

# Coubertin and fencing

by Paul Anspach

*Olympic three-weapon fencer in 1908 (sabre and épée: bronze medal), in 1912 (épée and foil: two gold medals), in 1920 (épée: silver medal), founder and then President of the Fédération Internationale d'Esgrime for over sixteen years, and member of the Belgian Olympic Committee since 1906, Mr. Paul Anspach feels at the age of 92 more than ever involved with the sports movement. In an exchange of correspondence we asked him to agree to write an article for our review on his wonderful and unparalleled experience as a sports leader and instigator. Telling us a few anecdotes, he modestly said that nobody would be interested in them. However we beg to differ, as will our readers upon reading the following lines. Thank you, Mr. Anspach.*

"In 1914 Baron Pierre de Coubertin asked me to take up the job of secretary of the Paris Olympic Congress. These are the reasons, at least I think so, which made him decide to ask me to help him. At the Stockholm Olympic Games in 1912 there was as yet no International Fencing Federation; on account of the lack of unity in the regulations of the different countries, there were a few abstentions at Stockholm. As I was deeply attached to the Olympic idea this made me sad and I resolved to complete the creation of an International Federation. At a preliminary Congress at Gand in 1913 I gave a long report on fencing at the Olympic Games and the necessity of having regulations accepted by all the world's fencers. Baron de Coubertin



1912



1974

was aware of this and congratulated me. As I spoke French, English and German fluently he asked me to sit as Secretary at the Paris Congress in June 1914.

"As I don't want to boast my importance like a peacock spreading out his tail, I should in truth tell you that when the Baron gave me this responsibility he also at the same time appointed as Secretary Prince Otto von Windischgraetz, IOC member for Austria from 1911 to 1919, and who married the Archduchess Elizabeth of Austria, grand-daughter of the Emperor Franz-Joseph and Leopold II, King of the Belgians, and daughter of the unfortunate Archduke Rudolph, the hero of the Mayerling drama. As the IOC at this time was mostly composed of members of the European aristocracy, Prince von Windischgraetz was in particular to look after the VIPs—an unknown term at the time—while I dealt in particular with the technical side of the Congress. Since then I remained in regular contact with the Baron.

"The last time I saw him was in the summer of 1935 in Lausanne, at the world fencing championships. He did me the honour of accepting to attend the banquet which closed this event and, in my capacity as President of the Fédération Internationale d'Esgrime, I invited all the fencers from every country present to acclaim him."



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