

The Catalans in (Olympic) Command, Despite the Catalans: How the Governance of Spanish Sport Moved from Madrid to Barcelona in the Early 1920s¹

Bernat López

Department of Communication Studies, Universitat Rovira i Virgili (Tarragona, Spain)

Abstract

Despite Catalonia being one of the most industrialized and developed, in capitalist terms, regions of Spain for most of the twentieth century, no Catalan is among the list of 36 prime ministers who governed the country during that period. Sports governance offers a very different picture, as seven Catalans have served as president of the Spanish Olympic Committee. Catalan influence even reached the top of the international Olympic movement through Juan Antonio Samaranch, one of the most influential presidents (1980-2001) in IOC history, and continues to the present day through his son, Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr., one of the Committee's vice-presidents and a candidate in the March 2025 presidential election. The objective of this article is to critically explore the process that led to the "Catalan takeover" of the Spanish Olympic movement in 1924 and which is at the origins of this influence. Although in line with Catalan sporting supremacy of the time and also with the ambition of its leaders (the Catalan nationalist party Lliga Regionalista) to govern Spain, this takeover was achieved against the latter's will and, what is even more paradoxical, under the anti-Catalanist Primo de Rivera dictatorship.

Keywords: Spanish Olympic Committee, Catalan nationalism, International Olympic Committee, Antwerp 1920 Olympics, Paris 1924 Olympics

In January 1924 the Spanish Olympic Committee (SOC) was reconstituted in Barcelona after more than three years of inactivity. Six of the Committee's eight members, including its president and secretary, were Catalans and seven lived in Barcelona. This represented a radical change in geographical terms when compared with the previous Committee, formed in Madrid in 1919, all of whose members lived there and none represented Catalan sport. In fact, since the SOC was created in November 1912, the Committee had been an almost purely *madrileño* affair, with all 11 members of the very first Committee living in Madrid and the one reconstituted in March 1916 also being 100% *madrileño*.

This remarkable shift in the governance of the Spanish Olympic movement in such a centralistic country as early twentieth-century Spain was noted by the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). On receiving news of the 1924 "Catalan SOC", a puzzled Pierre de Coubertin wrote to Henri de Baillet-Latour: "How is it that the Spanish Olympic Committee is based in Barcelona? Do you know anything about this strange story?".¹

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Coubertin's reaction appears a little overdone, since at that time several National Olympic Committees (NOC), including the Swiss, American, Yugoslav, and Egyptian ones, were not based in their countries' political capital cities. In any case, the SOC's 1924 "Catalan shift" lasted for a long time as the management of the Spanish Olympic movement remained entirely in Catalan hands until the end of the Civil War and only returned to Madrid in 1939 on account of the new regime's centralistic policy.

Even since the Civil War, Catalan influence on the Spanish Olympic movement has remained strong, as four Catalans have served as SOC president since 1939. This means that, together with the three pre-war presidents, seven of the 17 SOC presidents have been Catalans. Contrasting with this prominence, no Catalan has served as Spanish head of the Executive since 1873, despite Catalonia being one of the most industrialized and most developed, in capitalist terms, regions of Spain, as well as one of the most populated.² Catalan influence even went right to the top of the IOC during the lengthy, decisive presidential mandate of Juan Antonio Samaranch (1980-2001), reaching its peak at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. This influence has extended to the present day through Samaranch's son, Juan Antonio Samaranch Salisachs, who has served as IOC vice-president since 2016 and was a candidate in the March 2025 presidential election.

The 1924 "Catalan takeover" of the Spanish Olympic movement has therefore had a long-lasting impact not only on the Spanish Olympic movement but also on the history of the IOC and the global Olympic movement. The story behind the events that led to this takeover is therefore worthy of an in-depth review. This is the objective of this article through a thorough and critical examination of both press sources and primary sources held at Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya and Lausanne's IOC archives. Though several Spanish sports historians have already touched on the issue, we believe that the predominant perspective has overlooked or misinterpreted a substantial part of the primary sources (mainly the documentation held at the IOC archives, only examined and discussed by Conrado Durántez). Moreover, it has paid insufficient attention to the links between specific "Olympic facts" and the broader Catalan and Spanish political context, which was strongly influenced by the rise of Catalan regionalism (the first political embodiment of Catalan nationalism, or Catalanism) to the status of decisive power in both Catalonia and Spanish governance.³

Political Context: The Rise of Catalan Nationalism and the Mancomunitat Campaign

The 1913-14 and 1919-20 campaigns in favor of Catalan Olympic autonomy which eventually led to the Catalan takeover of the Spanish Olympic movement in 1924 need to be put in the broader Spanish political context of the time. The latter was agitated by the rise of Catalanism to the status of main political force in Catalonia and a very influential one in Spanish politics. Political Catalanism was born under the label "regionalism" and was embodied almost single-handedly by the Lliga Regionalista, a bourgeois and conservative party created in 1901 which became hegemonic in Catalonia between 1906 and 1923, when it was displaced from power by the Primo de Rivera Dictatorship.⁴

One of the main achievements of Catalanism in this period was obtaining from the Spanish government the first devolution measures for Catalonia since the loss of its self-government institutions after the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714). After gaining a strong influence in the Spanish parliament, the Lliga launched a campaign in 1911 to achieve a degree of Catalan autonomy through the establishment of a regional administrative entity. In late 1911

the presidents of the four Catalan provincial councils put forward a project to create a *mancomunidad* (association, or *mancomunitat* in Catalan) that would unite them. In October 1912, the Spanish parliament issued a decree to enable the creation of provincial *mancomunitades* but the process stalled after the murder of Prime Minister Canalejas and the dissolution of the Spanish chambers in June 1913. To clear this impasse, the Lliga launched an aggressive campaign:

On October 24 [1913], the Lliga convened (...) a “Catalan assembly”, which gathered all the Catalan provincial *diputados* and the Catalan members of the [Spanish] parliament; on the same day in the evening, a massive demonstration (...) took place in Barcelona (...). A few days earlier, a plebiscite on the law on *mancomunitats* had been held in the 1,073 Catalan municipalities, 1,016 of which (...) had supported it.⁵

Note the almost perfect chronological coincidence of these events with the launch of the 1913-14 Catalan Olympic “devolutionary” campaign discussed below. Taking into account the close relationship between Josep Elias i Juncosa, the leader of this campaign, and the Lliga politicians, as well as the fact that the campaign was led through the pages of the Lliga mouthpiece, *La Veu de Catalunya* (hereinafter *LVC*), it seems clear that the Olympic campaign was a replica, in the (then minor) field of sport, of the pro-Mancomunitat campaign. The latter culminated in December 1913 when the Spanish government bowed to regionalist ambitions, issuing a decree that enabled the creation of the Mancomunitat de Catalunya in April 1914.⁶

The Catalans and the Olympic Movement: The Early Years (1894-1912)

Spanish (including Catalan) participation in the early years of the modern Olympic movement was almost non-existent.⁷ No Spanish team participated officially in the Athens or Paris Olympics.⁸ The first Spanish IOC delegate, Gonzalo de Figueroa, the Marquis of Villamejor, was not appointed until 1902⁹ and he failed to send a Spanish team to the St. Louis, London and Stockholm Olympics, postponing the debut of Spain’s Olympic team until 1920.¹⁰

The choice of the first Spanish IOC delegate owed much to the aristocratic, elitist mentality of Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of modern Olympism. Coubertin conducted the search directly through the Spanish royal family, specifically Prince Carlos de Borbón Dos-Sicilias, a brother-in-law of King Alfonso XIII. The Prince proposed Villamejor, a typical courtier and member of the highest and oldest Castilian nobility.¹¹ Closely involved in business and politics and a victim of poor health, Villamejor achieved little to promote Olympism or Spanish sport in general despite his non-negligible efforts that were mostly conducted behind the scenes. Other than his confessed inability to mobilize the Spanish sporting forces, one of the most recurring subjects of his sparse correspondence with Coubertin are his repeated (and fruitless) efforts to resign his IOC membership.¹²

The only noteworthy Spanish Olympic initiative of this period is the 1905 establishment in Madrid of a “Comité Español de los Juegos Olímpicos” at the request of the organizers of the 1906 “intermediate” Athens Olympics, which were not recognized by the IOC as part of the modern games and became merely a one-off event. This committee was never acknowledged by the IOC as a proper Spanish NOC, did little except meeting once, and failed to send a Spanish team to Athens.¹³

The Catalans were almost absent from these early initiatives even though Barcelona had been leading the Spanish *sportization* process since the late nineteenth century.¹⁴ Few references to Olympism or the games are found in the Catalan press of the time. One of the earliest mentions of the modern games was made in *LVC*, the future leader of the 1913 and 1920 Catalanist Olympic campaigns. An article it published in late January 1906 discussed the above-mentioned intermediate games and the alleged interest of the Greek consulate in Barcelona to set up a local committee to promote the Athens games in Catalonia.¹⁵ Although the Madrid committee did include a “delegate in Barcelona”, nothing is known about his Olympic activity, if indeed there was any.¹⁶

The 1908 London Olympics generated some interest in the quadrennial event in the Spanish press for the first time, and a few timid complaints about the failure of a Spanish team to participate appeared in several Catalan newspapers.¹⁷ Missing voices in this chorus of regrets were those of *LVC* and of its main sportswriter, Josep Elias i Juncosa. Indeed, the *LVC* paid almost no attention to the event¹⁸ even though Elias, who wrote under the pen name *Corredisses* (“the hasty one”¹⁹), had attended the event, according to his version of the facts.²⁰

The London Olympics seems to be at the origin of Elias’s interest in Olympism. In 1911 he requested the program of events and the regulations for the Stockholm Olympics. Commenting on these documents he wrote, to our knowledge for the first time, about his wish that “a team from our nation” would participate in the games and so avoid “the embarrassment of our country being among the few that fail to be represented”.²¹ Given Elias’s Catalanist ideas, it is unclear which “nation” or “country” he was alluding to here, i.e., Spain or Catalonia.

As the inauguration of the Stockholm games approached, more voices began to be heard in the Spanish press about the need to send a Spanish team to the event. These voices included Elias, who in April 1912 advocated “ending regional and club rivalries” and creating “a National Union that would select the team to represent our country at the 5th Olympiad”.²² Incidentally, this plea bore little resemblance to the regionalist or even separatist stance he would later adopt.

By this time Elias had begun corresponding with Pierre de Coubertin. IOC archives preserve a postcard where Coubertin invited him to “discuss Olympism in Spain” at the Stockholm games.²³ However, neither Elias nor any Spanish delegation attended those games. This led to a new round of complaints in the Catalan press that must have resounded in Villamejor’s ears and encouraged him to attend to his unfulfilled Olympic duties. In late November 1912, more than ten years after he was appointed as Spanish IOC delegate, Villamejor announced to Coubertin: “Next Saturday [actually, Monday, November 25] I will form my Spanish Olympic Games committee, having decided to dedicate myself to it in body and soul”. However, he immediately downplayed any chances of success since he feared, “as usual, not being *the right man in the right place*, but it will be your fault for refusing to replace me”.²⁴ Soon after, Villamejor wrote again to Coubertin, sending him the minutes of the foundational meeting of the SOC, all of whose members lived in Madrid and which had no representation from the Catalan sporting forces.²⁵

The formation of this Committee was broadly and warmly greeted in the press in both Madrid and Barcelona, echoing Villamejor’s claim that he was “determined to prevent Spain from remaining an embarrassing exception” concerning participation in the modern games.²⁶ Notably, from the beginning Villamejor expressed his determination to decentralize the

governance of the Spanish Olympic movement by setting up regional delegations of the SOC: “We are now striving to set up committees in the other Spanish regions”, he wrote to Coubertin.²⁷ *La Vanguardia*, the leading Catalan newspaper, was quick to express its desire that Barcelona would “soon form another [Olympic committee] to ensure that (...) [Catalan] athletes are duly represented at [the] Berlin [games]”.²⁸ Significantly, Elias and LVC remained silent about this important Olympic news.

In the following months, Villamejor toiled behind the scenes to gain support from the Spanish government for his Olympic plans. This was supposed to be an easy task since his brother, the Count of Romanones, was serving as Prime Minister. However, it turned into a painstaking exercise: “Beyond my capabilities”, Villamejor confessed to Coubertin.²⁹ In early 1913, a Catalanist newspaper bitterly criticized the alleged inactivity of Villamejor’s Committee and suggested for the first time (to our knowledge) that the Catalans should take the initiative by bypassing it:

If in centralistic and bureaucratic Spain nothing is done to send a delegation to the next Olympics, the Basque Country and Catalonia (...) have the right and, what is more, the duty, to (...) on their own (...) set up the essential athletes’ guilds that will attend the future Olympics.³⁰

In fact, Villamejor was pulling strings in an attempt to set the Spanish Olympic movement in motion. In addition to his (fruitless) contacts with the Spanish government, in the summer of 1913 he sent a circular letter to the presidents of 371 Spanish sports entities announcing the SOC’s desire to send a Spanish team to the 1916 Berlin Olympics and suggested that they should come together to form national federations.³¹

The First Catalanist Olympic Campaign (1913-14)

Amid these (arguably unimpressive) initiatives, out of the blue, given his previous discrete public stance on the issue, Elias lambasted Villamejor and the SOC in a forceful article published in September 1913 in the Catalanist weekly *Catalunya*. Elias denounced Spanish/Catalan absence from the international Olympic movement and the lack of activity of both Villamejor and the SOC, whose members he accused of being “the dog in the manger [that] neither does anything nor allows anyone else to do anything” and whom he insultingly called “useless people” and “slackers”.³²

This set the prelude to the event that signaled the beginning of the first Catalanist Olympic campaign (late 1913–mid-1914), which was led by LVC: the talk Elias delivered on 18 October 1913 in Barcelona in which he doubled down on his criticism of Villamejor and the SOC for their alleged inactivity, demanding

that our country be represented [at the 1916 games] (...) in the name of patriotic feelings both as Spaniards and as Catalans (...). Since those above us fail to summon us, we must awaken them from their slumber (...). Let us organize sub-committees in the main regions.³³

It appears that Elias must have warned Coubertin about this event because the latter responded with a postcard, dated two days later, with the short message: “All my gratitude and compliments”.³⁴ The talk attracted broad and enthusiastic coverage in the local press, which echoed Elias’s call to decentralize the Spanish Olympic governance by creating regional

delegations or SOC “sub-committees” (in his words) and spur the allegedly ineffective SOC into action.³⁵

The decisive impetus to Elias’s regionalist plans was provided by the Marquis himself by means of a letter he sent to Narciso Masferrer, editor of the Barcelona-based, main Spanish sporting newspaper, *El Mundo Deportivo*, in December 1913. Perhaps falling victim to an excess of sincerity, Villamejor wrote:

I read (...) the article you published (...) in which you dealt me a much-deserved blow (...). To my embarrassment I must confess that (...) since I began trying to do something, the outcome has, unfortunately, been almost nil. I beg you, who have so much power in the sporting world, to help me as I would like to set up regional committees (...) and Catalonia, being the wealthiest and most advanced region, must set the example.³⁶

In response, Masferrer enthusiastically called on Catalans to form an Olympic committee right away.³⁷ Elias picked up the baton, announcing two days later: “There is a strong effort underway to constitute a Catalan Olympic Committee (...) in agreement with the Spanish one”.³⁸ This suggestion, which was “devolutionary” in nature rather than secessionist, apparently matched Villamejor’s intention³⁹. On the other hand, Elias also revealed (though perhaps he was bluffing) that he had “taken steps, which were very well channeled, to create a fully independent pro-athletics committee or entity” in Catalonia, but he eventually relinquished this project:

Given that my perhaps discordant cries have, as I intended, reached the ears of the Marquis of Villamejor (to whom I send my apologies for my criticisms), and as I have always been respectful of the rule of law, (...) [I] declare myself a fervid champion of the creation of a Catalan Olympic Committee.⁴⁰

Elias channeled this initiative through Barcelona’s Sports Journalists Union, which convened an assembly on December 12 to “discuss how to create the Catalan regional committee and ensure that Spanish representatives attend the Berlin games in 1916”.⁴¹ The assembly appointed Elias and two others to carry out the task and the former wrote immediately to Villamejor asking for permission and instructions to set up the proposed committee.⁴² He also wrote to Coubertin to enthusiastically inform him about these events, proudly highlighting his leadership in the process:

[Following my October talk] I conducted an active press campaign (...) [and] was fortunate to attract the attention of our sporting public. I will set up a Regional Olympic Committee (...) having managed to obtain from the Marquis of Villamejor (...) the permission I had requested (and which I deemed utterly necessary).⁴³

Elias asked Coubertin for instructions and a model for the statutes of the projected Catalan committee. Coubertin swiftly and drily, though diplomatically, replied on a postcard: “I believe that the creation of your regional committee will be highly effective and I congratulate you on this, but you did well to remain in good rapport with the Spanish Committee since the IOC can recognize only one Committee per country”.⁴⁴ To our knowledge, Coubertin did not send the instructions Elias had requested nor the blueprint for the statutes, though this does not mean that he “denied permission to set up the Catalan regional Olympic committee”:⁴⁵ he simply highlighted the primacy of the Spanish Committee (to which Elias bowed) through a

problematic argument, since at that time IOC statutes stipulated nothing about the recognition of NOCs.

Indeed, this was a source of trouble and confusion for the IOC in its early years. Coubertin's perspective on territorial/national matters was ambiguous. His stance on the "existence of a 'sporting geography' that was different from the political one" with which he justified the IOC's early recognition of stateless nations (at that time), such as Finland and Bohemia, has often been quoted.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, in his memoirs he also criticizes regionalism (in the specific case of Italy), explaining that the IOC's non-interventionist policy on the setting up of NOCs and the resulting "creation of multiple committees opposing or interfering with each other within the same country" was a "difficulty" for the IOC.⁴⁷ Unhappy with this situation, in 1919 he

had a highly dictatorial text approved (...) according [to which] (...) the "recognition" of a national committee depended on the member or members of the IOC for the incumbent country, who were empowered to dissolve the committee with a simple statement.⁴⁸

This was an ex-post materialization, in regulatory terms, of the idea Coubertin had conveyed to Elias when asserting the subordination of the proposed Catalan committee to the existing Spanish one: no separate Catalan committee would be recognized by the IOC. Another indicator of Coubertin's lack of support for hypothetical Catalan Olympic secessionism was his diplomatic courting of King Alfonso XIII, to whom the IOC awarded an Olympic diploma in June 1914 (Coubertin had already bestowed the king a medal in 1902).⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Villamejor was unhappy with Catalan Olympic activism, which he suspected of being secessionist in nature despite the regionalist character of its public manifestations. In January 1914 he wrote to Coubertin to complain about the "ridiculous efforts" he had to deploy when attempting to "organize something in Spain", and regretted that he "could only succeed in Catalonia", which was his "only hope for the next Olympics". Regardless, he bitterly criticized Elias's "agitative" campaign, which he attributed to Catalans always "wanting to consider themselves independent and refusing to understand that their only right in life is to be Spaniards".⁵⁰

In the end, despite all the media fuss created in Barcelona and contrary to what some scholars have asserted, this controversial Catalan Olympic Committee (COC), or rather sub-Committee, failed to materialize. Elias was unable to find an individual of his liking to accept the chairmanship, and the outbreak of World War One dampened Catalan Olympic enthusiasm, which eventually faded with the cancellation of the 1916 Berlin Olympics.⁵¹ On the other hand, the rapid success of the pro-Mancomunitat campaign discussed above may explain why, after much journalistic commotion in November and December 1913, the Catalan Olympic campaign languished throughout 1914 and the much-heralded COC failed to materialize. Parallelism also exists about the non-secessionist nature of both campaigns – despite Villamejor's mistrust of the Catalan Olympic campaign and contrary to the latter's interpretation by the *official* historian of the Spanish Olympic Committee.⁵²

The War Parenthesis: 1915-1919

During the parenthesis due to WWI, for obvious reasons sport and Olympism were given low priority in the public agenda. In Catalonia, the Olympic euphoria of 1913-14 gave way to a

more pragmatic approach that led in 1915 to the foundation of the Federació Atlètica Catalana (FAC), of which Elias was elected vice-president in an assembly held later that year.⁵³

Despite initial mistrust on account of its hypothetical attitude towards the Spanish Olympic movement, the new federation was promptly welcomed by the SOC. In late March 1916 the latter agreed to “facilitate the setting up of provincial athletic federations”, which were “granted the status of [SOC] sub-committees”.⁵⁴ The SOC, therefore, acknowledged the FAC as the “Catalan sub-delegation of the IOC” – i.e., a delegation of the SOC in Catalonia –, though some authors have mistaken this acknowledgment for full recognition of Catalonia as “an Olympic nation”.⁵⁵ The Federación Atlética Donostiarra was granted the same representation in the Basque province of Guipúzcoa.⁵⁶

These were placid days for Villamejor and his committee: with no Olympic appointment in view and a fluid relationship with the Catalans via the FAC, he welcomed Pierre de Coubertin to Madrid in early June 1916 for a visit that reinforced Villamejor’s authority over the Spanish Olympic movement.⁵⁷ We found no evidence of Coubertin making a stopover in Barcelona, nor any trace of his Spanish trip in the Catalan press.

In the immediate years, little happened in the field of the Spanish Olympic movement. The only note worthy of mention is the letter sent by the mayor of Barcelona, Manuel Rius i Rius, to “M. le Baron de Caumartin [sic]” in 1917 expressing Barcelona’s availability to host the Olympic Games.⁵⁸ This was a rather surprising initiative as it occurred in the context of a low level of Olympic activism in Catalonia and had no political connection with the previous nor with the second Catalanist Olympic campaign of 1920 (Rius was not a Catalanist but rather the opposite). However, in 1918 Elias began a press campaign to build a stadium in Barcelona and associated the project with the cautiously announced possibility of “holding, in the long term, an Olympiad [sic] once we have grown sufficiently to be in, let us say, a moral condition to aspire to such an honor”.⁵⁹

The Second Catalanist Olympic Campaign, 1919-21

Things seemed to be clear and settled in the relationship between Catalan sport and the Spanish Olympic movement, channeled through the FAC as the Catalan delegation of the SOC, as Elias acknowledged in January 1919.⁶⁰ However, the approaching 1920 Antwerp games and the evolution of the Spanish/Catalan political context would radically change this scenario.

Concerning the latter, the end of WWI and the ensuing wave of geopolitical changes in Europe spurred on Catalan regionalist ambitions. Moving one step beyond the administrative devolution embodied by the Mancomunitat, the Lliga launched a campaign in late 1918 to claim political autonomy for Catalonia, greatly stirring up Spanish politics.⁶¹ The Mancomunitat assembly agreed on a proposal for a Catalan statute of autonomy but this was rejected by the Spanish parliament in early 1919. In March 1919 the outbreak of the revolutionary general strike in Barcelona known as the “Vaga de la Canadenca”, which greatly alarmed the Catalan conservative elites, put an end to this campaign as in the ensuing repression the Lliga sided with the Spanish government.⁶² As a less politically disruptive alternative, the Lliga decided in September 1919 to push towards an enlargement of the Mancomunitat’s competencies.⁶³

In this context, the Catalan elites launched a second Catalanist Olympic campaign. This began in June 1919 with the formation in Barcelona of the Stadium Club, which intended to lobby in

favor of Elias's stadium project.⁶⁴ Its representatives quickly got in touch with Villamejor, who wrote back in July to express his support but also his skepticism over the possibility of hosting the Olympics there in the short term, much in line with Elias's stance as explained earlier.⁶⁵ In August the Stadium Club was reinforced by the appointment as chairman of the millionaire Santiago Güell i López,⁶⁶ the Baron of Güell and son of the wealthy sponsor of famous architect Antoni Gaudí. Güell was politically close to the Lliga⁶⁷ and at the same time very close to the Spanish royal family.⁶⁸

Shortly afterwards, with the Antwerp games approaching, Villamejor convened a meeting of the SOC to renovate its membership. Once again, none of the members were representatives of Catalan sporting forces,⁶⁹ though, thanks to Villamejor's decentralizing policy explained above, such *madileñismo* was not meant to be a problem.

In this way, Villamejor had renovated the SOC one year before the inauguration of the Antwerp games, which seemed a sufficient anticipation to select and train a Spanish team. The Marquis publicly promised that Spain would be represented at those games.⁷⁰ However, the Committee did nothing in the remaining months of 1919, partly because Villamejor was badly injured in a car crash.⁷¹ This led to the first public criticisms of the new SOC's inactivity.⁷² In October, the Stadium Club assembled over 1,500 people in Barcelona in a "sporting affirmation meeting" where several speakers demanded that Spain be represented in Antwerp and criticized "SOC's laxity (...) and the State's negligence". Rather surprisingly given the allegedly good rapport between the SOC and the FAC, the latter's representative feigned to raise the sporting secessionist flag by stating: "What is almost certain is that if the Government does not intend to send a Spanish team to the Olympics, the Mancomunitat will send one in the name of Catalonia".⁷³

Eventually, in early January 1920 and coinciding with the resumption of Elias's criticisms of its inactivity, the SOC was kicked into motion.⁷⁴ Apparently unaware of SOC's reactivation, however, Elias published this "secessionist" admonition:

There is much to be done to reach our goals, chiefly due to the traditional apathy of the Spanish Olympic Committee, which (...) has done nothing to send a representation of our country to Belgium (...). Fortunately, our excellent relationship with Baron de Coubertin (...) will allow us to make up for [these] deficiencies (...). If Spain is not going to Antwerp, at least Catalonia [will], as it has the full right to attend since it is a well-defined nationality.⁷⁵

Elias was bluffing here, as he publicly acknowledged one week later. In 1919⁷⁶ the IOC had stipulated that the right to participate in the games corresponded to "states, not nations", which meant that the Catalans could participate only "within the Spanish group" and were therefore "in the hands of the Spanish Olympic Committee".⁷⁷ In later articles, Elias toned down his criticism when he received news of SOC's revitalization and Villamejor's personal involvement.

However, days and weeks went by but the government's money failed to appear. In mid-April 1920, an alarmed and pessimistic Villamejor wrote to Coubertin: "Governmental support will fail to reach us. After the government awarded us a grant of 230,000 pesetas, parliamentary meetings will be suspended before the grant is approved and we will find ourselves penniless". According to Villamejor, grave danger loomed in the event of a Spanish team failing to participate in Antwerp: "Catalonia and the Basque provinces are determined to attend, thus making this a political affair while hoping to present themselves as independent nations".⁷⁸

The fact that the Marquis had apparently taken seriously Elias's sporting secessionist threat suggests both a fear on the part of Castilian elites of the emerging Catalan nationalism, and Villamejor's lack of awareness of IOC rules, which granted him full authority over participation in the Antwerp games. Apparently ignoring the previous designation of the FAC as the Catalan delegation of the SOC, Villamejor agreed on a new Catalan regional "subcommittee", which was hastily set up in early June with representatives of the main local sporting entities and under the chairmanship of FAC's president, Jaume Garcia Alsina.⁷⁹ Elias was fully aware of the subordinate status of the Catalan Committee, as illustrated by the term "SOC's Catalan delegation" which he would later use, though he ended up recovering the pompous name of Catalan Olympic Committee, which had been employed in the 1913-14 campaign and which both the entity itself and other Catalan newspapers adopted as though they wished to add fuel to Villamejor's fears.⁸⁰

Those fears even led to Villamejor going as far as personally advancing 30,000 pesetas of the much-awaited governmental subsidy,⁸¹ which eventually arrived in late July almost when the Spanish athletes were boarding the trains that would take them to Belgium.⁸² These funds allowed for a 56-strong Spanish team – a remarkable figure for a debut participation.⁸³ The Marquis and other members of the SOC traveled to Antwerp along with a Catalan delegation led by Elias and COC president, Jaume Garcia Alsina. At first, matters apparently went well between the Madrid and Barcelona groups, as evidenced by the fact that Garcia Alsina, together with two SOC members, led the Spanish delegation at the parade of athletes during the opening ceremony.⁸⁴ However, those Catalan delegates also bore an assignment that would tarnish this rapport once and for all.

On 7 August 1920, the Lliga-governed Mancomunitat officially appointed Elias as its representative charged with presenting Coubertin with Barcelona's candidacy to host the 1924 Olympics. Despite his earlier prudent stance on this matter, Elias fulfilled this mission on arrival in Antwerp in mid-August, apparently without the knowledge of the SOC.⁸⁵ However, this was a legitimate move, since the IOC's statutes at that time did not stipulate that candidacies for hosting the games had to be channeled through the incumbent NOC.⁸⁶ Moreover, Francesc Cambó, the Lliga's supreme leader, had apparently informed Prime Minister Eduardo Dato of the project and been given the green light to proceed.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Villamejor was outraged as he probably first learned about the project at the IOC session held during the games.⁸⁸ Clearly, he had been bypassed. A few days later, the French Agence Havas released a wire that was published by several Spanish newspapers:

The Spanish [Olympic] Committee has proposed that the next Olympics be held in Spain, and this proposal was taken into account [by the IOC] (...). The [International] Olympic Committee unanimously agreed to disregard the Mancomunitat's proposal to hold the next Olympics in Barcelona.⁸⁹

This was fake news, as Coubertin himself denounced in a letter he sent to Elias.⁹⁰ The latter promptly accused Villamejor and/or his entourage as being the authors or instigators of the wire.⁹¹ In fact, the IOC had taken Barcelona's candidacy fully into consideration but, like the thirteen other candidacies, it was put on ice because, at Coubertin's request, the IOC postponed the election of the host city for the 1924 games.⁹² The story of the wire turned rather farcical when, immediately after it was published in Spain, the president of the Mancomunitat publicly denied it had entrusted Elias with presenting Barcelona's candidacy.⁹³ However, not only had it done so but it had also awarded him the considerable amount of 2,000 pesetas to cover his expenses during his Olympic mission. To add insult to injury, the

candidacy had not even been presented in earnest since, in a private report sent to Puig i Cadafalch, Elias confessed: “I stressed [to Coubertin] that we considered our petition a sort of *pourparler* or *ballon d’essai*” that would later be presented officially through the SOC if and when the IOC was to accept it.

In any event, Elias’s astute Olympic move on behalf of the Lliga leaders exhausted Villamejor’s patience, who ended up resigning his IOC position (this time for good) in early 1921.⁹⁴ The Madrid press bitterly criticized Barcelona’s candidacy, labeling it as “separatist machinations”.⁹⁵ Once on home turf, the Catalan delegates, again led by Elias, fired back with a series of articles denouncing the SOC’s alleged incompetence, duplicity, and anti-Catalanism.⁹⁶ Elias boasted of the “strong sympathies” Coubertin felt for Catalonia and announced that the Baron had accepted an official invitation in early 1921 to oversee the construction work on the stadium that was to become the venue for the Barcelona games.⁹⁷

A wave of Olympic fever led by Elias took hold of the Catalan press in the ensuing weeks. In January 1921 this led to the transformation of the COC into a “Comitè de les Olimpíades Catalanes”, which aimed to hold a “Catalan Olympics” in 1922 and to campaign for Barcelona’s candidacy to host the 1924 international Games.⁹⁸ The Lliga leader and former minister in the Spanish government, Joan Ventosa i Calvell, became chairman of the Committee, and Santiago Güell and Elias became prominent board members.⁹⁹ At least six other board members were in the orbit of the Lliga or were members of it.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, what appeared to start to flounder were Coubertin’s alleged sympathies for the Catalan cause. Not only had he failed to visit Barcelona in early 1921 but, on receiving a wire from Ventosa announcing the formation of the new committee, Coubertin wrote back to reprehend him for using Olympic terminology unduly. Neither this letter nor the initial wire could be located in the archives but they can be deduced from a letter Elias sent to Coubertin in mid-March informing him that the initials “COC” in Ventosa’s wire, which had led to Coubertin’s annoyance, stood for “Comitè de les Olimpíades Catalanes”, not for “Comitè Olímpic de Catalunya”. Elias hoped that Coubertin would clear the use of this initialism (but he did not, as explained below).

He also informed Coubertin that at the following IOC session, Barcelona’s candidacy for the 1924 games would be presented by “the Spanish OC [Olympic Committee]” (this did not happen) and suggested that Coubertin might appoint “a second delegate in Spain, in agreement with the SOC, to spread the Olympic ideal in Catalonia”.¹⁰¹ Here, Elias was acting highly diplomatically by asking for a specific “Catalan delegate” while simultaneously affirming the preeminence of the SOC and therefore of Villamejor, of whose resignation Elias seemed unaware (the Marquis was gravely ill and died in October that year).¹⁰²

Soon after, Coubertin amazed the international Olympic movement with one of the most audacious moves of his career: in a letter published in the French press he asked the IOC to award the 1924 Olympics to Paris, as eventually occurred.¹⁰³ “Enthusiasm has turned to depression”, wrote Elias as the hopes for Barcelona were shattered.¹⁰⁴ Even so, he attended the IOC session in Lausanne in early June, to which he had apparently been summoned by Coubertin and where he witnessed the latter’s diplomatic skills: on one hand, the IOC president demanded that concerning “the conflict [sic] that had arisen with Catalonia”, the words “Olympic” and “Olympiad” should be dropped from the name of the new Catalan Committee and the projected local games; on the other hand, Coubertin endorsed Elias’s request to accept the Baron of Güell as the second IOC delegate for Spain, after obtaining

Villamejor's acquiescence.¹⁰⁵ Coubertin also accepted Villamejor's advice to appoint Basque millionaire Horacio Echevarrieta as his successor.¹⁰⁶ Back in Barcelona, Elias wrote in gratitude to Coubertin informing him that the local games would eventually be called "the Iberian games" and they would gather athletes from the whole peninsula (they were never staged, tough).¹⁰⁷

The Lliga's "separatist" soul is evidenced by the fact that the second IOC Spanish delegate obtained by Elias in Lausanne was meant to act only in Catalonia, while the other Spanish member was to oversee the rest of Spain. For this reason, Elias wrote to Coubertin in an attempt to block the appointment of Echevarrieta, whom Elias and Güell considered unsuitable for the role since he did not represent the Madrid elites, whose "boycott" of Güell's Olympic co-leadership they feared. Instead, they put forward the names of two typical courtly aristocrats – the Duke of Alba and his brother the Duke of Peñaranda – "whose appointment would be much welcomed by Spanish high society".¹⁰⁸ As observed above, however, Coubertin disregarded this advice. In the end, Güell and Elias accepted this decision and respectfully considered Echevarrieta as the "number one" Spanish IOC delegate as he was Villamejor's "heir" and had better connections with the Madrid elites.¹⁰⁹

The Catalans "Towards Hegemony": 1922-1924

The next move in the Catalanist Olympic campaign was to transform the ill-fated Comitè de les Olimpíades Catalanes (COC) into a Catalan multi-sports entity controlled by the Lliga. In January 1922 this culminated in the merger of the COC and the Federació de Societats Esportives de Barcelona into the new Confederació Esportiva de Catalunya (CEC) led by the COC president (Ventosa) and vice-president (Güell) and with Elias as a board member.¹¹⁰ An influential Madrid newspaper rightfully warned concerning this move in an alarming tone: "The Catalans are heading towards hegemony".¹¹¹

In a letter informing Coubertin about this news, Elias also complained that the new SOC had not been created yet "because of Echevarrieta, who has not replied to our repeated requests".¹¹² The latter failed to attend the IOC's June 1922 session – unlike Güell, who was to witness another demonstration of Coubertin's diplomatic skills. After the previous year's reprimand came the encouragement in the form of the awarding of the 1923 Olympic Cup to the CEC thanks, in Coubertin's words, to "the work carried out in Catalonia".¹¹³ It seems clear that Coubertin had a much cleverer and more strategic perspective than the inexperienced Güell, who, by his own account, had initially asked for the Cup to be awarded to FC Barcelona.¹¹⁴ Nor did Güell appear to have a clear idea of what the Iberian Games should represent since he supported an IOC motion advising against the organization of regional games.¹¹⁵

While the CEC was fairly active in the ensuing months, in the rest of Spain matters were stalled. In January 1923 Güell confessed that the SOC had not yet been formed and again pointed to Echevarrieta's abstention: "I have refrained from taking definitive action (...) as I have not reached an agreement" with Echevarrieta.¹¹⁶ In August the press reported that, whereas the latter remained silent (he had apparently resigned in April¹¹⁷), Güell had sent a circular letter to the Spanish sports federations.¹¹⁸ By October, however, Spain had still not officially registered for the Paris Olympics.¹¹⁹

Politics would once more precipitate events in Spanish sports governance. In September 1923, the Captain General of Catalonia, Miguel Primo de Rivera, launched a coup d'état with immediate success thanks in part to the almost unanimous support from conservative Catalan forces, including the Lliga. Güell himself publicly stated his support for the rebellious general.¹²⁰ These grave events pushed the Olympic dossier to the background. Moreover, in early December Güell travelled to South America to tend to his business interests. However, matters had already been settled at the highest level. In late December the press reported that Güell had temporarily delegated his Olympic powers to Primo de Rivera's aide-de-camp, Lieutenant-Colonel Mariano de Rivera (no relation to the dictator), as the latter Rivera himself confirmed.¹²¹ As announced in the press, this meant that the dictator had taken almost first-hand control of the Spanish Olympic dossier,¹²² though when asked whether the General had appointed him, Mariano de Rivera categorically replied: "Not at all! I have simply accepted the remit my good friend the Baron of Güell has entrusted to me". However, he also acknowledged: "I have afterwards spoken on this matter on several occasions with General Primo de Rivera, who (...) will give us his most determined support".¹²³ In late December Mariano de Rivera appointed the members of the new SOC – representatives of the existing Spanish federations of Olympic sports – and gathered them together for a constitutive meeting held in Barcelona on January 11, 1924.¹²⁴

A former member of SOC and sports journalist at an anti-Catalanist Madrid newspaper expressed the dismay that was felt by the more centralistic souls about this arrangement: "It is unacceptable that such an important delegation (...) should be based in a Spanish town [other than Madrid]".¹²⁵ However, not only would the new SOC be based in Barcelona for many years but such a Catalanist entity as the CEC, a reincarnation of the ephemeral 1920 Catalan Olympic Committee, would become its mothership. CEC vice-president (Güell) and secretary (Josep Mesalles Estivill) would become SOC's president and secretary, respectively, and the Catalanist entity would provide two other SOC members. Furthermore, the SOC would be based at CEC headquarters. Elias, CEC's mastermind, expressed his satisfaction at the outcome: "The initial enthusiasm of the more resolute was hampered for a while by several incompetent individuals and the indefinable attitude of (...) Echevarrieta, who has just resigned his position, thereby leaving the other [IOC] delegate, the Baron of Güell, completely free".¹²⁶ Contrary to what some sources have asserted,¹²⁷ the CEC continued to exist in parallel with the new SOC.¹²⁸

A delegation of the new SOC traveled to Madrid in late January to pay tribute to the dictator and officially request a governmental subsidy to cover expenses for the Spanish participation in the Paris Games.¹²⁹ Coubertin seemed unhappy at learning of these arrangements in a letter sent by Rivera: "I have not fully understood but it seems that Güell (...) has appointed this gentleman to replace him at the IOC. It is quite extraordinary".¹³⁰ Regardless, things went ahead as planned. In early March Güell returned to Spain and took over from Rivera, who became SOC's vice-president. After much toil, the SOC secured the governmental funds, including a grant of 2,000 pesetas from the Mancomunitat,¹³¹ and sent a 93-strong Spanish Olympic team to Paris. Compared to the 56 athletes sent to Antwerp four years earlier, this represented a huge leap forward for Spanish sports (though not in terms of results). Elias was delighted: "Thanks should be given to the government for the facilities it provided to enable the athletes' strong attendance at the games".¹³² Two years later Elias still praised the "seriousness of (...) SOC's activity" at the Paris games.¹³³

Led by conservative Catalanists, the Catalan sporting forces had good reason to be more than happy with the outcome of their Olympic campaign: whereas Catalans had comprised barely a quarter of the 1920 Spanish Olympic delegation, in 1924 they accounted for almost 50%.¹³⁴ More importantly, by early 1924 Spanish Olympic and sports governance had been put in the hands of conservative Catalanist leaders through none other than Primo de Rivera's Spanish nationalist dictatorship.

Concluding Remarks: Catalans in Command (Despite the Catalans)

The Olympic movement and sport were the only fields in which Catalanism, as embodied by the nationalist political party Lliga Regionalista, fully achieved its most ambitious goal of "Catalan hegemony within Spain".¹³⁵ Indeed, according to the Lliga's leader, Francesc Cambó, one of the supreme objectives of the party was "to take over Spanish government" to modernize and decentralize the country.¹³⁶ Cambó was close to becoming prime minister on several occasions but eventually failed. The Lliga's aspiration to rule Spain from Catalonia and by Catalans succeeded only in the "minor" field of sport and the Olympics.

The first paradox of this story is that this hegemony was achieved against the plans and will of the Catalanist sporting leaders. These merely aspired to have a direct say in the governance of the Spanish Olympic movement through a dedicated IOC delegate for Catalonia but found themselves in charge of the whole of Spanish sport due to the Olympic indolence of Villamejor's successor, Horacio Echevarrieta, and the latter's replacements as representatives of "the rest of Spain" until the civil war. The second paradox is that this occurred thanks to the anti-Catalanist Primo de Rivera dictatorship and the contradictions and ambiguities of conservative Catalanism that led to its initial alliance with the dictator in the hope of winning the social war that had pitted the Catalan bourgeoisie against extreme workerism since the end of WWI.

¹ Letter from Coubertin to Henri de Baillet-Latour, February 16, 1924, printed in Conrado Durántez, *El Comité Olímpico Español. Orígenes y naturaleza jurídica* (Madrid: Comité Olímpico Español, 1999).

² Jaume Vicens Vives, *Manual de historia económica de España* (Barcelona: Vicens Vives, 1972).

³ The most prominent scholarship on the early origins of the SOC includes, among other, Durántez, *El Comité Olímpico*; Xavier Pujadas, *Catalunya i l'Olimpisme* (Barcelona, Comitè Olímpic de Catalunya, 2006); Conrado Durántez, *El centenario del Comité Olímpico Español* (Madrid: Comité Olímpico Español, 2013); Alberto Aragón Pérez, *Santiago Güell y López: el primer català al moviment olímpic internacional* (Barcelona: Fundació Barcelona Olímpica, 2013); Alberto Aragón-Pérez, "Baron Güell, an IOC member from Barcelona's high society", *Journal of Olympic History* 22, no. 3 (2014); Fernando Arrechea, *España y los Juegos Olímpicos*, PhD Dissertation (Murcia: Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia, 2017); Fernando Arrechea & Xavier Torredadella-Flix, "El sueño olímpico de Barcelona 1924", *Revista Internacional de Ciencias del Deporte* 16, no. 62 (2020), 430-434.

⁴ Isidre Molas, *Lliga catalana, un estudi d'estasiologia* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1972); Charles E. Ehrlich, *Lliga regionalista. Lliga Catalana 1901-1936* (Barcelona: Instituto Cambó/Editorial Alpha, 2004).

⁵ Josep Grau, *La Lliga Regionalista i la llengua catalana (1901-1924)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2006), 192.

⁶ Grau, *La Lliga Regionalista*, 193.

⁷ Durántez, *El centenario del Comité*.

⁸ Arrechea, *España y los Juegos*.

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- ⁹ Letter from the Count of Mejorada (future Marquis of Villamejor) to Pierre de Coubertin, February 4, 1902. All of Villamejor's correspondence cited here is held at the IOC archives, call number CIO MBR-MEJOR-CORR, location OU.VC.A.004.02.04.
- ¹⁰ Arrechea, *España y los Juegos*.
- ¹¹ Letter from Mejorada (Villamejor) to Coubertin, February 4, 1902.
- ¹² See, for instance, the letters from Villamejor to Coubertin dated May 9, 1904; January 12, 1905; January 6, 1909; and July 20, 1910.
- ¹³ Durántez, *El centenario del Comité; Arrechea, España y los Juegos*.
- ¹⁴ Xavier Pujadas and Carles Santacana. *Història il·lustrada de l'esport a Catalunya* (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona and Columna, 2005); Xavier Torredadella-Flix, "Los orígenes de una ciudad olímpica: Barcelona y el asociacionismo deportivo decimonónico ante la gestación de los primeros Juegos Olímpicos", *Citius, Altius, Fortius* 5, no. 2 (2012), 91-133.
- ¹⁵ "El Comitè dels Jochs Olímpics", *LVC*, January 27, 1906, 3.
- ¹⁶ Arrechea, *España y los Juegos*.
- ¹⁷ See, for instance, A. S., "La IV Olimpiada", *La Vanguardia*, July 23, 1908, 4; "Los Juegos Olímpicos", *Los Deportes*, July 31, 1908, 9; S. López, "Notas de educación física", *Los Deportes*, February 13, 1909, 28.
- ¹⁸ The newspaper's star writer made a short lyric reference to the games (Xènius, "Glosari. Jochs Olímpics", *LVC*, July 18, 1908, evening edition, 2).
- ¹⁹ Josep Elias i Campins, *Josep Elias i Juncosa, Corredisses* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1992).
- ²⁰ Josep Elias i Juncosa, "Conferència donada el dia 18 d'octubre...", *Catalunya*, October 25, 1913, 567-568.
- ²¹ Corredisses, "Sport", *LVC*, September 26, 1911, 4.
- ²² RRF, "Juegos Olímpicos", *Heraldo de Madrid*, March 11, 1912, 4; Corredisses, "Jochs Olímpics", *LVC*, April 26, 1912, 1.
- ²³ Postcard from Coubertin to Elias, May 4, 1912. All of Coubertin's correspondence cited here is held at the IOC archives, "Correspondance Coubertin", vols. II and III, call numbers A-P02/068_SD1/094 and A-P02/069_SD1/036 respectively.
- ²⁴ Letter from Villamejor to Coubertin, November 20, 1912; the words in italics are in English in the original.
- ²⁵ Letter from Villamejor to Coubertin, December 2, 1912; José Miguel García García, *Acta de constitución oficial y miembros del Comité Olímpico Español de 1912* (Sevilla: Punto Rojo, 2013), 68; Conrado Durántez, "The foundation of the Spanish Olympic Committee", *Journal of Olympic History* 8, no. 1 (2000), 36-41.
- ²⁶ R. Ruiz Ferry, "Juegos Olímpicos", *Heraldo de Madrid*, December 2, 1912, 4. See also "Atletismo", *La Vanguardia*, December 4, 1912, 5; "Olimpismo", *El Mundo Deportivo* (hereinafter *EMD*), December 12, 1912, 5.
- ²⁷ Letter from Villamejor to Coubertin, December 9, 1912.
- ²⁸ "Atletismo", *La Vanguardia*, December 4, 1912, 5.
- ²⁹ Letter from Villamejor to Coubertin, March 11, 1913.
- ³⁰ Hans, "Sobre els futurs Jocs Olímpics", *El Poble Català*, April 4, 1913, 3.
- ³¹ Marcelo Sanz, "Juegos Olímpicos", *La Correspondencia de España*, September 14, 1913, 4.
- ³² Josep Elias i Juncosa, "Olimpisme", *Catalunya*, September 9, 1913, 486-487.
- ³³ Elias, "Conferència donada...".
- ³⁴ Postcard from Coubertin to Elias, October 20, 1913.
- ³⁵ See, for instance, "De una conferencia. Los Juegos Olímpicos", *La Publicidad*, October 21, 1913, 4; J. Costa i Deu, "Festival sportiu", *LVC*, October 22, 1913, 2; "Vida deportiva", *El Diluvio*, October 22, 1913, 20-22; "De una conferencia. España y los Juegos Olímpicos", *EMD*, November 6, 1913, 1; Manuel Nogareda, "España y la olimpiada", *Stadium*, November 15, 1913, 462.
- ³⁶ N. Masferrer, "Los Juegos Olímpicos. Una carta del excmo. Sr. Marqués de Villamejor, presidente del comité español", *EMD*, December 4, 1913, 1.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Corredisses, "Olimpisme", *LVC*, December 8, 1913, 6.
- ³⁹ Arrechea & Torredadella-Flix, "El sueño olímpico".
- ⁴⁰ J. Elías y Juncosa, "¡a Berlín!", *EMD*, December 13, 1913, 1.
- ⁴¹ J. G., "Sindicato de Periodistas Deportivos", *EMD*, December 11, 1913, 1.

- ⁴² “Juegos Olímpicos”, *El Diluvio*, December 17, 1913, 23.
- ⁴³ Letter from Elias to Coubertin, December 18, 1913, printed in Durántez, *El centenario del Comité*, 77.
- ⁴⁴ Postcard from Coubertin to Elias, December 24, 1913.
- ⁴⁵ Andreu Mercé Varela, *Pierre de Coubertin* (Barcelona: Península, 1992) 140.
- ⁴⁶ Pierre de Coubertin, *Memorias olímpicas* (Lausanne: COI, 1997), 139.
- ⁴⁷ Pierre de Coubertin, *Memorias olímpicas*, 109.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid. See the specific formulation of this rule in Comité International Olympique, *Comité International Olympique* (Lausanne: Imprimeries Réunies SA, 1920).
- ⁴⁹ Letters from Villamejor to Coubertin, June 24, 1902 and January 15, 1914.
- ⁵⁰ Letter from Villamejor to Coubertin, January 15, 1914.
- ⁵¹ J. Elías y Juncosa, “Revista de Olimpismo”, *Stadium*, July 30, 1914, 612-613; “De un Velódromo a un Estadio”, *Stadium*, December 5, 1914, 792-793; “Ecos de la quincena”, *Stadium*, December 12, 1914, 804.
- ⁵² Conrado Durántez, *El COE. Un siglo* (Madrid: COE, 2012); Durántez, *El centenario del Comité*; Durántez, *El Comité Olímpico Español*.
- ⁵³ “La Federación Atlética: convocatoria”, *Stadium*, March 27, 1915, 199; “La Federación Atlética”, *EMD*, April 5, 1915, 1; Winter, “Federación Atlética Catalana”, *EMD*, September 6, 1915, 1,
- ⁵⁴ “Atletismo”, *Heraldo Deportivo*, April 25, 1916, 11.
- ⁵⁵ Jaume Llauredó and Jordi Finestres, *Seleccions esportives, un dret de Catalunya* (Barcelona: Pòrtic, 2002), 52. The SOC meeting held on 31 March had decided to “appoint a delegate-member of the central committee in Catalonia and in the Basque provinces with a full say in the international meetings”, i.e. the meetings of the Spanish delegation of the IOC, which was an alternative name for the Spanish Olympic Committee often used at that time. The letter quoted by these authors inviting the FAC to appoint a member of “this Committee” is not from Coubertin but from Villamejor and the committee it refers to is the SOC not the IOC.
- ⁵⁶ A. de Aguilar, “Federación Atlética Donostiarra”, *Heraldo Deportivo*, April 5, 1916, 99-100; “Comité olímpico”, *EMD*, May 22, 1916, 3.
- ⁵⁷ Poli, “El barón Pierre de Coubertin”, *El Imparcial*, June 6, 1916, 5.
- ⁵⁸ Letter from Manuel Rius, Mayor of Barcelona, to “M. le Baron de Caumartin [Coubertin]”, May 16, 1917. IOC archives, call number D-RM01-ESPAG/002, location OU.VC.A.011.04.02.
- ⁵⁹ J. Elías i Juncosa, “Estadis antics i moderns”, *D’Ací, d’Allà*, March 1918, 250-51.
- ⁶⁰ Corredisses, “Ruta atlètica”, *LVC*, January 13, 1919, 8,
- ⁶¹ Borja de Riquer, *Alfonso XIII y Cambó* (Barcelona: RBA, 2013).
- ⁶² Grau, *La Lliga Regionalista*, 309-310; Francesc Cambó, *Memòries* (Barcelona: LaButxaca, 2008).
- ⁶³ Grau, *La Lliga Regionalista*, 312.
- ⁶⁴ “Pro estadi”, *LVC*, June 24, 1919, 14.
- ⁶⁵ “Stadium Club”, *La Vanguardia*, July 12, 1919, 4.
- ⁶⁶ “Stadium Club”, *LVC*, August 18, 1919, 8.
- ⁶⁷ He was vice-president of the political party Federació Monàrquica Autonomista, a satellite of the Lliga (De Riquer, *Alfonso XIII y Cambó*, 132; “El districte VII”, *LVC*, January 27, 1922, 10).
- ⁶⁸ De Riquer, *Alfonso XIII y Cambó*, 43. For a biographical approach to the figure of Santiago Güell, see Aragón-Pérez, *Santiago Güell y López*; Aragón-Pérez, “Baron Güell”; Aragón-Pérez “Santiago Güell”.
- ⁶⁹ “Comitè Olímpic Espanyol”, *LVC*, July 14, 1919, 12.
- ⁷⁰ R. Ruiz Ferry, “Olimpismo”, *Heraldo Deportivo*, August 25, 1919, 4-6.
- ⁷¹ Letter from Villamejor to Coubertin, October 13, 1919; “1919”, *Heraldo Deportivo*, December 25, 1919, 7.
- ⁷² Perkus, “De los campeonatos atléticos”, *El Figaro*, October 22, 1919, 15; Un Atleta, “Charlas atléticas”, *Madrid-Sport*, October 16, 1919, 6.
- ⁷³ Corredisses, “Miting deportiu”, *LVC*, October 20, 1919, 7.
- ⁷⁴ R. Ruiz Ferry, “Olimpismo”, *Heraldo Deportivo*, January 15, 1920, 11-12; “Federació Atlètica Catalana”, *LVC*, January 19, 1920, 7.
- ⁷⁵ “Jocs Olímpics”, *LVC*, January 26, 1920, 3.
- ⁷⁶ Minutes of the IOC session held in Lausanne, April 5-8, 1919, IOC archives, call number B-ID01/014, location OU.VC.A.017.01.01.
- ⁷⁷ Corredisses, “Jocs Olímpics”, *LVC*, February 2, 1920, 9.

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- ⁷⁸ Letter from Villamejor to Coubertin, April 14, 1920.
- ⁷⁹ Corredisses, "Olímpiques", *LVC*, June 7, 1920, 9.
- ⁸⁰ "Comitè Olímpic Català", *LVC*, June 16, 1920, 9; "La VII Olimpiada", *El Diluvio*, June 30, 1920, 14; "Els esports. Amunt els cors!", *LVC*, July 1, 1920, 11.
- ⁸¹ Letter from Villamejor to Spain's ambassador in Belgium, May 10, 1920, quoted in García, *Acta de constitución*, 50-51.
- ⁸² "Real decreto concediendo un crédito extraordinario de 125.000 pesetas...", *Gaceta de Madrid*, 213, July 31, 1920, 380-381.
- ⁸³ Arrechea, *España en los Juegos*.
- ⁸⁴ Corredisses, "De la VII Olimpiada. La inauguració", *LVC*, August 18, 1920, 7.
- ⁸⁵ "Cap a l'Olimpiada", *LVC*, August 10, 1920, 13; "Una bella iniciativa. ¿La VIII Olimpiada en Barcelona?", *EMD*, August 12, 1920, 1; Corredisses, "De la VII Olimpiada", *LVC*, August 21, 1920, evening edition, 9.
- ⁸⁶ Comité International Olympique, *Comité International Olympique* (Lausanne: Imprimeries Réunies, no date).
- ⁸⁷ Letter from Elias to Josep Puig i Cadafalch, President of the Mancomunitat, August 31, 1920, Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, call number ANC1-737-T-5265; José M. Co de Triola, "Después de la Olimpiada: puntualicemos", *Stadium*, September 30, 1920, 23.
- ⁸⁸ Minutes of the IOC session held in Antwerp, August 17-30, 1920, IOC archives, call number B-ID01/015, location OU.VC.A.017.01.01.
- ⁸⁹ "La Olimpiada de Amberes", *La Época*, August 23, 1920, 3.
- ⁹⁰ "Un desmentiment a l'Agència Havas", *LVC*, September 23, 1920, 4.
- ⁹¹ Josep Elias i Juncosa, "Raport olímpic", typewritten report on Elias's démarches in Antwerp delivered to the president of the Mancomunitat de Catalunya, September 1920. Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, call number ANC1-10-T-224.
- ⁹² Minutes of the IOC session held in Antwerp, August 17-30, 1920. IOC archives, call number B-ID01/015, location OU.VC.A.017.01.01.
- ⁹³ "La VIII Olimpiada", *LVC*, August 25, 1920, p. 6.
- ⁹⁴ Postcard from Coubertin to Godefroy de Blonay, February 10, 1921.
- ⁹⁵ A. de Palomar, *El Mundo*, September 11, 1920, 2. See also R. Ruiz Ferry, "Lo de Amberes", *Heraldo Deportivo*, September 5, 1920, 5; "ABC en Barcelona", *ABC*, September 3, 1920, 12.
- ⁹⁶ See, for instance, Corredisses, "Els esports: Patriotisme", *LVC*, September 20, 1920, p. 9; J. Mestres i Fossas, "La VII Olimpiada Moderna i la Delegació Espanyola del COI", *LVC*, September 27, 1920, 4; José M. Co de Triola, "Después de la Olimpiada: puntualicemos", *Stadium*, September 30, 1920, 23; J. M. Co de Triola, "Después de la Olimpiada. Responsabilidades", *Stadium*, October 16, 1920, 571-573; J. M. Co de Triola, "Después de la Olimpiada. Observaciones y comentarios", *Stadium*, October 30, 1920, 596.
- ⁹⁷ "Lo de la Olimpiada", *LVC*, September 11, 1920, 4.
- ⁹⁸ Corredisses, "L'Olimpiada Catalana", *LVC*, November 22, 1920, 9; Corredisses, "El Consell de les Olimpíades", *LVC*, January 25, 1921, 11; "Las olimpiadas, sesión memorable", *Stadium*, January 29, 1921, 7.
- ⁹⁹ "Las olimpiadas, sesión memorable", 7.
- ¹⁰⁰ Eusebi Bertrand i Serra, Josep M. Co de Triola, Joan Farnés, Francesc d'Assís Galí, Jaume Mestres and Enric Ràfols (see "Las olimpiadas, sesión memorable", 7).
- ¹⁰¹ Letter from Elias to Coubertin, March 17, 1921. All of Elias's correspondence cited here is held at the IOC archives, call number D-RM01-ESPA/002, location OU.VC.A.011.04.02.
- ¹⁰² "Ecos", *Stadium*, October 22, 1921, 7.
- ¹⁰³ "L'attribution à Paris des prochains Jeux Olympiques", *Le Temps*, March 20, 1921, 4.
- ¹⁰⁴ Corredisses, "Olímpiques", *LVC*, April 5, 1921, 13.
- ¹⁰⁵ Minutes of the IOC session held in Lausanne, June 2 to 6, 1921, IOC archives, call number B-ID01/016, location OU.VC.A.017.01.01; letter from Villamejor to Coubertin, June 14, 1921.
- ¹⁰⁶ Letter from Villamejor to Coubertin, May 31, 1921.
- ¹⁰⁷ Letter from Elias to Coubertin, June 16, 1921.
- ¹⁰⁸ Letter from Elias to Coubertin, June 25, 1921.
- ¹⁰⁹ Rosendo Calvet Mata, "Habla el delegado español...", *La Jornada Deportiva*, January 17, 1923, 1.
- ¹¹⁰ "Vida deportiva. Confederación Deportiva de Cataluña", *La Vanguardia*, January 24, 1922, 12.
- ¹¹¹ A. C. M., "Los catalanes van hacia la hegemonía", *La Voz*, February 7, 1922, 7.

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- ¹¹² Letter from Elias to Coubertin, March 30, 1922.
- ¹¹³ Minutes of the IOC session held in Paris, June 7, 2022, IOC archives, call number B-ID01/017, location OU.VC.A.017.01.01.
- ¹¹⁴ Correcuita, “Futbol. Notes d’estiu”, *LVC*, July 3, 1922, 13.
- ¹¹⁵ Minutes of the IOC session held in Paris, June 7, 2022. IOC archives, call number B-ID01/017, location OU.VC.A.017.01.01.
- ¹¹⁶ Calvet, “Habla el delegado español...”.
- ¹¹⁷ Durántez, *El Comité Olímpico*, 81. The consulted archival, press, and scholarly sources do not provide details concerning the circumstances of this resignation.
- ¹¹⁸ Ricardo Ruiz Ferry, “Atletismo”, *El Sol*, September 4, 1923, 6.
- ¹¹⁹ N. Masferrer, “Las Olimpiadas de París”, *La Vanguardia*, October 13, 1923, 8.
- ¹²⁰ “El manifest del Sometent”, *LVC*, September 14, 1923, 7.
- ¹²¹ Juan Deportista, “El Comité Olímpico Español...”, *Aire Libre*, January 3, 1924, 17.
- ¹²² “El nuevo Comité Olímpico Español”, *La Correspondencia de España*, January 21, 1924, 4.
- ¹²³ “El directorio prestará su decidido apoyo...”, *El Liberal*, January 6, 1924, 2.
- ¹²⁴ Minutes of SOC’s constitutive meeting, printed in Durántez, *El Comité Olímpico*, 86.
- ¹²⁵ Rubryk, “Ante los Juegos Olímpicos de 1924”, *ABC*, January 12, 1924, 24.
- ¹²⁶ Corredisses, “Els vinents Jocs Olímpics”, *LVC*, January 14, 1924, 2.
- ¹²⁷ For instance, Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, “Els olímpics catalans de fa un segle”, retrieved from <anc.gencat.cat/ca/detall/noticia/Els-olimpics-catalans-dara-fa-un-segle>.
- ¹²⁸ See, for instance, “Confederación Deportiva de Cataluña”, *La Nación*, December 7, 1927, 5.
- ¹²⁹ “El Comité Olímpico Español”, *La Vanguardia*, January 31, 1924, 12.
- ¹³⁰ Letter from Coubertin to an unknown correspondent printed in Durántez, *El Comité Olímpico*.
- ¹³¹ Document ANC1-184-T-493, “Exercici: 1924-1925. Lliurament 0151. Cultura. Subvencions. Comitè Olímpic Espanyol”, retrieved from <arxiusenlinia.cultura.gencat.cat/#/cercabasica/detallunitat/ANC1-184-T-493>.
- ¹³² Corredisses, “Els Jocs Olímpics”, *LVC*, July 28, 1924, 5.
- ¹³³ Corredisses, “Olímpiques”, *LVC*, February 2, 1926, 2.
- ¹³⁴ Author’s own calculation based on Arrechea, *España y los Juegos*.
- ¹³⁵ De Riquer, *Alfonso XIII y Cambó*, 53.
- ¹³⁶ Cambó, *Memòries*, 656.