of the reproduction of the ancient festivals (Young, 1996). However, Coubertin's vision of an Olympic restoration (beginning at the very end of the 19th century) has proved the most successful and enduring. Acceptance of the reinstatement of these quadrennial international competitions with a rotating sequence of host cities was neither immediate nor inevitable. Without Coubertin's tireless and impoverishing proselytizing on behalf of his self-proclaimed movement, the Games and indeed the contemporary global sport hierarchy would not have developed as they have (see, for example, MacAloon, 1981; Guttmann, 2002; Young, 1996).

From the beginning, Coubertin faced stiff resistance to his Olympic revival. The first several editions of the modern Games were disappointing to Coubertin, in 1900 and 1904 in particular, largely because of what he perceived to be the political usurpation of his Olympic ideals. The "problems with the French government [in hosting the 1900 Paris Games], coming after the rude treatment he had received in Athens [at the 1896 Games]" convinced him "that *any* kind of state involvement in sports introduced 'a fatal germ of impotence and mediocrity'" (Guttmann 2002, 22). And it was not the political 'interference' in the *hosting* of the Games alone that Coubertin had to address. The very act of defining which polities were allowed to form duly-recognized National Olympic Committees was itself intensely political and controversial. In 1911, Coubertin publicly defended the IOC's practice of recognizing "sporting geographies" rather than political ones which meant, in

essence, that the IOC reserved the right to recognize an independent team composed of Finns or Czechs (who ostensibly had distinct national cultures) rather than requiring them to compete under the imperial National Olympic Committees representing Russia or Austria respectively. Naturally, this outraged the royal families and governments (not to mention the Irish and others who did *not* enjoy Olympic recognition of their independent 'nationhood'; see Peacock 2009). Coubertin thus faced perpetual political pressure from Games' hosts, National Olympic Committees, and individual IOC members (who often did not take to heart the injunction that they were to be missionaries of Olympism *within* their nations rather than representatives *of* national interest within the IOC).

Crucially however, Coubertin's efforts to reinstate the Olympic Games and lead the movement that fostered them were in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of a specific set of ideological propositions, namely "that Olympic Games model democratic social arrangements; that athletic competition between nations contributes to peace; that what he would soon call 'true internationalism,' that is, respect for and celebration of national, cultural differences, rather than 'cosmopolitanism,' the extirpation of such differences, was to be served by the Olympics; and that ignorance is the chief enemy of peace and brotherhood and the Games serve an educational function..." (MacAloon 1981, p. 189). The broad idea that sporting exchange among nations could facilitate enlightened pacifism was premised on the fundamental belief that nations and national cultures were the appropriate units at which to facilitate such exchange. Thus, Coubertin's aspirations for the IOC were inextricable from the political realm because they relied upon the contours of the political world (e.g. state borders). Inevitably, this led to political conflict.

Despite his insistence that the International Olympic Committee was to transcend such petty national politics, this explicitly political course Coubertin had appointed for the institution effectively prohibited such transcendence. Governments could not resist attempting to use what was obviously a set of political practices and occasions to their advantage. An Olympic ideology prohibiting the 'mixture of sport and politics' was, in Coubertin's own time, fundamental to the movement but Coubertin had indeed permanently fused the worlds of Olympic sport and international politics and consequently struggled to limit partisan interests being contested within and external to the movement.¹

What made his task of resisting partisan influence over the Olympic movement even more difficult was Coubertin's *conscious recruitment* of (often former) political leaders and exploitation of aristocratic networks to spread the gospel of Olympism. Though his charismatic vigor in establishing and carrying on the Games was not realized through the holding of public office, (i.e. Weber's "party" categorization), Coubertin's energies were quite consistently directed towards the

¹ These political contradictions have endured to the present day where the contemporary Olympic Charter maintains that "The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society" (*Olympic Charter* 2007, 11).

aristocratic classes throughout Europe. Similarly, despite his aristocratic birth, Coubertin's appeals were not made by virtue of the (ambiguous) political standing of European nobility in an era of dramatic political transformation nor by the wealth of that same class (i.e. Weber's "class" category), but rather by virtue of the social status that was still reserved for this aristocracy. That is, while the wealth and political access of the titled individuals recruited into Coubertin's Olympic project were certainly not insignificant to their influence, the aspects of their authority that led Coubertin to exploit them as a pan-European network was that granted to them by "virtue of successful claims to higher-ranking descent: hereditary status groups" (Weber, 1978, p. 306). Indeed Cropper has argued that the entire Olympic endeavor was, at least initially, an effort to reestablish the primacy of a European-wide aristocratic order, albeit an enlightened one intimately familiar with and instrumental in managing the structural changes occurring through industrialization, urbanization, and democratization (Cropper, 2008).

Ultimately, it is difficult to argue against Coubertin's success as the prophet of what he called a secular religion.² Certainly, he perceived his own decades-long efforts as having largely succeeded in firmly establishing and globalizing the Olympic movement:

When I planned to re-established the Olympic Games, people took me for a madman.... Yet the Games were re-established, and the principle of the Games has now been accepted by all nations. The rhythm of the Olympiads has entered the fabric of international life, and is now a regular factor in that life.... In faraway countries, youths are training in the muscular exertions that will earn them the honor of appearing in the stadium on the walls of which, through a recent decision of the International Olympic Committee, the names of the victors shall be cared from now on. This Committee, which I have had the honor of chairing from the start, and on which sit representatives of forty-two countries in Europe, America, Asia and Africa is, as was said last year on the rostrum in Geneva, a miniature League of nations. Through over twenty-seven years of operation, it has faced many conflicts but it has never failed in its

² "The primary, fundamental characteristic of ancient Olympism, and of modern Olympism as well, is that it is a *religion*. By chiseling his body through exercise as a sculptor does a statue, the ancient athlete 'honored the gods'. In doing likewise, the modern athlete honors his country, his race, and his flag. Therefore, I believe that I was right to restore, from the very beginning of modern Olympism, a religious sentiment transformed and expanded by the internationalism and democracy that are distinguishing features of our day" (Coubertin, 2000, p. 580).

task. It has moved on at a steady pace, along a path of progressive internationalism. (Coubertin, 2000, p. 209)

And Coubertin's own assessment has not been out of step with other internal and external commentators. Millions of individuals who have worked within the global Olympic movement, have competed at the Games and other IOC-sanctioned events, or have been spectators at, hosts of, or journalists covering the same would not deny the integral role of Coubertin's Olympic project in world society and communities and institutions around the globe. Students of history and world culture have likewise acknowledged the outsized role of the Olympic movement and Coubertin's singular role in its establishment:

Though satisfied that his brain-child had come to life, even Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the moving force behind the 'restoration' of the Olympic Games, appears to have felt some disappointment [in the first editions of the Games].... And yet, from these inauspicious beginnings, the Olympics grew to become a grand spectacle, the largest regularly staged event in the world.... Claiming the attention of a global audience, the Games have helped to foster a shared awareness of living in one world society. (Lechner and Boli, 2005, p. 1; see also MacAloon, 1981 and Young, 1996.)³

By the end of his life, the charismatic energies and qualities of Coubertin had established a global movement with thousands of disciples, committees in most countries of the world, and a wildly popular global festival with rituals, flags, oaths, hymns, and all other trappings of a vibrant social movement. In fact, the final Games before his death, the 1936 Berlin Games, have been perceived as the first broadly tele-visualized and globally media-saturated Games of the 20th century. Hitler and the Third Reich so enthusiastically embraced the movement (for their own ends, of course, as it is for all other editions) that his regime campaigned vigorously for Coubertin to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

In sum, Coubertin's charismatic authority in the revival of the Games remains a potent force today as the IOC pursues its aims and enjoys unparalleled political legitimacy. His legacy is a constant point of reference at conferences and meetings of Olympic bodies, in correspondence with world leaders, in speeches to global audiences during the Olympic Games, and in many other instances. Dozens of streets, schools, stadia, and other infrastructure around the world are named for the Frenchman. The Pierre de Coubertin Committee honors his legacy and countless volumes have been written recounting his efforts to found the movement. In this

³ "The Olympic Movement was one of the most significant 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm, 1992) of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it remains the preeminent international cultural movement in global society as we enter the twenty-first century" (Roche, 2002, 165).

sense, Coubertin laid the foundation for subsequent authoritative presidents of the IOC.

Brundage

Coubertin's abilities to attract and inspire largely overshadowed the successive presidents who, although fulfilling the office of IOC president, frequently appealed to Coubertin himself and, after his death, his words and his legacy. Coubertin retired the presidency in 1925 but his successor, the Count Henri Baillet-Latour, was often eclipsed by the Baron until his death in 1937. Although respect was paid to Baillet-Latour as the holder of the presidential office, Games organizers, IOC members, and the public continued to look to Coubertin as possessing much control and influence over the movement. Although unable to attend the 1936 Games, for example, Coubertin's speech was broadcast over the loudspeaker and was the genuine keynote event of the opening ceremony.

Upon Baillet-Latour's death in 1942, the world was embroiled in a second world war and the 1940 and 1944 Games had already been cancelled. The Swedish sports administrator Sigfrid Edstrom was a caretaker president until the IOC could reconvene after the war and he was elected to serve as outright president until 1952. By this time, the world had dramatically changed from the one the IOC had known in 1936. The 1948 London Games had reinitiated the cycle of Olympic competition, albeit by exclusion of the Germans and the Japanese, and the map of Europe and indeed the world was still in dramatic flux. New countries and new borders had followed in the immediate aftermath of World War Two, and other changes were to continue over the next several decades, with Cold War alliances hardening and shifting, and the beginnings of the decolonization of Africa, Asia, and parts of Latin America.

It was within the context of these transformations that the American industrialist Avery Brundage took over the presidency of the IOC for two decades (1952-1972). Brundage had competed as a track athlete in the 1912 Stockholm Games and thereafter rose rapidly through the American amateur sporting institutions to become one of the most prominent Olympic administrators. He was vigorous in defending the IOC and the 1936 Berlin Games against threatened boycotts relating to the Third Reich's anti-Semitic policies. He was thus intimately involved with what might be considered the first generation of Olympic administrators and was wholeheartedly invested in Coubertin's philosophy of Olympism, amateurism, and independence from external political pressure. Though his personality was not as amiable as Coubertin's, his dogged, outspoken, and persuasive leadership of the movement bore a resemblance to the reviver of the Games and certainly surpassed that of the intervening presidents (Guttmann 1984). Brundage's own brand of charismatic authority was likely necessary to the survival, or at least the continued relevance, of the Olympic movement (as it was then

constituted).⁴ The routinized charisma with which the office of IOC president had been imbued by his predecessors, who borrowed significantly from Coubertin's legacy in order to govern the movement, was greatly expanded upon and reinvented by Brundage. Although he paid due (and sincere) tribute to Coubertin, the force of his *own* charisma and energy was instrumental in fending off genuine threats to the movement (or at least the IOC's control of it) including the outright takeover of the Games by individual governments, United Nations institutions, and other actions which Brundage perceived as impositions upon the IOC's independence.

During Brundage's presidency, for example, the constitution of the IOC still had a large proportion of lords, knights, and barons; but added to these figures was a host of new members who, despite the fact that governments were not supposed to be 'appointing' national representatives, clearly functioned as political delegates (this was especially true in the case of new members from state communist and Third World countries). As a result, despite the fact that such state appointees were often utilized to pursue national interests that were at variance with Brundage's own views, the political influence of the IOC had grown to the point that Brundage boasted "No Monarch ever held sway over such a vast expanse of territory" (*Olympic Review* 1960, 60).

Indeed there is probably no IOC president who took greater pains to fend off external political influence than Avery Brundage. Although he was not always successful, and although the morality of the battles he chose to fight can be questioned, Brundage's strong personality and his ability to persuade and attract consent (if not outright discipleship) cannot be denied. Like Coubertin in his later years, Brundage's opposition to *l'ingerence politique* was stubborn. It was also likewise oblivious (whether disingenuously or otherwise) to the duplicity of Olympic politics. The most visible demonstrations of political action on the part of the IOC are often exposed when outside actors exert political pressure on the latter, thus revealing the political nature of sustaining the status quo. Brundage, for example, was elected to the IOC in large part because of his vehement objection as the president of the American Athletic Union to the growing chorus of voices suggesting the United States boycott the 1936 Berlin Games because of the Nazi regime's policies and preparations. For Brundage, boycotting the Third Reich was 'political' but the hypocrisy of celebrating the enlightened peace-through-sport ideology under the banners and grandiosity of a bigoted and murderous regime was not. In his most (in)famous Olympic moment, Brundage delivered a speech the day after the Israeli team was murdered by Palestinian terrorists at the 1972 Munich Games in which he condemned political intrusions into the sacred Olympic space and used the occasion to announce that "The Games... have been subject to 2 savage attacks. We lost the Rhodesian battle against naked political blackmail" (Guttmann 1984, 254). This second 'attack' was the insistence of African National Olympic Committees that the racial regime (and Olympic team) in Rhodesia was grounds for

⁴ This is not to say that Brundage's particular decisions or personality were necessary, only that the institution of the IOC needed this kind of charismatic leadership in order to continue to enjoy the place in world society that it had hitherto.

its expulsion from the Games. Again, by bringing a political fight to the IOC, the Africans had exposed the IOC's own political choice to maintain the status quo. Brundage's insistence that "the Games must go on" despite the massacre was likewise a political statement.

Brundage also exerted charismatic authority to maintain the amateur nature of the Games and the movement. Both the commercialization of the Olympic movement in general and the introduction of professionals into the Games in particular were completely rejected by Brundage. Indeed Brundage may have been even more polemical towards the role of money in Olympic sport than his predecessors and successors because of his childhood experiences with organized crime and corrupted professional sports in his hometown of Chicago. For him, amateur sport was the antidote to "the gross social and economic injustices in the imperfect world in which we live" (Guttmann 1984, 11). Like Coubertin, Brundage viewed the Olympic movement as the (literal) level playing field upon which all amateur athletes could enjoy equal chances for success. The introduction of money – whether through sponsorship of the Games, subsidizing the IOC, or sponsorship, salaries, broken-time payments or any other compensation for athletes and teams – would distort this playing field and, like the injection of partisan politics, destroy the spirit of Olympism.

Of course, not all expressions of charismatic leadership are created equal. While Brundage ensured that his tenure would be marked by the continued privilege and legitimacy of the Olympic movement in world affairs, and not by external usurpations of IOC control, the dilution of amateurism, or the corrupting influence of corporate sponsorships, internally his strong and reinvigorating role had perhaps been excessively severe and alienating. Rather than replacing Brundage with the charismatic Comte de Beaumont, the IOC members voted in the rather jovial Lord Killanin. This clearly irked Brundage, who believed that if the IOC was to survive, it needed "a leader. And [Killanin] isn't a leader" (Guttmann, 1984, p.247).⁵ In response to this election, but also in recognition of the immense (and losing) battle Brundage believed he had fought, he predicted, upon handing over the symbolic keys of the IOC to Killanin, that "you won't have much use for these; I believe the Olympic Movement will not last more than another few years" (Payne, 2006, p. 5-6).

Samaranch

The eight years of Killanin's presidential term returned the leadership of the IOC to the routinized charisma that accompanied the office by virtue of the outsized personality of Coubertin and, perhaps without acknowledgement, Brundage. Indeed by the end of the 1970s, many commentators believed that Brundage's pessimism regarding the Olympic movement had nearly been realized. After the 1972 massacre of the Israeli team at the Munich Games, dozens of African countries had boycotted

⁵ For his part, Killanin seemed to run (successfully) on a platform that he was "not Avery Brundage" (Guttmann, 1984, 247).

the 1976 Montreal Games to protest the participation of other countries who had violated rules and practices against staging matches with the apartheid South African sport system. As well, both the People's Republic of China (Beijing) and the Republic of China (Taipei, Taiwan) had boycotted Montreal at the last minute because the Canadian government had refused to allow the latter to compete as the Republic of China but had compromised to let them compete as Taiwan, to Beijing's consternation. In early 1980, the United States and dozens of allies committed to boycott the Moscow Games. The IOC was nearly bankrupt and, after the Montreal Games left the host saddled with decades of public debt, only Los Angeles lined up to host the 1984 Games.

Enter Juan Antonio Samaranch. After his 1980 election to the presidency, Samaranch recounted: "I felt so alone that I couldn't cope with all the demands of the job, with the sizeable problems that I knew there were and had to be handled. It was a feeling that lasted maybe two weeks, during which it even crossed my mind how I might withdraw" (quoted in Payne 2006, 11). Samaranch had long been involved in the Olympic movement and in sports administration. He was a minister in General Franco's dictatorial government and was thereafter Spain's ambassador to the Soviet Union. Indeed he likely commanded even higher influence within the corridors of political power than Coubertin or any other Olympic leader. He demanded to be called "Excellency" (a title otherwise reserved for heads of state) and he brought an end to the cycle of East-West boycotts of the Games. He also contravened a United Nations Security Council resolution banning Yugoslavian athletes from international competition in the course of hostilities and used the UN's own force in the region to whisk these same athletes out of besieged Sarajevo directly to the 1992 Barcelona Games (bypassing the normal Spanish entry procedures for foreigners, especially from war-torn countries). In short, the diminutive Spaniard was the most charismatic and audacious president since Coubertin himself.

However, as we have seen, this level of influence among formal political institutions is not wholly without precedent. Rather, what set the "Samaranch revolution" apart from previous leaders' endeavors was the path upon which he set the entire Olympic movement that (for the foreseeable future) will likely preclude the *necessity* (though perhaps not the actual realization) of maintaining the level of charismatic authority that only individual presidents can bring. In parting with the nearly century-long traditions of amateurism and non-commercialism, Samaranch fully embraced the logic of the market in terms of both the individual athletes and the "Olympic brand" as a whole.⁶ Nothing exemplifies this fundamental redirection of the Olympic movement more than the wholesale cooptation of celebrities and

⁶ The commercialization of the Olympic brand has been extensively treated elsewhere and we do not wish to repeat that literature here, except insofar as to recognize the Olympic turn towards global capital flows and the pairing of odd bedfellows in the form of sponsorships (see Payne 2006; Barney et al, 2002). The acceptance of professionals into the Olympic fold has likewise been extensively treated, and we only address it here as it applies to the appropriation of the influence of professional-athletes-as-celebrities (see Allison 2001, Slack 2004).

popular culture, and, in this sense, Samaranch became the most assuredly 'celebritized' president IOC president.

This change in the culture and ideals of the Olympic movement began almost immediately upon Samaranch's taking office. In 1981 at the Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden, Germany, the IOC began to fundamentally alter the way it financed Olympic activities. The "Olympic brand" is now touted as the world's most recognizable brand, and many of the world's other contenders for that title are actually sponsors of the movement (i.e. McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Visa, etc; see Wall, 2001.). The literature on the IOC's transformation from a lean organization run largely by infrequent meetings and mail-in votes to an extremely well-financed and professionalized bureaucratic institution of global significance is extensive and need not be belabored here. What is important is to understand that this newfound wealth (and in particular the new exposure to media outlets that were lining up to bid for the right to broadcast the Games) began a larger trend towards the appropriation of a heavily celebritized culture that has since been incorporated into every element of the movement.

The vertical integration of celebrity culture into the IOC was not as deliberate or as rapid as the decision to commercialize the Olympic movement through corporate sponsorships at the global and national levels. In some ways, it may have gone unnoticed as the natural outgrowth of the process of commercialization. Nevertheless, the instrumental use of celebrities and celebritized culture marked a distinct departure for the IOC. It is not that the worlds of Olympic sport and celebrity had not crossed paths before.⁷ In the past 30 years, however, the IOC has not only invited and co-opted professional athlete-celebrities, but has also incorporated celebrities with little or no connection to the Games or even sports more generally. This appropriation of celebrity power has generated unprecedented revenue, unprecedented visibility, and a sense of the fitness and universality of the IOC's place in world society.

Consider two illustrations of the instrumentalization of celebrity power under the Samaranch tenure. Most naturally, but perhaps most profoundly, the admission of professionals into the ranks of Olympians, a process that Samaranch was directly involved in promoting and negotiating, made way for the celebritization of Olympic influence. The professionalization of the Games was somewhat gradual, but the most popular, mediatized image representing this process is that of the "Dream Team" composed of professional American basketball players competing at the 1992 Barcelona Games. Far more than merely dwarfing all other teams and winning the gold medal, the Dream Team was a celebritized phenomenon unlike anything the Olympics had previously experienced. The hotels, the Olympic village, the Games' venues, the airports, and everywhere else the superstars from the National Basketball Association went, they were literally mobbed by fans (including many opposing players) for autographs and other

⁷ Think, for example, of Johnny Weismuller, the five-time Olympic gold medalist that became the famous ululating Tarzan in many films in the 1930s.

personal exchanges. The members of the Dream Team were celebrities unlike anything the Olympic movement had seen before, with one executive from the Burns Celebrity Services firm commenting, “No doubt about it, this is the biggest, most expensive marketing deal in the history of sports” (Cunningham 2009, 450).

The admission of professionals was more than merely an attempt to secure the best athletes in the world; it was the means by which the IOC most legitimately capitalized upon the celebrity power of sports stars whose social status had long since surpassed their seemingly superhuman physical feats. Students of sports history will be able to note what a sea change this professionalization process represented. The devotion to amateurism as the defining and glorifying feature of the Olympic movement had been fanatical. The image of the professional as nothing more than a trained animal or as one who prostituted him or herself had often been invoked. And, for many, the 1992 Dream Team confirmed those features of professional sports which IOC members had most feared: the team stayed in lavish hotels, behaved as entitled superiors rather than internationalist ambassadors, and, worst of all, nearly failed to take to the winner’s podium when their most important loyalties (i.e. to their corporate sponsors) were in jeopardy because of conflicting sponsorship obligations between the United States Olympic Committee and the individual players.

Yet there was no doubting that great economic and political power was to be had for Samaranch and the Olympics by capitalizing upon the celebrity of the Dream Team. The media coverage of the team and the basketball tournament was extensive and lucrative. Indeed, so outsized was the role of these NBA celebrities that one USOC official remarked that “There are young people out there who think the Olympics are one big basketball tournament” (Cunningham 2009, 87). In terms of Samaranch’s authoritative efforts to revive the Games, and to convince political and financial institutions of the continuing relevance of the movement, nothing, it seems, could have been more welcome. Not surprisingly, then, Samaranch was directly involved years later with the introduction of National Hockey League players into the Winter Games.

Still, perhaps the most powerful implementation of celebrity power arising from the Samaranch presidency was the “Celebrate Humanity” advertising campaign. The campaign began in 2000 while the IOC was in the midst of the corruption scandals that plagued Samaranch’s last years as head. In many ways, it represented the culmination of his efforts to transform the IOC into one of the most visible and powerful non-governmental organizations on earth. The entire campaign was overseen by Michael Payne, who began working for the IOC at the same time that Samaranch took office in the early 1980s and became the organization’s marketing director under Samaranch in 1998.

Celebrate Humanity made extensive use of celebrities who were neither Olympians nor even well-known athletes. The first celebrity courted for the campaign was Robin Williams, the renowned American actor who had never previously done the kind of voiceover work that he did for the IOC. After Williams, a

cavalcade of celebrities was enlisted to record talking-heads or voiceovers for the video clips that were run thousands of times around the world: Avril Lavigne, Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan, Christopher Reeve and Andrea Bocelli. In addition, as Maguire et al. (2008) have pointed out, these global celebrities were complimented by a host of locally-recognized celebrities for local markets; the marketing team responsible for the campaign had intentionally generated media that could be adapted to local languages and celebrity personalities. The celebrities used included Siti Nurhaliza (Malaysia), Omar Sharif (Morocco, Algeria, and France) Valeri Gergiev (Russia), Steffi Graf (Germany), Giovane Gavio (Brazil), Youngpil Cho (South Korea), and Maura Tierney (United States) (International Olympic Committee, Athens 2004 Report, 105). Thus, the campaign was not a blunt instrument, but one tailored to engage and energize the greatest number of people worldwide (Maguire et al. 2008).⁸

The IOC also explicitly noted that Canadian musician Avril Lavigne “was specially chosen for her ability to appeal to the youth of the world” (International Olympic Committee 2004). Compared to other included celebrities (like Nelson Mandela, who was a boxer in his youth, was a privileged guest at the IOC headquarters in Switzerland, and made a personal appeal for Cape Town’s bid to host the 2004 Games), Lavigne did not easily call to mind specific Olympic connections or credentials. Instead, the audience for the campaign was simply told why she thought that “the Olympic Games rock” (International Olympic Committee, Athens 2004 Report, 105). This particular contribution seems to be the clearest example of the Olympic’s instrumentalization of celebrity power, begun under Samaranch. The subject, Lavigne, had no readily accessible connection to the movement; instead, she was selected (to sell a product, as Maguire et al., 2008, elaborate) because of her “appeal” among young consumers. Following Marks and Fisher (2002), given that these young audiences were not necessarily interested in, or attuned to, the social importance and political legitimacy of the Olympics and IOC, celebrities like Lavigne were useful to the extent that they could serve as arbiters of the organization’s cultural and political authority.

Rogge and Beyond

Following the notion of routinized charisma, Samaranch’s revolution seems to have ushered the IOC and the broader movement into an era where individual charisma is less deterministic. That is, although the IOC has always dined (literally and figuratively) at the table of kings and presidents and has enjoyed (varying) levels of privilege and legitimacy seemingly beyond its stature, the wholesale subjection of the organization and the Olympic ideals to the logic of a global market

⁸ Even the choice of celebrities was illustrative of the use of celebrity power by the IOC. The inclusion of Nelson Mandela, for example, yielded a number of influential images to the Olympic movement. Mandela was, of course, a political leader and the head of the South African state. He also conjured remembrance of the IOC’s (somewhat belated) boycott of apartheid-era South Africa. Further, as attested to in the recent findings of the Reputation Institute, Mandela is perhaps the most visible and admired “public personality” in the world (Reputation Institute 2011).

(and particularly the marketplace's global celebrities) has insulated it against depending on the goodwill of any given prime minister, philanthropist, or ambassador and imbued the Olympic Movement, and the position of IOC president, with ongoing authority. Samaranch's successor, Jacques Rogge, is decidedly less charismatic than the three presidents examined here, and, as an orthopedic surgeon, has less access to formal political networks. Yet his tenure, beginning in 2001, has, despite serious criticisms, never seemed to have placed the long-term viability of the IOC in jeopardy (see, for example, Worden, 2011, 62-71). Even in the face of the global economic crisis, urban centers around the world continue to line up in Lausanne to compete to host the Games, the coffers of the IOC are at unprecedented levels and the Olympic rings, as a symbol, remain universally recognizable (Wall 2001). The IOC's contemporary embracing of celebrity culture, whether through celebrity athletes or otherwise unaffiliated celebrities, means that corporations and other profit-making firms now have every interest in making the Games the most visible, successful, and commercialized spectacle possible. Thus, even though Rogge and his successors may not possess the charisma typically necessary for celebrity politicians, the celebritization of the IOC as an institution, and the office of the presidency in particular, seems firm.

Conclusion:

In this paper, we have attempted to illustrate the forms of power enjoyed by IOC presidents Coubertin, Brundage, and Samaranch that afforded each of them a measure of political celebrity. At the same time, we have suggested that capitalizing on, and eventually co-opting, celebrity culture afforded the IOC a new, and perhaps dubious, form of power and influence under Samaranch that was absent during the presidencies of Coubertin and Brundage. Indeed, with the political avenues for power relatively unchanged over the years, the commercialization and the celebritization of the Olympic Movement beginning with Samaranch represents a dramatic yet practical response to shifting norms in world society and the trajectory of global capitalism. That is, although the IOC now enjoys a level of *class* power without precedent in its history, the *status*-based influence it wields through the cooptation of celebrity power is a separate, but equally significant source of power. Similarly, while the logic of commercializing the Olympic brand also made its celebritization possible, the ability to attract, persuade, hire, and enjoy the company of celebrities has multiplied the normative power of the IOC and improved the political clout and status it enjoys on a global scale.

Of course, the means by which the three IOC presidents under review accumulated and exercised power in world society differed in accordance with the prevailing environmental norms of their respective eras. Thus, while continuities can certainly be uncovered across the entire modern Olympic period, the political reach and effectiveness of Coubertin, Brundage, and Samaranch depended to a large extent upon their abilities not only to navigate these evolving world cultural norms but to appropriate them and command respect and deference (i.e. power) for the IOC as an institution.

In conclusion, it is possible to connect the narrative that we have offered here to the process of political re-invigoration in the face of apathy as described by Marks and Fisher (2002). Clearly, IOC presidents have had regular recourse to political celebrity and, more recently, to the political use of celebrity culture more broadly and have leveraged these opportunities to re-position, reinvigorate, and energize public understandings of the legitimacy of the Olympic Games and Olympic movement, particularly in times of crisis. As we have been careful to illustrate, this does not necessarily mean that Coubertin, Brundage and Samaranch should be considered celebrities in their own right, but does suggest that their sources of power, understood here in Weberian terms, and the rise in celebrity culture more broadly in the past three decades, have afforded them a type of political celebrity that is not insignificant. Particularly as the Olympics under Jacques Rogge move towards an ever more ambitious global standing – illustrated by recently formalized partnership with the United Nations and the IOC's championing of international development through sport – close attention should be paid to the ways in which party, class and status continue to contribute to the political legitimacy of the IOC and its leaders, including President Rogge. The ever increasing connections between the Olympic Games and the culture of celebrity, and the political implications thereof, are worthy of ongoing analysis.

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