



29. PIERRE FRÉDY, BARON DE COUBERTIN

i. Introduction

The name of Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin is joined with the recent Greek athletic history and the revival of the Olympiads. He was born to an aristocratic family, in Paris, France, 1st January 1863 and 2nd September 1937 he went out for his last walk alone, round the “Parc La Grange”, in Geneva by the today Athletic Library of the city. There, he let his psyche fly over the Alpes and bring his heart rest at the Coubertin Monument at the holy soil of Ancient Olympia. He was a profound educator and an active Philhellene.

He had inherited the title of Baron as well as a great fortune from his father Charl-Luis, so he could afford to study law, sociology and pedagogics. He published a lot of books and articles on athletic themes. He concerned himself about educational systems of his time as well as the problems of culture.

Baron de Coubertin, having in his psyche the great importance of the globalization of the athletics promoted the ancient Greek Olympic Spirit. He toured to the U.S.A. and Europe and he studied the different pedagogical methods. He visited Greece at the time the excavations of the German archeological mission, under Ernst Curtius, brought to sight, the athletic sites and stadiums. Baron de Coubertin embraced the Olympic Spirit and advanced to the formation of the modern Olympiads.

In 1886 Baron de Coubertin, carrying out a commission of the French Government organized the Physical Education Congress. His main concern was the education of the children in France and his continuous pursuit was the didactic reform. The French Ministry of Education entrusted him with the study of the didactic systems of many countries around the world. After all his investigations, his sensation about the athletic training was rather negative. “Everywhere I had found the dissension, the internal confrontation among the supporters”... he confessed, “and then, I first apprehended the idea of the Olympic Games’ re-establishment”.

Baron de Coubertin, as a sociologist and pedagogue, after he had studied the ancient Greek writers, he grasped the idea of the revival of the Olympic ideals; he lectured throughout the U.S.A. England and France and at a great meeting with the French athletic unions on the 29th November 1892, he projected the modern Olympiads. Baron de Coubertin announced at Sorbonne that the modern Olympiads could be held in a modern organization.

Two years later, on 23rd July 1894, an international athletic congress was held in Paris, where the delegate of fifteen countries participated. At the end of this six-day congress all the members accepted the proposition of the revival of Olympism. The recurrence of the Olympiads was authentically declared. The I Olympic Games was proposed by the first president of the International Olympic Committee, Dimitrios Vicelas to be held in Athens, in March 1896. The proposition was unanimously accepted. Since 1896, for over a century the Modern Olympiads join enthusiastically the younger generations worldwide.

Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin, as a young man, was an enthusiastic sportsman. Influenced by the events of the 19th century and his own education, Baron de Coubertin developed a passionate belief that the sport possessed the power to benefit humanity and encourage peace among the nations of the world.



He was an educator, who was primarily responsible for the revival of the Olympic Games after nearly 1,500 years of abeyance. Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin was one of the first French advocates of physical education and wrote many books on this subject. It was his belief that international competition among amateur athletes, as the ones he had proposed, would diminish the world's tensions.

Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin was the driving force behind the fledgling Olympic Movement. In 1896 he became the second president of the International Olympic Committee, based in Lausanne since 1915, and held that post for twenty-nine years, (1896-1925).

He committed his life and his fortune to the establishment and growth of the modern Olympic Games. "The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well", wrote the founder of the Modern Olympic Movement, Baron de Coubertin.

Baron de Coubertin, who had broken a long family tradition of military service, was never a very happy man, he was married and had a son who was mentally handicapped and had died at an early age. The two sons of his brother died at World War I; the Baron de Coubertin family of a 460-year history was ended.

His contemporary men did not appreciate the high value of his individual offering and did not honor him, as he deserved it. During the ten last years of his life he was hit by economic misfortunes. He tried to find a work to earn his leaving, but he could not. His last appearance in public was his salutation to the first torchbearers that carried the Olympic Flame from Olympia to Berlin at the XI Olympiad in Berlin, Germany, 1936. Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin, poor and lonely, died one year later 2nd September 1937, from a heart attack, at the park Grange in Geneva.

Though Baron de Coubertin did not approve of women competing in the Olympic Games at his time, he fought ferociously for the larger ideals of Olympism. His vision and determination created a movement that has, united the athletes of different races, tribes and nations of the world in peaceful celebration and competition.

Since 1896, every four years, athletes from around the world come together to celebrate the Olympic Games. These Games are the world's noblest festivals of athletic competition and international friendship. Athletes from all parts of the globe and from all walks of life, gather at the Olympic city to realize their dreams and experience the glory of Olympic competition.

Baron de Coubertin had believed in modern Greece. He had written in a great Paris paper: "...the people that are going to visit Athens during the I Olympiad will comprehend that the ancient Greece is disfigured by a clumsy pedagogical system and that there is the modern Greece that is not at all known. Both of them, the ancient and the modern Greece are closely joined by the bonds of similarity relations".

Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin revealed the Olympic symbol in 1913. In his words: "these five circles stand for the five regions on Earth that reconcile with Olympism... it is an authentic Olympic symbol". These Olympic circles represent the five continents and the meeting of the athletes from all around the world. The colors of the Olympic circles have been chosen to represent at least one of the colors of the flags of each country. The five colors are: bleu, yellow, black, green and red and are set upon a white background.

The prototype Olympic flag was made by "Bon Marché", in Paris. It is three meters long and two meters wide. It flapped for the first time at the Olympic stadium in

Antwerp. That first flag also brought the motto: «*Altius, Silius, Fortius*», Faster, Higher, Stronger.

G. Dolianitis characterizes Baron de Coubertin the inspirer, organizer and the spirit of the international Athletic Congress in Paris and regards him as the protagonist of the Olympic happenings till the end of his life.

Dimitrios Vicelas, the first President of the International Olympic Committee, characterized Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin as an indefatigable man, energetic, courteous in behavior, with an iron will. The Athenian newspaper of that time “*Hestia*”, announcing the death of the sporting man Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin wrote: “Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin belonged to the distinguished men, who deserve the two high titles, of the Philhellene and the benefactor of the humankind”.

Sixty years after the death of Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin, 5th September 1997, the International Olympic Committee voted for the XXVIII Olympiad to be held once again in Athens in 2004AD. Athens is given the challenge to light the Olympic Flame and show its modern identity.

The “everlasting ancient spirit, of the pure father of the handsome, the great and the true” coexists and emerges even more beautiful in the dynamic energy of the athletic ideal of the “*Altius, Silius, Fortius*”, “Faster, Higher, Stronger” in every aspect of the everyday life for the prosperous ensuring of the future generations as well as the protection of the environment.

ii. Theodor Lewald

The idea for the revival of the Olympic Flame, the everlasting hallowed fire, burning constantly at the Prytaneum of the ancient Olympia, was suggested by Theodore Lewald.

Theodore Lewald was a member of the International Olympic Committee. The Olympic Flame first appeared at the IX Olympic Games, at the Amsterdam Stadium in 1928. The flame is lit by the concentration of the sunbeams, the eternal origin of energy and symbol of the universal prosperity. Today the site of the touch of the Olympic Fire is considered virtuous.

With this inspiration of Theodore Lewald, everyone following the Olympic Flame can go along with the torchbearers carrying the Olympic fire to the modern Olympic cities. This Flame running through the world lights and joins in admirable harmony the universal youth.

Today in the sacred grove of Altis there are the ruins of the temple of Hera and Zeus as well as many other ancient monuments. At this sacred spot, every time the flame is touched, the heart of Theodore Lewald comes back to life while the torchbearers are carrying it to each modern Olympic city to light the Olympic Stadium and the brains of humanity.

iii. The International Olympic Day

The idea of an International Olympic Day was adopted at the 42nd IOC Session in St Moritz in January 1948. The National Olympic Committees (NOC) were entrusted with the organization of this event and asked to choose a date between 17 and 24 June to show their wish to commemorate the founding of the IOC at the Sorbonne in Paris, on 23 June 1894, when Pierre de Coubertin secured the restoration of the Olympic Games.



Olympic Day was first celebrated on 23 June 1948, after the whirlwind of World War II, and before the XIV Olympiad in London.

Since 1987, Olympic Day has been marked by the staging of fun runs by the NOCs. This is one of the activities of the IOC's Sport for All Commission, whose specific purpose is to promote mass sport.

In Greece the Olympic Day is celebrated on 6th April, commemorating the first day of the I Olympiad in Athens in 1896.

iv. The Olympic Movement

The Paris Congress and the five-year work of Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin created the International Olympic Committee, the supreme authority of the Olympic Movement, on 23rd June 1894, a day that is celebrated annually around the world as the International Olympic Day.

In addition to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Olympic Movement includes the International Sport Federations (ISF), the National Olympic Committees (NOC), the Organizing Committees of the Olympic Games (OC), the National Associations, (NA), the Clubs and the people belonging to them, particularly the athletes. The Olympic Movement also includes other organizations recognized by the IOC.

The Olympic Charter as a philosophy "exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind describes the modern Olympism as conceived by Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin in. Blending sport with culture and education, *Olympism* seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles".

"The goal of *Olympism* is that sports education take place everywhere being at the service of the harmonious development of mankind, with a view of encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity".

"The goal of the *Olympic Movement* is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practiced without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic Spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play". The Olympic Movement "encompasses organization, athletes and other persons who agree to be guided by the Olympic Charter".

The *International Olympic Committee* is the supreme authority of the Olympic Movement. Based in Lausanne, Switzerland; the IOC is a non-governmental and non-profit organization whose primary purpose is to encourage the growth of sport within the Olympic ideal, including ensuring the regular celebration of the Olympic Games.

The *International Olympic Committee* comprises individuals who volunteer their services on behalf of the Olympic Movement. Membership is open to resident citizens of countries having National Olympic Committees. Members must speak either French or English. New members are elected by the existing membership. Individual members represent the *International Olympic Committee* in their home countries. They are not delegates of a country to the *International Olympic Committee*. Individual members may not be under the authority of any government, organization, or individual that might direct or compromise the independence of their votes. As in 1995, there were 106 members of the *International Olympic Committee*.



The *International Olympic Committee* was formed on June 23, 1894, in Paris, France at the instigation of the founder of the modern Olympic Movement, Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin. Initially it consisted of fourteen members, with Demetrios Bikelas its first president. Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin assumed the presidency in 1896, and led the Olympic Movement until 1925. As of this writing there have been seven *International Olympic Committee* presidents. The present president Juan Antonio Samaranch of Spain was elected to the post in 1980 and since then twice reelected. One American, the late Avery Brundage, served as *International Olympic Committee* president for twenty years, from 1952-1972.

In 1981, the *International Olympic Committee*, elected its first women members: Pirjo Haggman of Finland and Flor Isava-Fonseca of Venezuela.