

ELWOOD S. BROWN: MISSIONARY EXTRAORDINARY

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For a young man, with no formal connection with the Olympic movement, to be invited to address an IOC Session is a rare honour but for the same man to address three consecutive Sessions is quite unique in Olympic history. This historical landmark occurred when, at Coubertin's invitation, the American Elwood S. Brown, spoke to the Sessions at Antwerp (1920), Lausanne (1921) and Paris (1922). Who then was this little-known individual who was destined to play a role of increasing importance within the Olympic movement?

Elwood Stanley Brown was born in Cherokee, Iowa on 9 April 1883 and he moved west at an early age, attending Grammar School and High School in Portland, Oregon before graduating from Wheaton College, Illinois. He then spent one year as a basketball coach at the University of Illinois after which he took up a post with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Chicago and it was this initial connection with the YMCA which eventually led to his involvement, some years hence, with the Olympic movement. Brown spent five years with the YMCA in Chicago before moving to Salt Lake City and in 1910 he accepted the position of Physical Director of the YMCA in Manila, Philippines.

Brown quickly settled down into the American colony and within one year he was instrumental in establishing the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation (PAAF) in January 1911. The following year a committee appointed by the PAAF began to lay plans for a Far Eastern Games to be held during the Manila Carnival in February 1913. Brown was the driving force on this committee and, although still a relative newcomer to the Orient, he recognised the reluctance of the Asians to take on Westerners in sporting encounters where inherent physical differences decided the outcome of many sporting encounters. To enlist support for the first Far Eastern Games, Brown travelled widely throughout Asia and with the help of his YMCA contacts, China and Japan were persuaded to send teams to Manila. During the Games, the Far Eastern Athletic Association (FEAA) was founded (10 February 1913) and Elwood Brown's sterling efforts were recognised when he was appointed the first Secretary-General. After the successful conclusion of the 1915 Games in Shanghai and the 1917 Games in Tokyo, America entered the European War and Brown answered the call of patriotism. In July 1917 he applied for war service and the disturbing response from the YMCA headquarters was a cablegram telling him to 'Prepare to proceed to Russia within 60 days'. The confirmatory letter advised Brown that he was to be put in charge of the Association's physical edu-

cation programme in Russia, but the Bolshevick Revolution quickly put an end to such plans.

Brown eventually left Manila six months later and on 7 April 1918 he landed in France.

Although as Secretary-General of the FEAA he had limited contacts with the IOC, it was his arrival in Europe that really marked the beginning of his career as a respected and influential figure in international sport.

By the time Brown arrived in Europe the outcome of the conflict was beyond doubt and he was able to devote his attention to the furtherance of sport after the Armistice. One month before the war ended he put forward his ambitious plans to Army HQ: these included mass games for the entire army, the American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F.) Championships, the Inter-Allied Games and the construction of the Pershing Stadium to stage these Games. Fortunately for sport in the American Army, Brown had established an excellent relationship with General Pershing, Commander in Chief of the American Expeditionary Force, when they were both serving in Manila some years earlier. Pershing not only gave immediate approval to Brown's plans he also appointed his old friend from Manila YMCA as Director-General of the Inter-Allied Games.

The Games were a huge success and Coubertin quickly recognised that Brown's organizational talents, coupled with the YMCA's concept of 'play for all', could be of considerable value to the IOC. After the Games, Brown returned to America and in September 1919 he was appointed Secretary for Physical Education of the Foreign Department of the YMCA and in 1920 he undertook his first assignment for the IOC.

In March of that year he went to South America as a representative of both the IOC and the YMCA and after travelling extensively he was able to establish a South American Athletic Federation which planned to stage the South American Games every two years.

Brown first addressed an IOC Session at Antwerp in August 1920. He offered the IOC the assistance of the YMCA network in spreading the Olympic message and he also spoke of one of his favorite subjects, Regional Games. He proposed that the first South American Games should be held in Buenos Aires in 1922 and also put forward the idea of a Hindu Games to be held in India.

After the Antwerp Session, Brown visited YMCA branches in the American Army of Occupation area, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Greece, Turkey and Italy and he had hardly completed his tour before he was off to the Far East again to visit YMCA contacts in India,

China, Korea, Japan and the Philippines and he even managed to include a private visit to Java (now Indonesia) in his itinerary. In an age before air travel was commonplace, the amount of travel undertaken by Elwood Brown in 1920 was truly phenomenal and everywhere he went he spelled out his plans for a standardized world-wide physical education programme within the YMCA framework. Despite all his work in South America, Europe and the Far East the development that, perhaps, gave Brown the most satisfaction in an extraordinary busy year was the formal recognition of the FEAA by the IOC in 1920. Although had it not been for the interruption of World War I this recognition would surely have been made much earlier.

Not surprisingly, Baron de Coubertin became increasingly impressed with the ideas and abilities of the hyper-active and talented Brown and, anxious to strengthen the ties between the IOC and the YMCA, he asked Brown to address the IOC for a second time at the Session in Lausanne in May 1921. Coubertin asked Brown to present a more specific outline of his plan of co-operation between the IOC and the YMCA. Brown was able to tell the Session of his world trip in 1920 during which he had made more contacts with the outposts of world sport than any IOC member had ever done - or even contemplated. Brown put to the Session his idea for a series of Regional Games for 4 - 5 different regions and his proposal was favourably received by the IOC members although no decision was taken. In referring to the South American Games to be held the following year, Brown informed the Session that the Games would be held in Rio de Janeiro and not Buenos Aires as originally planned.

When Brown addressed the IOC Session for a third time in Paris 1922 his theme was again 'play for all' but this time he stressed the advantages that the prestige, authority and influence of the National Olympic Committees could bring to the scheme. However, discussions on the question of Regional Games became one of the major points of the Session. Professor Wittig (IOC member for Poland) told the meeting that plans were afoot to stage a Regional Games in Warsaw for participants from Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Yugoslavia. In retrospect, it is difficult to see what "Region" these countries constituted. There was certainly no geographical affinity between, say, Greece and Finland. It was also revealed at the Paris Session that King Carol of Romania had taken the initiative in promoting a Regional Games in Bucharest for Czechoslovakia, Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia. Clearly, by 1922 Regional Games had become 'fashionable'.

Generally speaking, Brown's ideas were well received by the IOC members but he was not without his critics. With some justification, General Sherrill (USA) pointed out

that the result of the YMCA's efforts in South America fell short of expectations and suggested that the Protestant nature of the YMCA deterred certain predominantly Catholic counties from supporting ventures initiated by the 'Y'. Sherrill spoke forcefully in favour of bringing the American Catholic organization, "Knights of Columbus" into the picture on an equal basis with the YMCA and he also proposed that the majority of the organising committees of the Regional Games should be of Catholic religion. Despite Sherrill's views, it is unlikely that religion was a material factor in the lack of support given to the early editions of the South American Games. The YMCA were at their strongest in the Philippines, the centre of Catholicism in the Far East.

Just when it seemed that a positive and meaningful arrangement between the IOC and the YMCA might be achieved Elwood Brown suddenly died just three weeks before his 41st birthday. On 4 March 1924, after playing handball at Park Avenue Railroad YMCA in New York City, he suffered a heart attack and was rushed to Englewood Hospital where complications developed. Amputation of his left leg failed to save his life and he died on 24 March 1924 leaving a widow and two teenage children. His wife, who was on her way from New York to the Orient, first received the news of her husband's illness on her arrival in Yokohama the day before he passed away.

After his death, the close relationship between the IOC and the YMCA faded. There were no arguments or major disagreements - simply that there was no man of the calibre of Elwood S. Brown to carry on the work he had started. The relationship between the IOC and the FEAA continued until the latter organization was disbanded for political reasons after the 1934 Far Eastern Games in Manila. The IOC frequently voiced their support for the FEAA but in view of their alleged enthusiasm it is surprising that a non-Asian member of the IOC never once attended any of the ten celebrations of the Far Eastern Games. It had been hoped that Count Baillet-Latour would be present at the 1923 Games in Osaka but he changed his plans at the last moment.

Although Elwood Stanley Brown is now a virtually forgotten man it is pleasing to note that his talents were, at least, recognised during his lifetime. He was awarded the Legion d'Honneur (France), the Order of the Crown of Italy, the Order of the Redeemer (Greece) and the Distinguished Service Medal (USA). Such a man deserved no less.

Sources: The History & Development of Physical Education & Sports in the Philippines (Ylanan, 1965). The History of the IOC Sessions, Vol.I (Wolf Lyberg, 1994). Various YMCA publications & papers kindly made available by C.Gary Allison (1st Century Project).