

The Pan-American Games' development (1955-1959)

O desenvolvimento dos Jogos Pan-Americanos (1955-1959)

Desarrollo de los Juegos Panamericanos (1955-1959)

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Keywords:

History;

Sport;
Pan-American
Games;
Latin America.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the second and third editions of the Pan-American Games (Pan-Am), as a formal constituent of the Olympic Movement, materialized within the broader tensions of Cold War. Data collection gathered primary sources from the 1950s corresponding to the preparation and realization of those Games, namely: official documents of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Pan-American Sports Organization (PASO), and the Mexican Olympic Committee. Results demonstrate that, after the immediate success of the first two editions, the continuity of the Pan-Am was threatened by financial, ideological and political reasons.

Palavras-chave:

História;
Esporte;
Jogos Pan-
Americanos;
América Latina.

RESUMO

Este estudo analisa a segunda e terceira edições dos Jogos Pan-Americanos (Pan-Am), como constituintes formais Movimento Olímpico, materializados nas tensões do contexto mais amplo da Guerra Fria. Os dados coletados reúnem fontes primárias da década de 1950 que correspondem à preparação e realização dos Jogos, a saber: documentos oficiais do Comitê Olímpico Internacional (COI), da Organização Desportiva Pan-Americana (PASO), do Comitê Olímpico Mexicano. Os resultados demonstram que, depois do sucesso das primeiras edições, a continuidade dos Jogos Pan-Americanos esteve ameaçada por razões ideológicas, financeiras e políticas.

Palabras clave:

Historia;
Deporte;
Juegos
Panamericanos;
América Latina.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación examina la segunda y tercera ediciones de los Juegos Panamericanos como constituyentes formales del Movimiento Olímpico, materializados en las tensiones del contexto más amplio de la Guerra Fría. La recolección de datos reunió documentos del Comité Olímpico Internacional (IOC), de la Organización Panamericana de Deportes (PASO), e do Comitê Olímpico Mexicano. Los resultados demuestran que, después del éxito sucesivo de las primeras dos ediciones, la continuidad del Pan-Am se han amenazada por motivos políticos, económicos y ideológicos.

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Received 23 April 2022; accepted 29 July 2022.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/rbce.44.e002522>

INTRODUCTION

World War II ravaged Europe, brought wholesale destruction to Germany, and elevated the Soviet Union and the United States to a confrontation as superpowers. Such context highlighted the embracement of international sport as a medium for promoting national prestige by governments throughout the world. Notably, the number of regional Games increased during the Cold War (Barker, 2015).

At that point, to make the Olympic Movement global/universal, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had endorsed a couple of regional or continental competitions. Multi-sport events were modeled after the Olympics, some with the IOC patronage, including the Asian Games, the Mediterranean Games, and the Pan-American Games (Pan-Am). As early as July 1952 at the Helsinki IOC Session, the Committee enlisted and approved rules for patronizing regional Games. In sum, regional sporting events had to promote the Olympic Movement's "high ideals" with limited use of its symbols and protocols, and abide by the Committee's rules, regulations and determinations (IOC, 1952).

Sport historians have largely ignored regional games as a subject worthy of study. But these competitions played an important role in the promotion of the Olympics worldwide. In the 1950s the Pan-Am became one of the biggest continental multi-sports events in the world, as well as a formal constituent of the Olympic Movement. Those Games have been organized by the Pan-American Sports Organization (PASO), which actions and decisions, according to IOC governance structure, must abide by the Olympic Charter.

Though claiming for PASO's autonomy in its early years, Latin American officials have embraced and emphasized Olympic symbols, protocols, and rules for the continental Games. At that point, Latin American scholars from Brazil, Argentina and Mexico concurred that modern sports were imported to teach the behavior necessary to accelerate modernization in Latin American societies (Arbena, 2001).

Even though it is common to observe sport events as political platforms along history, it is important to note that the IOC have pledged, especially before the 1980s, that its events should be independent, autonomous and entirely removed from political, religious or commercial interests (Senn, 1999). Such demand has been neglected several times in Olympic history and, as one may expect, that would also be the case of continental events.

During the Cold War, Latin Americans throughout Central and South America came through the control of military and dictatorial regimes that placed sports directly under the aegis of governments (Torres, 2011). It was within that context that the Pan-American Games materialized and developed.

Since its inauguration in Buenos Aires in 1951, the Pan-Am experienced gradual increases in participation

and competitive standards. But, to become firmly established, those Games depended on the efforts of particular individuals who persistently moved forward an agenda to secure the existence of the competition, an agenda that was permeated by political, financial and ideological factors. The American sport administrator Avery Brundage was one such individual. It was no coincidence that he presided over the organization of the Pan-Am Games from 1940 to 1955 (Santos, 2017).

The available literature about the history of the Pan-Am substantiates that Avery Brundage played a decisive role in the founding of those Games (Torres, 2011). It is important to note that the Pan American Games' conceptual ideal was embedded with the United States Good Neighbor Policy¹ of the 1930s, which forged a cooperative spirit of "Pan-Americanism" to strengthen economic, political, and cultural interlocution throughout the hemisphere. Sport was part of it.

However, international literature does not go much further to explore the development of the event in the following years after its formation and inauguration. The fact is that the Pan-Am have been consistently celebrated, quadrennially, always one year prior to the Olympic Games. These Games have never been interrupted since their first edition. However, in general, international sport literature gives little attention to this event's historical development.

Researches have shown that the Argentinean Organizing Committee set a high standard in the realization of the first Pan-Am, despite accusations of the use of sport for political propaganda of the Peronist government² (Torres, 2014; Santos, 2017). This study is aimed to examine further developments of that event, focusing on the second and third editions of the Pan-Am in 1955 and 1959, respectively.

Thus, this study intends to contribute to the body of knowledge of Latin America sport history. It might be noted that such history has been only sparingly examined in international sport history circles, given the paucity of journal articles or monographs about Latin America's sport history in international perspective. It is important

¹ The Good Neighbor policy was one dimension of the foreign policy of the administration of United States President Franklin Roosevelt. Directed towards Latin America, the policy's main principles were those of non-intervention and non-interference in the domestic affairs of Latin America. In general, the Roosevelt administration expected that this policy would create more economic opportunities in the form of reciprocal trade agreements between the countries of the Americas.

² Peronism is an Argentine political movement based on the political ideology and legacy of former President Juan Domingo Perón and his second wife, Eva Perón. It was a nationalist and populist regime in which sport was used domestically and internationally to advance political and diplomatic goals (Torres, 2014).

to promote thoughtful reflection on the complex cultures of this vast continent for a wider audience (DaCosta 2003; Booth, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This study is presented in the format of a historical narrative. Any historical work demands interpretation and understanding of historical events, documents and processes. To a large extent, the availability and reliability of the sources influence the quality of a historical narrative. Of equal importance is the contextualization of the sources within their own time (Howell and Prevenier, 2001).

The research material for this study was mainly drawn from primary sources corresponding to the 1950s, most importantly, those found in the Avery Brundage Collection (ABC), at Western University, Canada. As well as other institutions, Western University have made a special effort to preserve collections of major research significance, including those concerning Olympic Studies, at the International Centre for Olympic Studies, where this study was developed as Doctorate research finalized in 2016. Archives from the ABC have been catalogued, organized, maintained, and made available for scholars from all over the world who have explored the materials found in the collection and published their research in peer-reviewed publications on a variety of topics. The ABC comprise microfilmed correspondence, minutes, reports, photographs, scrapbooks, certificates, and publications, only available in a few institutions in the world. The Collection includes extensive files on the IOC; National Olympic Committees (NOCs); official reports from sports federations and organizations; Olympic Games and continental games.

In 2017, a continuation research proposal of the previous doctorate dissertation was granted with the Joe Arbena Award, from The North American Society of Sports Historians (NASSH). With NASSH's incentive, additional data was collected in August 2017 in Mexico City at both the *Comité Olímpico Mexicano* and PASO. The access to the material required several contact attempts through digital correspondences and, ultimately, four visits to PASO, and two visits to the Mexican Olympic Committee. Sources consulted included mainly correspondences between sport leaders and reports. Such archives offered a broader perspective for examining the contributions and challenges of the heads of the continental organization, bringing to the surface further relations between the IOC and PASO related to questions of autonomy, aroused tensions, and other factors.

Thus, those archives were put together, identifying their chronology, the social actors involved and their interactions, to compose this historical narrative. Based on them, this paper tells a story about the early editions of the Pan American Games, beyond the sporting events themselves. The following sections explore data gathered for this study providing an assessment of the context and

facts related to the 1955 and 1959 Pan-American Games, here characterized as the rise and troubles of the event, respectively.

THE 1955 PAN-AMERICAN GAMES: ESTABLISHING A PATTERN

Avery Brundage, first president of PASO and soon-to-be president of the IOC in 1952 was too occupied with the full penetration of the Cold War into the Olympic Movement to assist PASO in preparations for the II Pan-American Games (Senn, 1999)³. Opportunely, “[...] the child was fortunate to fall into Mexican hands” (Brundage, 1955, p. 27).

With the support of Miguel Alemán Velasco, president of the Mexican Republic, José de Jesús Clark Flores, president of both the Mexican Sport Confederation and the Mexican Olympic Committee, attended the III Pan-American Congress and proposed to celebrate the second edition of the Pan-American Games in Mexico. Flores presented a detailed project to gather the necessary votes for that purpose, and those Games were awarded to Mexico City.

The overall development of Mexican sport favored the work of the Mexican Olympic Committee in the preparations of the II Pan-American Games. Although Mexican sport focused on meeting wartime needs during World War II (often with sporting facilities being co-opted by the military), in the post-war era sport achieved heights of popularity, accompanying improvements in the country's infrastructure (Witherspoon, 2008, p. 19).

The evidence examined for this paper demonstrates that Flores' work, experience, and reliability regarding his connections with Avery Brundage (a very influential sport leader in the Americas) greatly contributed to the success of the II Pan American Games.

Flores had a long history of involvement with sport and sport organizations and was well-known by his passion for his country and idealistic vision of sports. Such aspects had a positive impact on the initial and avid preparations for hosting the second Pan-American Games.

Flores was determined to set a new standard of excellence for the Western Hemisphere sport festival. Only three months after the inaugural Games closure, Flores wrote to Avery Brundage to update him of what was already being done for the organization of the

³ Since the end of World War I, the Soviet state had stood apart from the Olympic Games, criticizing them as a plaything of international capitalism. The IOC, for its part, displayed little interest in having Soviet athletes participate in the Olympic Games throughout the 1920s and 1930s. World War II changed this relationship. In the mid-1940s, the Russians signaled that they wished to return to the various international sports federations and to enter the Olympics (Senn, 1999).

second Pan-American festival. Flores proposed a contest between artists and writers from the continent to create the Pan-American symbol and motto. He explained:

Dear Sir:

We feel it is necessary that the Pan-American Games have a shield and motto by themselves to advertise the event and to be used on the flag of the games to wave together with the Olympic flag and with those of the competing nations (Flores, 1951, unpagued).

On 25 September 1951 Brundage fully supported the idea to arrange the contest:

Dear General Clark:

The contest you have arranged to select an appropriate emblem and motto for the Juegos Pan Americanos is an excellent idea, which should produce good results. The important thing is to obtain widespread publicity. A notice should be sent to all athletic and art organizations in the three Americas. Perhaps you should specify who will select the Jury. The members could be chosen by Olympic Committees in the respective countries named (Brundage, 1951, unpagued).

Following Brundage's suggestion, the Pan-American Organizing Committee quickly outlined the regulations of the proposed contest. The Committee established that the motto should consist of four words written in Latin or covering the four languages spoken in the continent (Spanish, English, Portuguese, and French). The emblem, in turn, should be plain, aesthetic, and suggestive. Contestants could enter the competition for the motto, the emblem or both. Cash prizes, a gold medal, and a diploma signed by the President and the secretary of the Pan-American Sport Organization would be granted. The winning motto and emblem would become PASO's property.

The winning motto, "América: Espíritu, Sport, Fraternité", was officially announced at the V General Assembly of PASO held in Mexico City in 1954. The motto of the organization remains to this date. The emblem included the motto together with the Pan American Torch placed across five concentric rings in yellow, green, white, red and blue from center in that order (see Figure 1)⁴.

A change in Mexican national politics compromised Flores' involvement in the organization of the second Pan-American Games. In 1952 Adolfo Tomás Ruiz Cortines assumed the presidency of Mexico. Cortines then dismissed Flores from his military position. In 1953, Flores announced his resignation from both the Mexican Olympic Committee and the Mexican Sports Confederation before the new president of the country had "the pleasure" to do it (Carmona, 1981).

⁴ In 1988, with the approval of the IOC, the emblem was modified. The five Olympic rings are now superimposed on the Pan American Torch.



Figure 1. The original emblem and motto of the Pan-American Games. A black and white photo of the original emblem found in the United States 1956 Olympic Book: quadrennial report, archived at Western University.

However, when Flores resigned his positions, the organization of the II Pan-American Games was well advanced. A number of sporting facilities were built as well as the athletes' village, which was located on the campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Although Flores was no longer officially involved in the organization of Pan-Am, as a dedicated man for the development of sport in his country and proud IOC member, he did not sever his connection with either organization. He assiduously contacted Brundage regarding the preparations for the Pan-American Games and was confident that, despite the political motive of his resignation, the organizing committee of the second Pan-American Games was in good hands:

The Mexican Government accepts and gives its almost unlimited support to the II Pan-American Games, having selected a person to take charge, whose enthusiasm and references are of the biggest degree. Although I do not know this gentleman personally, yet

all who do, coincide that he is a veteran sportsman, honest, complete, an organizer and the only thing he will need is all the support he can possibly get. The Mexican President put his entire confidence in the selected man, who is Senator Guzman Willis (Flores, 1954, unpagged).

Far different from the inaugural event, operational issues did not pose major challenges for the Mexican Olympic Committee in the organization of the second Pan-American Games. The internal politics in Mexico seem to have maintained a certain distance from the organizing committee in terms of the operations of the Games. Analyzing the context of the preparations for the 1955 Pan-American Games, Brundage said:

This must be explained to governments that seek to impose political control on their sport organizations. Governments should initiate and carry on programs of physical culture, recreation, and health for their citizens, but, the control of national and international competitive sport must be left with the national federations and National Olympic Committees. You can see an example of this happy state of affairs here in Mexico, where President Ruiz Cortines and his Government made an appropriation and turned it over to Senator Willis and his organizing committee to be used without political interference of any kind. It is your obligation to keep the Pan-American Games free from political intrigue (Brundage, 1955, p. 27).

In general, the event was a great success. Over one and a half million tickets were distributed free to the Mexican public, and “[...] virtually every venue was packed with enthusiastic fans” (McGovern, 1956).

During the IV Pan-American Congress (held in conjunction with the Pan-American Games), IOC members and Latin American sport leaders conversed about the future of sport and the Olympic Movement in the region. The Congress approved Flores' suggestion to recognize the acronym ODEPA – Organización Deportiva Panamericana, as the official name of the institution. Avery Brundage attended the Congress and announced that he looked forward to further expansion of the Olympic Movement in Latin America:

You will find the Olympic flag flying at the Stadium for these games are held under the patronage of the International Olympic Committee and in conformity with its regulations. The I.O.C. looks with favor on these Regional Games since they bring to the attention of additional thousands of people, competitors and spectators alike, the high principles of the idealistic Olympic Movement (Brundage, 1955, p. 27).

Spectators at the closing ceremonies of the 1955 Pan-American Games witnessed an impressive pageant. In general, athletes, spectators, media, and organizers praised the facilities and organization of

the events. Brundage, in one of his last statements as president of PASO, emphasized:

Latin Americans should be strong supporters of Amateurism because of their great love for liberty and freedom. National Olympic Committees according to Olympic rules must be free, independent, and autonomous. Obviously, no national organization can resist effectively if its government seeks to take control and use sport as a political instrument for either personal or national aggrandizement. But countries without free and independent athletic organizations lose the benefit of international recognition and consequently the privilege of this sort of competition for its athletes (Brundage, 1955, unpagged).

The 1955 Pan-American Games offered a powerful precedent to the Mexican Committee, which ultimately led them to submit a serious bid for the 1960 Olympics. When that bid failed, they bid again for the 1968 Games, and won them. It seems fair to suggest that a pattern was established: successfully hosting the Pan-American Games boosted the interest and confidence of sport and political authorities of cities aspiring to host the Olympic Games.

THE 1959 PAN-AMERICAN GAMES: STRUGGLING FOR SURVIVAL

The 1959 Pan-Am were originally awarded to Cleveland, Ohio. The project fell apart because of the lack of financial support by the Congress. Chicago's Mayor Richard J. Daley expressed interest in replacing Cleveland as host.

While PASO's new president, Douglas F. Roby, and his direct assistants were disturbed by the developments related to the realization of the third Pan-American Games, Latin American José de J. Clark Flores was emerging as a determined and uncompromising leader of the Pan-American cause. Flores continually engaged in PASO's actions, writing to Roby on every matter and corresponding with Brundage.

In fact, Flores was vehemently offering help in all matters related to the organization of the Games. Seeking to publicize the III Pan-American Games and assess the conformity of National Olympic Committees to the Olympic regulations, Flores “[...] spontaneously offered to make a visit to each one of the Central American and Caribbean countries at his own expense to endeavor to bring a little order out of the chaos” (Aguirre, 1958, unpagged).

With the III Pan-American Games officially awarded to Chicago, Roby wrote: “Chicago's acceptance as host for 1959 Pan American Games puts the events on sound footing” (Roby, 1956). Roby mentioned that PASO's officials predicted a “[...] greater-than-ever success” for the event, which was second only to the Olympic Games in prestige and magnitude.

However, following the initial effort to win the right to host the Games, Chicago energies caused Brundage, Roby and other PASO's officials concern. Brundage was particularly apprehensive:

Fresh from the III Asian Games, staged with such great success in Tokyo, I want to express my disappointment and concern over the preparations for the III Pan American Games to be staged in Chicago in August 1959. Since the International Olympic Committee gives its patronage but does not sponsor these Games, I am writing not as its President but as one of the founders and the first president for fifteen years of the Pan American Games Organization. This organization was a feeble infant, but we carefully nursed it through the war, revived it after the war, and staged with considerable success, all things considered, the first Pan American Games in Buenos Aires and the second in Mexico. From all I can ascertain, it seems to me that the III Pan American Games are going to be the most dismal fiasco in the history of international sport. Unless some drastic action is taken immediately, the Pan American Games idea will die in an ignominious death right here in Chicago (Brundage, 1959, unpagged).

Brundage assuaged Roby by saying that he knew that those in charge of PASO had the best of intentions, but presumed that it was Chicago officials who had not the faintest idea of the magnitude of the task they have assumed. He said:

This will not only be a disgrace to the City of Chicago but also to the United States itself, as well as to all US amateur sport organizations including the national amateur sport federations, the Amateur Athletic Union, and the United States Olympic Association. It would be far better that the Games should not be held at all than to have them staged in a slipshod manner (Brundage, 1959, unpagged).

Chicago's Mayor and his committee tried to dampen criticism and save the Games. Daley constantly reiterated his commitment to stage the Games. In the letters he addressed to Brundage, he did not mention the high ideals or the potential of the Games to foster good will, but instead emphasized his belief that the hemispheric event would be an "[...] opportunity (for Chicago) to gain acceptance as the cultural and industrial center of the Americas" (Daley, 1958, unpagged).

The organizing committee worked faithfully and, by December 1958, they announced that all facilities required for the Games would be ready in time. In the end, Roby considered the Games successful. He stated:

The Chicago Games, generally, were considered a fine success with real growth in PASO manifested, and were conducted in the best Olympic tradition. Everything ran smoothly, with few exceptions, during the competitions (Roby, 1960, p. 30).

However, such success was not deemed as consensual among sport leaders. In the Avery Brundage Collection, negative comments written by Brundage regarding the opening ceremonies are found. He listed the following observations: "[...] political introductions and speeches, rabble on the infield, badly organized parade, music inadequate, no discipline when teams lined up on the infield, sloppy appearance, non-attention when the oath was given" (Brundage, 1959, unpagged).

At the Congress of the Pan-American Sports Organization held prior to the opening of the Games in Chicago, José de J. Clark Flores of Mexico succeeded Douglas F. Roby of the United States as president of the organization.

As president of PASO, Flores set forth two major goals: 1 - to give the necessary consistency and strength to the organization to maintain recognition and obtain more support from the IOC; 2 – to make the organization self-sufficient economically. Flores established a permanent office for PASO in Mexico City. As PASO's leader, he also promoted technical and scientific discussion and exchange of ideas between countries.

CONCLUSIONS

All sport organizations become embedded with their own unique cultural considerations, even when they are connected to larger organizations. As demonstrated in this work, Latin American sport leaders embraced the Pan-American idea, and thus the Olympic Movement seeking to articulate their respective political interests with the supposed apolitical Pan-American Games.

Much of the success of the II Pan-American Games was due to José de Jesus Clark Flores' experience, dedication, careful planning, and mainly, to the convergence of his ideals with the Olympic Movement. However, especially in preparations for the third edition, the continuity of the Pan-Am was threatened by financial, ideological, and political reasons.

In the 1950s, the overall success of the first Pan-Am strengthened the link between Latin America and the Olympic Movement and the aspirations of sport authorities to host the Olympics in South America. On the other hand, those Games served IOC authorities as an assessment of the Olympic Movement and sport progresses in that region of the world, maintaining a hierarchical difference, meaning that the Pan-Am Games served the Olympic Games.

Important to the development of sport in Latin America is the fact that, although led by Americans in its first 19 years, the Pan-American Sports Organization represented one of the first opportunities for Latin American sport leaders to experience the leadership of international multi-sport organizations.

FUNDING

This work was funded by the North American Society for Sport History, with The Joe Arbena Award.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interests.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank professor Robert K. Barney, the International Center for Olympic Studies, Western University, Canada, the Comité Olímpico Mexicano, and the Pan American Sports Organization.

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