

Return to Baden-Baden

Remarks from the President
of the International Olympic Committee,
Jacques Rogge

Dear colleagues,

It is hard to believe that it has been 30 years since the sports world gathered in this beautiful building for the XI Olympic Congress.

I am heartened to see so many familiar faces from that time here with us this evening. It says something about our Movement, and the commitment of those involved, that so many people who attended the Baden-Baden Congress in 1981 remain actively engaged in promoting Olympic values.

I will have more to say in a moment about the very important contributions made by two young Olympians three decades ago. It was obvious even then that Seb Coe and Thomas Bach were destined for leading roles in the Olympic Movement.

Thank you, Lord Coe, for the magnificent job you are doing as Chairman of the London 2012 Organising Committee. We look forward to great Games next year.

As a sign of his dedication, Dr Bach put aside studying for his legal exams to attend the Baden-Baden Congress. It will not surprise you to know that he presented some very strong arguments for greater participation by athletes within our governance structure.

The IOC is very fortunate that our dear colleague later resumed his studies. His guidance on legal matters is invaluable. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Dr Bach and the entire Deutscher Olympischer SportBund for hosting this celebration.

I have to confess that I declined to go to the Congress. My NOC proposed me to attend, but the meeting clashed with a sailing World Championships and I chose the latter.

Unfortunately, another guiding force from the 1981 Congress is not here this evening, but the spirit of Willi Daume is certainly with us. Willi Daume was instrumental in reuniting the Olympic Movement and the new Germany.

As host of the Baden-Baden Congress, he challenged delegates to live up to Olympic ideals and embrace change.

As we look back at the XI Olympic Congress, it is useful to put that event in a broader context.

The International Olympic Committee and our Movement have accomplished something extraordinary over the past 117 years.

It is hard to think of any other organisation founded near the close of the 19th century that is stronger and more vibrant than ever near the start of the 21st century.

We have thrived by adapting to changing times while remaining true to our core values and founding mission. The institution of the Olympic Congress has played a major role in this achievement.

The Congress is not a decision-making body. Its impact results from providing thought leadership, inspiration and guidance. There have been just 13 over the years. The first, in June 1894, in Paris, created the Olympic Movement and the International Olympic Committee.

Every succeeding Congress — about once a decade, on average — has refreshed and renewed our organisation. Some had historic impact.

The III Congress in Brussels, in 1905, expanded our efforts to share the rewards of sport more widely — with women, rural areas, urban dwellers and juvenile offenders.

Responding to advances in science and medicine, the V Olympic Congress in Lausanne in 1913 is remembered as the Congress that brought together the world of science and the world of sport.

Eight years later, the VII Congress, also in Lausanne, opened the way for the Olympic Winter Games.

The XII Olympic Congress in Paris, in 1994, recognised the Olympic Movement's role in protecting the environment. The Centennial Congress led to the creation of the IOC Sport and Environment Commission and the adoption of a new clause in the Olympic Charter directing the IOC to make environmental protection part of its core

mission. The 1994 Congress was also the first which included participation by the media.

The XI Olympic Congress earned its place in Olympic history during a challenging time for our Movement.

The Baden-Baden Congress came a year after more than 60 National Olympic Committees were forced to join a politically inspired boycott of the 1980 Moscow Games, and three years before a retaliatory boycott of the 1984 Los Angeles Games.

Our Movement's financial foundation was weak, and many cities were reluctant to take on the expense of hosting the Games. Los Angeles was the only serious bidder for the 1984 Games.

The gap between National Olympic Committees from the industrialised nations and the developing world was all too apparent.

Athletes — the heart of Movement — had no real voice in sports governance or administrative matters.

Doping had emerged as the single most serious threat to the integrity of sport.

All of those issues were hanging over the 469 delegates, including representatives from 143 National Olympic Committees and more than two dozen International Federations, who gathered at Kurhaus on 23 September in 1981.

The theme of their meeting was “United for Sport,” with three sub-themes: “The Future of the Olympic Games,” “International Cooperation,” and “The Future of the Olympic Movement.”

In many ways, those five days in Baden-Baden ushered in the Olympic Movement’s modern era. The 1981 Congress marked the start of a revolution — the Samaranch Revolution.

Juan Antonio Samaranch had been elected IOC President at the Moscow Games, so Baden-Baden was his first real opportunity to exert his leadership.

Here are just some of the outcomes of the 1981 Congress that shaped the Olympic Movement as we know it today:

A voice for athletes. Thomas Bach and Seb Coe were leaders in a delegation of more than two dozen athletes who were included as active Congress participants for the first time. A month later, the IOC Athletes' Commission was established to ensure a continued role for athletes.

More realistic guidelines for Olympic eligibility. The Congress brought an end to the inflexible and unworkable dogma of amateurism, which forced far too many athletes to abandon their Olympic dreams in return for financial security.

The development of a marketing programme. Breaking our total dependence on television rights strengthened our financial foundation and expanded the reach of our efforts to promote Olympic values.

The separation of the Summer and Winter Games. Ending the practice of holding both editions in the same year increased revenue and gave greater prominence to the Winter Games.

Tougher sanctions against doping. The 1981 Congress sounded the alarm on a problem that remains a top concern.

A more robust Olympic Solidarity programme.

Although the roots of Olympic Solidarity go back to the early 1960s, the Olympic Solidarity Commission was established in the framework of Baden-Baden.

A commitment to equality. Congress delegates reaffirmed the Olympic Movement's commitment to non-discrimination in sport and successfully advocated for more participation by women at the Games and throughout our Movement.

Closer ties to the United Nations. The speakers at the XI Congress included Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, Director-General of UNESCO, who acknowledged the role of sport as a force for peace and development.

A more unified Olympic Movement. The Congress strengthened cooperation between the IOC and the International Federations and the National Olympic Committees, and reaffirmed the IOC's role as the leading force in the world of sport.

The Baden-Baden Congress had a far-reaching impact because delegates looked to the future. It is a tribute to their foresight that much of the discussion at the most

recent Olympic Congress in 2009 was an extension and a revamp of the work done here.

The theme of the XIII Olympic Congress in Copenhagen was “The Olympic Movement in Society.” Within that framework, we addressed many of the same issues of the 1981 Congress, including the role of athletes, the fight against doping, Olympic Solidarity, equality in sport, opportunities for women and the structure of our Movement.

Building on the collaboration with the UN that we saw in Baden-Baden, the keynote speaker in Copenhagen was UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Of course, the 2009 agenda also addressed the issues of our time and the challenges in our future.

One major sub-theme at the most recent Congress, “The Digital Revolution,” would have been inconceivable in 1981 — more than a decade before the Internet revolutionised communication and commerce. The 2009 Congress was the first to invite public participation with a “Virtual Congress” that allowed contributions submitted online.

Current trends also guided discussion around another major sub-theme at the XIII Olympic Congress, Olympism and Youth. Young people have always been the primary focus on of our Movement, but promoting sports and Olympic values among them is more important than ever at a time when inactivity and obesity are on the increase.

That is precisely the role of the Olympic Congress — to learn from the past, to adapt to the present, to anticipate the future.

We have kept our Movement strong by respecting tradition while embracing positive change. As Willi Daume put in his opening remarks at the XI Olympic Congress: “Continuous change is an Olympic principle.”

Our founder, Pierre de Coubertin, and the delegates at that very first Olympic Congress would be very pleased to see where their vision has taken us.

They would be thrilled to know we are now able to share the values that motivated them — fair play, respect, friendship and excellence — with a global audience of some 4 billion people.

Above all, they would be heartened by the confirmation that the Movement they founded in 1894 is stronger, more vibrant and more relevant than ever.

Countless people share credit for that achievement, but there is no doubt that the delegates at the XI Olympic Congress belong on that list.

Tonight, we recognise and celebrate their contribution to the Olympic Movement.

Thank you.