
The French Initiative towards the Creation of an International Sports Movement 1908-1925: An Alternative to the International Olympic Committee

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The increasing number and rapid growth of International Sports Federations (ISF) and the creation of a Permanent Bureau for the ISF in the 1920s marked a significant period in the history of the international sports movement. As early as the end of the First World War, analysis of the French National Sports Committee (NSC) and International Olympic Committee archives shows the role France played in launching an international structure modeled on the system set up by the NSC at national level. Using the exclusion of the defeated powers as a pretext, this nationalist project, in keeping with French state policy, led to the

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creation of an international sports movement built around the incorporation of an International Sports Committee and the ISF as one unit. This endeavor signaled a period of conflict within the Olympic movement as supporters saw this action as a means to quash or to destroy Olympism.

THE THEME OF INTERNATIONAL SPORTS has most frequently been dealt with through study of the Olympic movement.¹ Its institutional foundation and, more particularly, its structure have rarely been explored.² This paper, however, analyzes the factors that played a leading role in the creation of a large number of international sports federations during the interwar years³ and their joining together to become a Permanent Bureau of International Sports Federations in 1921.⁴ The analysis is based on the archives of the National Sports Committee (NSC), the French Olympic Committee (FOC), and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Following Pierre de Coubertin's revival of the Olympic movement during the 1894 Congress in Paris of the Union of French Athletic Sports Associations (UFASA), a process of Olympic institutionalization was launched at the national level.⁵ Between 1894 and 1900, seven National Olympic Committees (NOC) were created and on the eve of the World War I there were twenty-three such committees, in most cases closely linked to a national committee responsible for physical and sports education.⁶

In late 1894 a French Olympic Committee was established with responsibility for the representation of France during the first Olympic games in Athens. This committee was comprised of major actors from the fields of sports and physical education, politicians, and journalists, but as it mainly dealt with the Olympic games, the committee's purpose was short-lived. However a series of national and international political crises then led to an intensification of republicanism aimed at reinforcing national unity.⁷ Sports and physical activity were acknowledged as a powerful tool for such mobilization, and the development of federations was assisted by the passing of the Freedom of Association Act in July of 1901.⁸ From this point on, the role of sports institutions was directed towards educating the French population—an education that would be in tune with republican values.

In order to develop collaboration on a national level, unions or federations were set up and affiliated. Initially these were based on religious, social, or political affinities, but the separation of church and state in 1905 produced tensions within the French sports movement. Republicans and lay citizens then united to counter religious federations and move closer to the Union of French Athletic Sports Associations (UFASA), which in turn became the meeting place for federations who adopted the republican spirit.⁹

Rapidly discouraged by the lack of UFASA commitment to the transformation of the Olympic games, de Coubertin resigned in December of 1906 from his position as an honorary member. His resignation was a protest against the laic and pro-governmental crusade the Union waged in opposition to the Sports and Gymnastic Federation of France's Patronages (SGFFP).¹⁰ The controversy escalated in 1907 when some French sports leaders refused to acknowledge de Coubertin's committee, which was "created in order to ensure that France would partake in the Olympic games in London."¹¹

At the UFASA meeting in January of 1907 the need to develop alliances based on republican culture was emphasized. A resolution was passed, confirming that: “an agreement has been reached between the allied federations . . . regarding the guidelines for France’s participation in this sports event [the Olympic games in London, 1908]” and that “all the major federations [have] officially decided that they will sponsor and partake in the Olympic Games if they or the French government are included in the organizing Committee.”¹²

They were not just speaking out against de Coubertin. As they defined themselves as non-political and non-religious, lay federations positioned themselves as the enemy of religious or political federations whose intention was to create national multi-sport organizations. In March of 1907 the SGFFP and its Secretary-General Charles Simon, along with various groups opposed to the UFASA, founded an Inter-Federal French Committee (IFC) whose aim was the development of sports. The struggle for ideological control over sports had now been sparked off at national level.

The threat of political or religious federations gaining ascendancy over French sports, along with the threat of partial control over Olympic participation by de Coubertin, led to five republican and lay unions uniting in May of 1908 to create the National Sports Committee.¹³ Through the initiative of Frantz Reichel and the UFASA, a national, multi-sport organization was founded. It united the French Union of Velocipedes, the French Boxing Federation (FBF), the French Rowing Federation (FRF), and the National Fencing Federation (NFF).¹⁴ Moreover, opponents to the UFASA, such as the Union of the French Gymnastic Federations (UFGF) or the Union of the French Shooting Federations (UFSF) offered their moral support to the NSC.¹⁵ From the time of its creation, the NSC personified the role of opposition to “religion with sports.” Frantz Reichel subsequently declared: “Our committee, the National Sports Committee, was founded in 1908 during the London Olympic Games; the Federations concerned felt the need, or rather, the necessity to unite in order to defend not only their own interests but also the general interests of French sports.”¹⁶

A similar situation occurred on the eve of the 1912 Olympic games in Stockholm. A compromise seemed to have been reached when the French Olympic Committee was created within the NSC framework which brought the role of the NSC full circle as the sole representative of French sports abroad. Prior to World War I, the NSC was the product of republican values, which spread through every field in which French influence was growing.¹⁷ Acquiring international legitimacy became the means of developing the role of leader at a national level. This legitimacy was finalized by the 1913 signature of a compromise between the IFC and the NSC.

From 1908 to 1922 (when it became state-approved) the NSC took a stand as a sports superpower in line with new ideas of political management: beliefs that were marked with the passage from “the paramount influence of a democratic political culture which characterizes republican political elites at the end of the 19th century . . . to a political culture which gives value to competent hierarchies and to the authority of centralized decision-making organs.”¹⁸ The NSC developed into a vehicle for the development of sports with the goal of imposing a unified model over a system of values representing a republican, national, and lay identity.¹⁹ It structured the French sports world on the basis of specific

elements and created a homogeneous French sports movement. The ratification of universal rules led to the organization of a hierarchy for French federations and to the control of republican and lay federations that specialized in one sport or one group of sports. Progressive grouping of the majority of federations contributed to the NSC's increased power, and by 1914—and especially from 1921 when the UFASA broke up into various sports federations—it was on the way to becoming the central actor in the development of sports in France.

This development favored relations between the committee—whose role was to embody the French sports movement—and the authorities; and in March of 1922 the NSC became state approved. The proximity also underlined the state's interest in the NSC as a means for significant action where sports and youth were concerned; action often hidden by nationalist, patriotic, and eugenicist goals. In consequence, the creation of the NSC resulted in a shifting paradox varying between “process towards autonomy” and “reinforcement of control over French sports.”²⁰

In using its national status to its advantage, actions by the NSC were not limited to French soil. As it aimed at proving that France remained a great nation, the NSC actively participated in the structuring of international sports. Its members were required to partake in and assume responsibilities that would in turn ensure significant French representation at the international level. Just before World War I broke out, the NSC's aim was explicit: “to organize world championships for all sports by means of competent federations.”²¹ Logically the mission was given to the major federations who “are the only ones qualified to represent the sport or groups of sports which they administer in France, and to rule on them on the international level.”²²

Although they first conceived their activity on the national level, the leaders of the NSC increased their international strategy during the post-war period. French leaders, members of the NSC, backed by the state, developed a plan of action that aimed at taking control of international sports based on the model established by the NSC. Their intention was to impose French authority at a high level. The goal was to acknowledge the prerogatives of certain sports federations but most importantly, to actively work towards the structuring of International Federations, so as to counter an increasingly powerful IOC.

Shifting in the Direction of an International Sports Movement

The practice of sports activities had been a recurring subject in France since the military defeat by Prussia in 1870, but after World War I sports became an important patriotic tool. Financial, economic, demographic, and psychological damage resulting from the conflict weakened France and marked the end of its worldwide political influence. Instead the country sought to exert international influence via sports administration, a process that had begun before the war.

After having contributed to the emergence of the Olympic movement,²³ the plan of several members of the NSC was to reorganize the international sports movement following the same pattern as the French model. As early as its first meetings, it offered to “organize the world championships for all sports through the agency of relevant federations,” thus laying the groundwork for this ambitious project.²⁴ The NSC aimed at con-

tributing to all international decisions and making France influential in terms of direction. For instance, the implementation of a single set of Olympic regulations during the Olympic Convention of Paris of 1914 was established under French influence: Earl de Clary declared that “when the detailed report of the sessions of the convention is published, we will see that the intervention of the French delegates has been effective . . . the French point of view [having] won out by 9 out of 10.”²⁵

French leaders also contributed to the creation of the first international federations both before and after the formation of the NSC.²⁶ As a result of French commitment, the Bureau of the European Gymnastics Federations—the first federation with international status—was created in July of 1881 in Liège, Belgium.²⁷ The International Football Federation was founded at the initiative of Robert Guérin, secretary-general of the soccer department of the Union of French Athletic Sports Associations (UFASA) in May of 1904. The International Union of National Shooting Federations was created in July of 1907, and led by Daniel Mérillon, vice-president of the NSC from 1913 to 1926.²⁸ The International Ice Hockey Federation was created in Paris in May of 1908, initiated by Louis Magnus, a member of the UFASA for ice-hockey and then secretary general of the French Winter Sports Federation.²⁹ Conceived by Duane Williams and created by Henri Wallet, member of the UFASA lawn-tennis branch, the International Lawn-Tennis Federation (ILTF) was established in March of 1913 in Paris.

After the First World War, France—both victorious and humiliated—tried to redeem itself with a rank fitting its ambitions to be a great power again.³⁰ Weakened on the international political scene, France saw sports as a field where nationalism and international influence could be demonstrated. The NSC became an agency for French nationalism. French leaders in the sports movement planned on restructuring international sports in order to take control and to use it as a means of achieving their goals. Using the organizational and ruling structure of the NSC as a model was in keeping with this desire to improve the nation’s prestige. In France, control over international sports became a top priority.³¹ During the first meeting following the war in November of 1918, discussions within the NSC dealt with these matters. The aim was to have the NSC and its federations take immediate action “which will pave the way for the direction of the groups affiliated to the National Sports Committee, in terms of resuming their participation in international associations, or the possibility of their membership within new international groups that may be created in the future.”³² Following France’s example during the Treaty of Versailles, a firm stance was taken regarding relations with foreign enemy organizations.³³ It was to be developed on the same basis as the one followed by political leaders:

Paul Rousseau believes—and the assembly unanimously agrees—that it is not feasible, in the days following the signature of the peace treaty, to have our French athletes meet those who declared war on France, that is to say, with those who are still our enemies today, since the war is not over yet. . . . The worldwide conflict which has just ended with the victory of France and its allies, has faced French groups with a very new state of affairs, and it is important that arrangements be made so as to protect French interests, so that our youth may be protected from direct contact with our enemies.³⁴

This declaration emphasized the political position sports had now taken.

During the meeting it was resolved:

The National Sports Committee, after having taken into account a project model presented by Mr. P. Rousseau, for the status of post-war international Federations, hopes that all Federations or affiliated Unions take the appropriate steps, from this point on, to ensure the continuation, the resumption or the creation of international sports federations, established in accordance with the following principles: 1) Excluded from the groups are Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and Turkey;³⁵ 2) It is forbidden to allow nationals from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey to take part in their games, contests or international events; and 3) Affiliated associations are not allowed to affiliate with any other similar international Federation.³⁶

A fourth principle was to organize world championships but, of course, without the participation of the nations excluded above.

Within this framework, the NSC defined itself as a reference point whose ideology would spread to all countries as the basis of a true and coherent international sports movement:

The National Sports Committee hopes that each country will pursue the unification of national Federations, affiliated with international Unions, into National Sports Committees similar to the French National Sports Committee, in order to achieve the creation of an International Sports Committee uniting the National Committees from every country.³⁷

This International Sports Committee (ISC) would be comprised of members of assembled international federations. As in France, the ISC had to build the international sports movement and to establish a hierarchy of responsibilities among the various federations. From a model based on independence and the opposition to multi-sport unions, the NSC had established the principle of “recognition of a single authority per sport or group of sports.”³⁸ Using an almost exact copy of the French NSC statutes, the ISC specified that “simultaneous participation in several international federations is forbidden.”³⁹ The purpose of this measure was to redefine respective powers and to ensure the existence of only one representative per activity through the establishment of exclusive delegation power. In the past, several federations or unions could have been considered as managers of the same sport, but now one was given the status of “leading” federation and had exclusive prerogatives over the sports concerned, thus assuring the coordination of initiatives in keeping with the instructions set up by the central organization.⁴⁰ Following the example of the NSC, the ISC would lead to the establishment of a system where it would have substantial power within the sports world.

The ISC: A Counter-model to the IOC?

Even though the “model statutes of an international group” set by Rousseau were not identical to those of the NSC, the principles of organization and values were similar. Following the NSC’s policy of “the acknowledgement [*sic*] of a sole sports power per sport or sports group,” an international group had to be comprised of the controlling federations of each sport at a national level.⁴¹ The chosen federations therefore became pre-eminent and facilitated the establishment of a common set of rules. Once these were instituted, setting up international contests then became possible while also allowing for

more exposure of each activity.

The structuring and the internal workings of the international group were close to those of the French NSC. The code of equality was respected, at least on the surface, since article 5—which specified the number of voices per federation—stated that “any unionized federation is afforded only one voice.”⁴² Additionally it offered a democratic system in which (theoretically) any member could become a representative of his sport in the committee or a member of the bureau. The system of representation was central to the international group as the NSC now coordinated structures that had previously been separate entities. This constantly-emphasized function was adopted by the project for all international federations and enabled the sport-governing bodies to gain influence and legitimacy of representation.

Contrary to members of the IOC, NSC members were sports leaders who had experience and were considered to be skilled enough to manage a sport because they had previously practiced sports or managed a club or a federation. The technical specialization code thus took precedent over philosophical aspects. Sports leaders who came from the aristocracy—who had dominated the scene until the First World War—were progressively being replaced by specialized sports administrators.

From 1912, being elected at the federation level or at the NSC level was necessary in order to secure responsibilities. This policy was in sharp contrast to the IOC whose members were granted the right of co-option.⁴³ Everything was organized so that only individuals who were not linked to the government in any way could become ambassadors of the committee for their respective countries.⁴⁴ Dedication to the Olympic spirit meant that co-opted members had to be “free from any allegiance to any sports discipline and able to decide as necessary and not only in the interest of the sport they favor.” Here, the “sacred” (ideology) prevailed over the technical aspect. An international bureau for peace through sports,⁴⁵ the International Committee quickly became, in the eyes of some, an “autocratic cenacle.”⁴⁶ Relations between the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) were unilateral and the latter played the role of dispatcher for Olympic policy as defined by the IOC. They did not become representatives of national sports structures at all but rather Olympic representatives on a national level. The difference between the two structures lay in the necessity for each NOC to work hand in hand with their respective national culture so as to offer better communication of the Olympic message.⁴⁷ Only the IOC could take on the international role, at the expense of the NOCs, which were not integrated internationally.

Therefore, it is understandable how much the goals aimed at by the NSC stood in sharp contrast to the Olympic organization, especially where representation was concerned. Indeed, at a dinner hosted by the British government during the 1908 London Olympic games, de Coubertin emphasized the danger of the electoral system and by doing so justified his choice in favor the Olympic movement:

We are not elected officials; we recruit from within and our terms in office are unlimited. What more does it take to provoke an opinion which is more and more accustomed to seeing the election system enlarge its power and, little by little, hold every institution under its thumb. . . . I have learned many things about this country's past, and among them, the fact that the best way to protect freedom and to serve democracy is not to give up everything to elections but on

the contrary to maintain, in the vast electoral ocean, small islands where we can ensure, in certain specialties, the pursuit of an independent and stable effort. . . . I daresay this is what sports groups, too often, lack.”⁴⁸

The IOC policy regarding its choice of members did not reflect the reality of international sport organization, and thus the IOC appeared to be an organ made up of a social elite that had no legitimacy for many representatives of the NSC, unlike the ISC which consisted of international sports federations and claimed to be a democratic and representative organization. In that respect two models of organization of sports authority confronted each other.

Conditions for organizing international contests such as the Olympic games or world championships emphasized the serious differences of opinion between the IOC and the ISC. Following the example of the French championships—exclusively organized by leading federations of the NSC—the international group was responsible for organizing annual world championships that differed from the Olympic games, which were organized only every four years. The organization of the world championships was under the sole authority of the international group, whereas during the Olympic games, its power was limited to technical aspects.⁴⁹

The ISC took on the role of arbiter of moral integrity and of arbitrator between the affiliated federations when problems arose. Just like the NSC, the international group “will also have the final word in settling conflicts which may occur between federations” with the result that on its level it appeared to be the regulator and controlling organ of the sports movement.⁵⁰ Representing authority, it had to take on a key position in the development of the sports scenario in France and throughout the world. This policy, inscribed in the NSC statutes, which led to the “acknowledgement [*sic*] and [the] extension of penalties by the federations” was also applied to the international group statutes in articles 31 to 33. Nonetheless, article 31 was especially inspired by this policy, declaring that: “Penalties handed down by the competent authorities of one of the affiliated federations against one of its members, or against a foreign member on its soil, will be applicable to all affiliated federations.” This could not be done unilaterally as “federations that have sanctions to hand down must inform the Secretary of the current International Group immediately. He will then notify the federation who will in turn apply sanctions to the members concerned.”⁵¹ Through this article, the International Group had full control over sanctions pronounced by national federations.

A New Means of Control over Sport

During the postwar years, sport was used by France as an instrument for culturally promulgating the country’s desired central model. France took part in the structuring of international sports and considered sports to be a full-fledged ideological tool.⁵² Not only was French established as the official language of the Olympic movement; it was also promoted in the sports field as one of the highest-ranking international languages. Article 17 of the ISC statutes specified that “all deliberations will take place in French and all official documents will be written in French.” The same pattern was followed in monetary matters, as article 31 announced that “the accepted monetary unit is ‘the franc on par.’” As each international group followed the same principles and the same rules, France was to

become a reference point in the sports world, thus overriding the existing structures such as the IOC, which was deemed excessively supranational.

The electoral system emphasized the democratic principle according to which any member could express an opinion and move up to a managerial position. However, this democratic characteristic that turned it into a product of the "French-style" Republic was only an illusion.⁵³ Following the example of the NSC, this type of leadership became outdated as a result of the votes given to each federation. It was a strategic issue that led to the establishment of control over the management of the organization and its policy on an international level.

Therefore, as it meant to favor colonial empires such as France, without affording advantages to countries made up of state plurality such as the United States of America or the United Kingdom, article 22 of the ISC statutes specified that:

Some nations, whose political constitution is such that they are organized as separate or autonomous provinces, with ethnic divisions or special governments, can be allowed, by exceptional agreement of the Convention, to be represented by one or several Federations. It is obvious that no one nation can be represented in this manner by more than twelve authorized persons as per the statutes. The Convention will decide whether the country, province, ethnic region, special group, colonies or group of colonies can be considered as a proper nation, or be attached to a nation.⁵⁴

Although this text seemed to pave the way for a policy of recognition of the independence of colonized countries, its purpose was to favor developed and industrialized nations, where sport was present and organized. International sports, in much the same way as a global economy, had to be controlled by the more developed societies.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, through this article, the French subtly placed itself in the conflict of influence between the French-speaking empires and the Anglo-Saxon nations.

Following this approach, the project for the creation of the ISC, where France would have a central position, imposed "proper" representation of French leaders on all the international governing bodies. Indeed, as it chose the electoral system and representation of the federations by its members, the larger the number of French members at the head of international federations, the greater the chances were of having more French voices in the ISC. Articles 19 to 24, related to the assignment of votes, underlined the French strategy aimed at occupying as much space as possible in all these international organizations. Aware of French strengths and weaknesses, it emphasized that vote assignment would take place "in accordance with a sports' importance . . . which will be finalized with the affiliation of the federation of the country concerned."⁵⁶ This was in harmony with Rousseau's speech at the NSC Assembly, which stated that "the principle of proportional representation per voice, according to the importance of the country, should be the course of action which will guide the French from this point on."⁵⁷ The purpose was to allow France to control a majority of international federations. This plan of action was clearly stated by Rousseau who specified that: "Without it, France would come across as still being a country at a disadvantage if national representation with only one voice per nation was applied. As a result, the French vote would have as little importance as one of the smallest groups, States or most recent Constitutions."⁵⁸

Aware of the weakness that France faced if it was deprived of its colonial power, article 19 emphasized taking into account the assignment of votes from the colonies and protectorates. This measure was finalized by article 24 that forbade the acknowledgment of a colony or a protectorate as a nation: "As a matter of course, by represented country we mean a proper nation, not dependencies or colonies."⁵⁹ The voting system reinforced those in power with the passing of article 23 in which "each federation can be represented by as many delegates as it has votes."⁶⁰ This situation indicates that the higher the number of delegates per country, the greater the force of influence and persuasion. Therefore, despite the image of a democratic system, analysis of this typical statute shows that everything contributed to the establishment of France and its representatives at the head of international sports.

Choosing vote distribution within the international group revealed the plan of action for the organization of every nation affiliated to it. As article 21 stated, "[E]ach nation is represented by one or two federations as long as only one federation rules both professional and amateur sports or as long as each sport is ruled by one specific federation."⁶¹ The international group granted itself the power to organize the sport of each nation both on amateur and professional levels. As it insisted on the necessity of creating international groups that represented both sports practices, it aimed at forming centralized organs of decision in which each sports specialty would be able to stimulate, develop, control, and regulate the entire sports movement worldwide and on any level of practice.⁶² In a world of sports divided between amateurs and professionals that most often reflected the practices of class, the French project appeared to be an innovation and in contrast to the policy advocated by the IOC.⁶³

After the construction of a sports movement on the grounds of specialization of federations and on common values based on amateur and competitive practice of sports, the NSC entered into a second phase intended to control all sports practices.⁶⁴ Since its foundation and more particularly from 1919 on, it was open to professional sports. Its organization process, based on leading federations, was reinforced by the desire to establish single-sport federations that would have full control over amateur and professional male sports practices. Nonetheless, the purpose behind this takeover strategy was aimed at controlling both codes. Even though amateurism remained a model of reference, professionalism was from that time on given increased consideration. During the interwar years, the NSC as well as the UFASA—which had become the Union of French Athletic Sports Federations (UFASF)—improved its relations with professional federations. This opening up to professional sport by the NSC was part of a process aimed at taking complete control of (over) all sports by the leading federations. This position was set out in article 22 of the ISC statutes; it stated that in the event of only one federation ruling both professional and amateur sports, "the affiliated Federation will be entitled to all its country's votes."⁶⁵ Moreover, if each sport was ruled by a special federation, "the number of votes will be determined by the Convention which will endorse their admission."⁶⁶ This measure favored the creation of a prototype federation, one in charge of both professional and amateur sports.

Anticipating the possibility of affiliating professional sports, the ISC gave the impression of being a more democratic organization even though the main reasons behind integration were the desire for control and communication of NSC values. Moreover, ap-

proval of professional sport would have increased the power of representation of leading NSC and ISC federations opening up their organizations to all social classes and especially to the general public that dominated professional sports. Indeed, professional sports were a means of democratization and of upward mobility. On the contrary, the IOC reinforced its policy favoring pure amateurism despite difficulties in elaborating a clear and precise definition.⁶⁷

Not only did the ISC play an essential organizational role, but it also defined conditions for sport. Just like the NSC, the ISC wanted to control the organization of sports practice and define its values and rules in order to direct its development. The creation of the ISC based on the NSC model became the means for a number of sports federations to promote a practice of physical activities with sports as the model, rather than using gymnastic or military models.⁶⁸

The purpose of the French project was to create a worldwide sports movement which would be politically united. After having established specialized international structures and unified sports activities within the ISC, the project's aim was to send a message of political belief based on the republican and laic model through sports education, to be taught to sportsmen all over the world, irrespective of class and religious differences. Building a system of skills and of specialization, this project would give a common identity to all national sports movements that would come together to form a world sports group. At the heart of this project, sports would be the agency for transformation towards a new international society.

An Uncertain Outcome

In the midst of an international situation characterized by an increase in nationalist feelings, France was no exception.⁶⁹ The end of the First World War had sparked off the beginning of a decline in France's influence on the international scene.⁷⁰ Under those circumstances, sport was viewed as a means of allowing France to gain new status. In the power struggle that opposed Anglo-Saxons to the French, France saw the structuring of international sports as a means of reviving her influence on the world scene while improving the role of sports within her borders.⁷¹ Hence sports authorities developed in the Anglo-Saxon world became a prime target of the French.⁷²

Post-war circumstances were not the only reason for French behavior. The history of the institutionalization of sport in France at the beginning of the twentieth century was closely linked to opposition to de Coubertin's initiatives from 1894 onwards.⁷³ In addition, several French leaders criticized de Coubertin's Olympism for being too close to the English model.⁷⁴ Integrated into journalistic and political fields, the leaders of French sports institutions led a critical and lasting campaign against de Coubertin and Olympism.⁷⁵

Derived from the same matrix from which the UFASA was composed, the NSC and the IOC progressively differentiated themselves from one another and by the end of World War I had become two antagonistic structures. With this conflicting rationalization, the NSC, through Rousseau, set up a project on an international scale whose aim was to imitate the system set up in France by the NSC: a system composed of single-sport federations, granted technical powers over their sport that followed a democratic model based on a republican and lay ideology.

The NSC session of November 22, 1918, was a turning point not only in the history of French sports but also in the history of international sports structuring. As they passed resolutions aimed at defining the basis of international groups—in other words international federations—the French developed a project for international sports politics. This project was intended to bring France into a position of total authority within each International Federation and then within the ISC, similar to the NSC. By means of a “democratic” channel, the French, who already held office at the international federation level, could move up to head the ISC and therefore direct international sports politics.

The French proposition heralded a troubled time for the stability of the IOC. The first attack was launched by Rousseau and the International Cycling Union who endeavored to create the International Sports Committee, a true supra-federation uniting all the International Sports Federations that ran amateur and professional sports. The aim was to knock male and amateur Olympic tradition off balance so as to favor a more liberal and democratic sports policy where sports activity would be controlled by a central organization. Aware of the threat to the Olympic movement, de Coubertin, assisted by several international leaders and members of the IOC who were part of the International Federations (IF) such as Sigfrid Edström, managed to have the French initiative aborted.⁷⁶ This led in 1921 to the creation of a Permanent Bureau of International Sports Federations with their headquarters in Paris.⁷⁷ Dutchman Captain Pieter W. Scharroo was elected president at the expense of candidate Eugène de Vögue, president of the International Automobile Federation, who was backed by the French. De Coubertin's co-option of Captain Scharroo to the IOC in 1924, along with the creation of a bond between the International Federations and the IOC during the sessions in Lausanne (1921) and Prague (1925), and the delegation of the technical authority for the Olympic games to the international federations, illustrated the many reasons for the failure of the French project.

Nonetheless, the French thereafter launched a series of actions in order to influence the future of international sports during the 1920s and 1930s. First of all, they tried to keep a French citizen at the head of the IOC, but Earl de Clary suffered a severe defeat in 1925 with the election of Henri Baillet-Latour.⁷⁸ This was a true sign that France had lost its influence within the Olympic movement. At the same time, the successive tensions of the FIFA, ILTF, Skating IF, and Skiing IF symbolized the struggle between the IF and the IOC, a struggle that began with French action after World War I.⁷⁹ Indeed, in 1925, Gaston Vidal was to become the IOC representative for the International Federations that claimed the right to have their seat.⁸⁰

The creation of an international organization that assembled all the international sports federations into an International Sports Committee was pursued by Gaston Vidal and Frantz Reichel in the direction of the League of Nations.⁸¹ Rather than arguing that they aimed at acquiring total control over international sports under the authority of this body, it can be suggested that they tried to imitate the French national initiative so as to impose democratic, republican, and lay sports. As they failed to get control over the IOC, instigators of the ISC tried—in much the same way as during the original creation of the NSC—to use the political world in order to obtain recognition and legitimacy. Their purpose was to coax the League of Nations into acknowledging the ISC's role as the “world's sports Parliament.” The League, however, was more concerned with diplomatic matters than the control of international sports.

The failure of the various maneuvers by the French symbolized France's "decadence" from the 1930s.⁸² These multiple defeats on the international stage led to a rupture among leading elements within the NSC. In fact, the NSC, along with the FOC had been represented by one president since 1925. Gaston Vidal, long-time enemy to the IOC, was elected president of the NSC and the Earl de Clary, a member of the IOC, was re-elected president of the FOC. The nomination in 1933 of Jules Rimet—a supporter of professionalism in the soccer—as president of the NSC, and of Armand Massard—a confirmed follower of Coubertin—as president of the FOC would intensify hostility and would result in them splitting into two distinct organizations in 1952.

However, in practice, it can be argued that France actually stimulated the development of international sports structures. The French triggered off the creation of many international federations, took part in the structuring of international sports, and created international sports practice whose organizations, rules, and ideologies appeared similar to their national model. Despite their overall failure their attempts led to the creation of international sports based on two systems: Olympism *and* international federations. It resulted in the IOC being more aware of the issues they each had to deal with all the while integrating them into its structures.



¹A great many works deal with its founder, Pierre de Coubertin, and with the Olympic games: John A. Lucas, "Baron Pierre de Coubertin and the Formative Years of the Modern International Olympic Movement" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1963); John J. Macaloon, *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Joanna Davenport, "Olympism: Foundation of the Olympic Movement," *Journal of the International Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation* 32 (1996): 26-30; John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle, eds., *Historical Dictionary of the Modern Olympic Movement* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 1996).

²For example, concerning the IOC, see Jean M. Leiper, "The International Olympic Committee and the Pursuit of Olympism" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1976); March L. Krotee, "An Organizational Analysis of the International Olympic Committee" in *The Olympic Games in Transition*, eds. Jeffrey O. Segrave and Donald Chu (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 1988), 113-148; Donald Macintosh and Michael Hawes, "The IOC and the World of Interdependence," *Olympika* 1 (1992): 29-45; John Hoberman, "Toward a Theory of Olympic Internationalism," *Journal of Sport History* 22 (1995): 1-37.

³Barbara Jean Keys, "The Dictatorship of Sport: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Mass Culture in the 1930s" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2001), 50.

⁴Report 1, by the Permanent Committee of the International Sports Federations, July 1921, Archives of the International Olympic Committee, Olympic Studies Center, Lausanne, Switzerland (hereafter IOC Archives).

⁵The UFASA was created in January of 1889. It was the heir to the Union of French Running Associations created on January 29, 1887. As it came from civilian sports, it was the most important sports federation, with 1,714 branches and 200,000 members in February of 1914. It assembled all sports activity that was considered athletic at the time: track and field, but also soccer (and rugby), swimming, baseball, bobsleigh, bowls, field hockey, ice-hockey, lawn-tennis, Royal Tennis (Longue Paume), sledding, and so forth. It called for competitive, male, and amateur practice. Run by important notables, it defended a lay and republican ideology. Its members belonged to the urban middle class. UFASA upheld values of being modern, progressive, and patriotic and of maintaining social tranquility. Pierre Arnaud, *Les Athlètes de la République: gymnastique, sport, et idéologie républicaine 1870-1914* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

⁶International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Movement Directory* (Lausanne, Switz.: IOC, 1998), 75-124.

⁷Vincent Denis, "The Invention of Mobility and the History of the State," *French Historical Studies* 29 (2006): 359- 377.

⁸Pierre Arnaud, *Le militaire, l'écolier, le gymnaste: naissance de l'éducation physique en France, 1869-1889* (Lyon, Fr.: PUL, 1991).

⁹Thierry Terret, "France" in *European Cultures in Sport: Examining the Nations and Regions*, eds. James Riordan and Arnd Krüger (Bristol, U.K.: Intellect Books, 2003), 103-122; Jean Baubérot, *Histoire de la laïcité française* (Paris: PUF, 2007). The UFASA signed treaties with the French Union of Velocipedes in 1901, the French Rowing Federation in 1902, the French Boxing Federation in 1903, the French Alpine Committee in 1907, the National Fencing Federation, and the French Professional Athletics Federation in 1909.

¹⁰The SGFFP was created in 1898 by Dr. Michaux. Inspired by the republican model, it was of catholic persuasion and represented numbers similar to the UFASA. It was a multi-sport federation, even though the majority of its members were from soccer.

¹¹*L'Auto*, 3 January 1907. Cited in Raoul Fabens, "La question des Jeux Olympiques," *Tous les Sports*, 18 January 1907, p. 3.

¹²Minutes of Union of French Athletic Sports Associations meeting, 14 January 1907, Union of French Athletic Sports Associations (UFASA) Archives, French National Olympic and Sports Committee (FNOOSC) headquarters, Paris (hereafter UFASA Archives).

¹³As it soon grew quite important in terms of numbers and in terms of the propaganda it spread, the SGFFP placed itself "at the disposal of the British Olympic Committee, solely responsible for the organization of the London Olympic Games in 1908 and promised to abide by its rules." Bernard Dubreuil, "La naissance du sport catholique" in *Aimez vous les stades? Les origines des politiques sportives en France 1870-1930*, ed. Alain Ehrenberg (Paris: Recherches, 1980), 245.

¹⁴The FUV, created in 1881, was a federation specializing in the organization of cycling and track motorcycling. It had total control of this activity as it included 750 associations with 150,000 members in 1914. It therefore ranked as the second most important sports federation in France after the UFASA. The FBF was founded on February 2, 1903. In February 1914, it had 180 associations with 15,000 members. It managed the organization of French Boxing, English Boxing, clubbing, and "canne." The FRF was created in 1890. In February of 1914, it was comprised of ninety-six associations with 15,000 members. It was responsible for the management of rowing. The NFF was created in 1882. In February of 1914, it accounted for 93 associations with 4,500 members. It organized the practice of bayonet, sword, foil, and saber in France.

¹⁵In 1873, the UFGF was the first national union to be created. In February of 1914, it included 1,545 associations with 300,000 members. It organized gymnastics on apparatus and movement gymnastics. The UFSF was created in 1886 and state approved on February 20, 1897. In February of 1914, it contained 3,162 associations with 400,000 members. It organized different sorts of shooting practice, such as shooting with hand-held and individual weapons, rifles, carbine, pistols, and revolvers.

¹⁶Extract from a report by Frantz Reichel, Secretary General of the French Boxing Federation (FBF), the UFASA, and the NSC. Minutes from the UFASA General Assembly, 13 February 1914, French National Olympic and Sports Committee Archives, Paris.

¹⁷Michel Winock, *La belle époque. La France de 1900 à 1914* (Paris: Perrin, 2002).

¹⁸Jacques Defrance, "Le sport Français dans l'entre-deux-guerres" in *Histoire du sport en France du second empire au régime de Vichy*, ed. Philippe Tétart (Paris: Vuibert, 2007), 102.

¹⁹Yoan Grosset and Michaël Attali, "La création du Comité National des Sports en France (1908-1922): Témoin de l'affirmation d'une identité nationale?" in *Sport and the Construction of Identities*, eds. Bettina Kratzmüller et al. (Vienna: CESH, 2007).

²⁰Jacques Defrance, "L'autonomisation du champ sportif, 1880-1970," *Sociologie et sociétés* 27 (1995): 15-31.

²¹First non-dated statutes of the NSC (1911 or 1912), article 1, p. 1, National Sports Committee Archives, FNOSC headquarters (hereafter NSC Archives).

²²Statutes of the NSC, 1914, article 4, pp. 5-6, NSC Archives.

²³Indeed, many French leaders were present at the Sorbonne during the revival of the modern Olympic games by Pierre de Coubertin. In addition to the numerous UFASF members, there were various French leaders such as Méryllon, president of the UFSF. These members would be majority members of the NSC. Norbert Müller, *One Hundred Years of Olympic Congresses 1894-1994: History, Objectives, Achievements* (Lausanne, Switz.: IOC, 1994), 35; *Souvenir Small Volume of the Olympic Convention in Paris, June 1894*, published for its centennial, 23 June 1994, personal papers of authors.

²⁴First non-dated statutes of the NSC (1911 or 1912), article 1, p. 1, NSC Archives.

²⁵Arnd Krüger, "Forgotten Decisions: The IOC on the Eve of World War I," *Olympika* 6 (1997): 85-98; Minutes of the meeting of the NSC on 2 July 1914, p. 4, NSC Archives.

²⁶Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan, eds., *Sport and International Politics: The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport* (London: E.&F.N. Spon, 1998), 19-21.

²⁷Its strong arm was Nicolas Cupérus from Antwerp, who opposed de Coubertin in 1896 and refused to join the Olympic sports movement.

²⁸On the national level, he was also president of the Union of the French Shooting Associations in 1886 and a member of the FOC, which was established on the eve of the Olympic games from 1894 to 1902.

²⁹Previously represented with a section within the UFASA, the French Federation of Winter Sports was created in 1921 in the wake of the dissolution of the UFASA into autonomous federations.

³⁰William Fortescue, *Third Republic in France, 1870-1940: The Conflicts and Continuities* (London: Routledge, 2000), 136-171.

³¹Jean Saint-Martin, "La Société Des Nations et l'éducation physique en Europe entre les deux guerres mondiales," *Stadion* 23 (1997): 137-155.

³²Minutes of the NSC meeting on 22 November 1918, p. 4, NSC Archives.

³³John Patrick Tuer Bury, *France, 1814-1940* (London: Routledge, 2003), 247-264.

³⁴Minutes of the NSC meeting on 22 November 1918, p. 4, NSC Archives.

³⁵Germany and the others were not excluded from many sports federations. See Per Olof Holmäng, *Idrott och utrikespolitik: den svenska idrottsrörelsens internationella förbindelser 1919-1945* (Gothenburg, Ger.: Historiska institutionen, Göteborgs universitet, 1988); or Per Olof Holmäng, "International Sports Organizations 1919-25: Sweden and the German Question," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 9 (1992): 455-466. This study shows that wherever neutral Scandinavian countries had a say, e.g., winter sports, track & field, Germany was allowed to continue participating.

³⁶Minutes of the NSC meeting on 22 November 1918, p. 8, NSC Archives.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸First non-dated statutes of the NSC (most likely published between 1911 and 1912), article 2, p. 4, NSC Archives.

³⁹Proposal for a statutes model for an international group, article 27, 22 November 1918, NSC Archives.

⁴⁰This governing system followed the same one established by the IOC so as to control the international Olympic movement. Alan R. Platt, "The Olympic Games and Their Political Aspects 1952 to 1972" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1976), 64.

⁴¹Statutes of the NSC, war edition, article 2, p. 4; proposal for statutes model for an international group, first article, 22 November 1918, both NSC Archives.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ambrose Alexandrakis and March L. Krotee, "The Dialectics of the IOC," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 23 (1988): 319-321.

⁴⁴Jean-Loup Chappelet, *Le Système olympique* (Grenoble, Fr.: PUG, 1991), 46-54.

⁴⁵Dietrich Quanz, "Civic Pacifism and Sports-based Internationalism: Framework for the Funding of the IOC," *Olympika* 2 (1993): 1-23.

⁴⁶Jean Saint-Martin, "La naissance du sport ou le ramasse-mythes des temps modernes," in *Le sport et ses valeurs*, ed. Michaël Attali (Paris: La Dispute, 2004), 19-64, 40.

⁴⁷Yoan Grosset and Michaël Attali, "Le nouveau CNOSF à la conquête d'une France sportive" in *De la psychologie sportive à la signification du sport en 2005*, ed. Jean Michel Martin (Reims, Fr.: PUR, 2006), 96-120.

⁴⁸Letter from Mister Armand Massard, *Olympic Review, The Review of the International Olympic Committee*, August 1957, pp. 16-18, <<http://search.la84foundation.org>> [26 September 2009].

⁴⁹See Gordon H. MacDonald, "Regime Creation, Maintenance, and Change: A History of Relations between the International Olympic Committee and International Sports Federations, 1894-1968" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1998); or idem, "Regime Themes and Institutional Dreams: On the Origin of the Relationship between the International Olympic Committee and International Sports Federations" in *Olympic Perspectives*, eds. Robert K. Barney *et al.* (London, Ont.: University of Western Ontario, 1996), 133-134.

⁵⁰Proposal for a statutes model for an international group, article 5, 22 November 1918, NSC Archives.

⁵¹Proposal for a statutes model for an international group, article 33, 22 November 1918, NSC Archives.

⁵²France was not an exception in this period since other countries or political groups used sports as a means to spread their political propaganda. This was also the case for some states (see, for instance: John Lucas, "American Preparations for the First Post World War Olympic Games, 1919-1920," *Journal of Sport History* 10 (1983): 30-44; or Roy Rosenzweig, "The Nazi Olympics: Berlin 1936," *Journal of Sport History* 24 (1997): 77-80; or, for some workers' groups, André Gounot, "Sport or Political Organization? Structures and Characteristics of the Red Sport International, 1921-1937," *Journal of Sport History* 28 (2001): 23-39; and, eventually for some religious groups, David I. Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

⁵³Serge Berstein and Odile Rudelle, eds., *Le modèle républicain* (Paris: PUF, 1992).

⁵⁴Proposal for a statutes model for an international group, article 22, 22 November 1918, NSC Archives.

⁵⁵The composition of the League of Nations was relevant. Frederick S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920-1946* (Leicester, U.K.: Leicester University Press, 1986). For a wider scope on international relations, see Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

⁵⁶Set up through article 19 the number of votes assigned per federation affiliated with the international group according to their importance in terms of sports, the French project gave power to the most sports-oriented societies in terms of number or international results. This criterion about "sports importance" had yet to be determined. It was all the more important since it directed states' policies towards a mass or an elite policy depending on the definition given to the international group. Proposal for a statutes model for an international group, article 19, 22 November 1918, NSC Archives.

⁵⁷Minutes of the NSC meeting on 22 November 1918, p. 7, NSC Archives.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Proposal for a statutes model for an international group, article 24, 22 November 1918, NSC Archives.

⁶⁰Proposal for a statutes model for an international group, article 23, 22 November 1918, NSC Archives.

⁶¹Proposal for a statutes model for an international group, article 21, 22 November 1918, NSC Archives.

⁶²This aspect was a specific characteristic that distinguished the international group as the French intended for the project as well as the IOC. As the latter turned amateurism into the cardinal rule, it followed a policy of rejection of the professional world. See S.J. Clarke, "Amateurism, Olympism, and Pedagogy: Cornerstones of the Modern Olympic Movement" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1976); or Pierre de Coubertin, "The Charter of Amateurism (1902)" in *The Olympic Games: Ancient and Modern*, eds. W. Lindsay Adams and Larry R. Gerlach (Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing, 2002), 113-115. On the contrary, the international group connects these two activities uniting international sports.

⁶³Eugen Weber, "Gymnastics and Sports in Fin-de-Siècle France: Opium of the Classes?" *American Historical Review* 76 (1971): 70-98.

⁶⁴Grosset and Attali, "La création du Comité National."

⁶⁵Proposal for a statutes model for an international group, article 22, 22 November 1918, NSC Archives.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Florence Carpentier, *Le Comité International Olympique en crises: La présidence de Henri de Baillet-Latour, 1925-1940* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 206-235.

⁶⁸Weber, "Gymnastics and Sports."

⁶⁹Paul Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory* (London: Pearson Education, 2005), 59-107.

⁷⁰Sylvie Monnet, *La politique extérieure de la France depuis 1870* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2000).

⁷¹Richard Holt, "Contrasting Nationalisms: Sport, Militarism and the Unitary State in Britain and France before 1914," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 12 (1995): 39-54.

⁷²Anne-Marie Waser, *Sociologie du tennis* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995).

⁷³Patrick Clastres, Paul Dietchy, and Serge Laget, *La France et l'Olympisme* (Paris: Association pour la diffusion de la pensée française, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 2004), 20.

⁷⁴Since the very first Olympic games, the French as well as the English tried to have their point of view on the ruling of sports and Olympism adopted. De Coubertin, a confirmed Anglophile, and Baillet-Latour were accused of favoring the English model and its representative, the British Olympic Association. By doing so, they gave it significant power within the Olympic movement—at least until World War II. Gaston Meyer, *Le Phénomène Olympique* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1960).

⁷⁵At the beginning of the twentieth century, relations between the media and French sports leaders were important. Indeed, Frantz Reichel and Paul Rousseau, who were among the most influential leaders at the time, worked as sports journalists. They gave birth to the first sports newspapers but also to the first sports and tourism press trade union in 1921. Frantz Reichel, for that matter, became its first president. Jacques Marchand, *Les défricheurs de la presse sportive* (Biarritz, Fr.: Athlatica, 1999), 5. Many French leaders worked in politics. So did the "Republican" member of parliament Daniel Mérillon, for example, president of the International Shooting Union and the Union of the French Shooting Associations, as well as his successor Jean Carnot, deputy for the "Left Wing Republican Party," or Jean Castellane, president of the French Swimming Federation and of the International Amateur Swimming Federation, who was an elected "Right Wing Republican." At the core of the conflict, Gaston Vidal would be elected a "Republican Socialist" member of Parliament, before becoming the leader of the Physical Education and Sports Service created on January 20, 1920, and affiliated to the Public Education Department.

⁷⁶He had attended the Olympic movement's sessions since 1910 as a delegate of the Swedish Olympic Committee. He then organized the 1912 games in Stockholm. One year later, he created the Athletics IF in 1913. He was co-opted by the IOC in 1920—as a reward for his commitment in opposing France's behavior—and he became a member of the executive commission in 1921, before becoming the acting president at the death Henri Baillet-Latour in 1940. He then became president of the IOC from 1946 to 1952.

⁷⁷Raymond Gafner, ed., *The International Olympic Committee One Hundred Years: 1894-1994: The Idea, the Presidents, the Achievements*, 3 vols. (Lausanne, Switz.: CIO, 1994), vol. 1. This bureau had limited influence and was dissolved on the eve of World War II.

⁷⁸Gafner, *International Olympic Committee*, 203.

⁷⁹Carpentier, *Le Comité International Olympique en crises*, 257-326.

⁸⁰He was president of UFASS in 1919 and then of the UFASF from 1920 to 1925, and eventually became president of the NSC from 1925 to 1930, having worked as vice-president of the NSC from 1920 to 1924 and of the FOC from 1920 to 1923. Besides, Gaston Vidal was Under-Secretary of State for Physical Education and Sports, a branch created on January 20, 1920. These positions and the actions undertaken against the IOC resulted in Pierre de Coubertin being turned into a personal enemy. In a letter to Henri de Baillet-Latour, Pierre de Coubertin explained: "*I remain convinced that the IOC is compromising itself when it meddles with the technical aspects and that its true role is to maintain . . . some philosophical pedagogy, hence it cannot tolerate being close to lunatics like Vidal.*" Letter from P. de Coubertin to Henri de Baillet-Latour, 11 April 1926, IOC Archives; Fabrice Auger, "Une histoire politique du mouvement olympique: l'exemple de l'entre-deux-guerres" (Ph.D dissertation, University Paris X-Nanterre, 1998), 124-133.

⁸¹Auger, *Une histoire politique du mouvement olympique*, 134-142.

⁸²Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France: La Décadence: 1932-1939* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983).