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The ITTF and Olympic recognition of table tennis: from pure amateurism to the Asian markets (1926-1988)

Killian Mousset (L-VIS, Univ Lyon 1), **Louis Violette** (ESPACE-DEV, Univ La Réunion), **Aurélie Épron** (L-VIS, Univ Lyon 1)

Abstract:

Table tennis was first played as an Olympic sport at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. Yet its official body, the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), had not always sought Olympic recognition. Founded in 1926, the ITTF was in conflict with the Olympic movement in its early years. While the democratized and apolitical vision of table tennis did not appear to be fundamentally at odds with Olympic values, amateurism was an obstacle for the federation. As a result, only after 50 years, in 1977, did the ITTF finally bow to the principles of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Thereafter, Olympic recognition became a major symbolic and economic pillar of the ITTF's development strategy. The aims of the two institutions became aligned as the popularity of table tennis internationally, particularly in Asia, contributed to the goal of globalizing the Olympics. This rapprochement with Asian markets accelerated under the IOC presidency of Juan Antonio Samaranch from 1981, leading to the inclusion of the discipline in the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games.

Keywords: Table tennis, ITTF, IOC, Asia, Olympic recognition

Introduction

Academic research on the history of Olympic sports, from the inclusion of soccer in the 1900 Summer Olympic Games in Paris to the exclusion of tennis in 1928, is not uncommon.¹ However, the path of more recently added Olympic sports remains little or sketchily discussed in the academic world.² For example, historical and sociological studies of table tennis have

most often addressed broader diplomatic issues.³ The institutional history of this international sport has remained a blind spot in historiography, yet its relationship to the Olympic movement merits examination to shed light on the policies implemented by the institutions involved. In this study, we have traced the process of the Olympic recognition of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) over the period from its foundation in 1926 to its entry as a competitive sport in the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. The Honorary Curator of the ITTF Museum, Chuck Hoey, undertook the work of retracing the Olympic history of table tennis by way of a chronology of excerpts from the minutes of annual and bi-annual meetings of the federation and a talk by its first President.⁴ Although this approach remains largely marginal to the evolution of the Olympic movement, it marks the long opposition of the ITTF and its President, Ivor Montagu, to the sport's possible inclusion in the Olympics, and covers the subsequent period until its recognition. This paper confirms the said gradual shift of position.

To carry out this contextual analysis of the historical relationship between the ITTF and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the following documents were examined: the minutes of the ITTF's General Assemblies from 1926 to 1989; minutes of IOC sessions since 1894; the minutes of the IOC Executive Board since 1921; select IOC documents on relations with international federations since 1928; minutes of the Olympic Programme Commission since 1968, and correspondence between the ITTF and the Olympic Programme Commission archived at the Olympic Studies Centre in Lausanne.⁵ These archival documents reveal evidence of the marked change of stance towards the Olympics within the ITTF over the twentieth century. They also highlight the structural changes and political shifts in the IOC up to the 1980s, when the goal of globalizing sports was ultimately adopted.⁶ While table tennis – so often considered a minor sport or simple entertainment – cannot alone take responsibility for these macro-scale changes, it bears witness to a complex institutional process that reveals the transformations at the heart of the Olympic movement.

The long-standing existence of an international sports organization or proven worldwide popularity could not be considered as sufficient criteria to earn Olympic recognition of a sport. Unlike table tennis, mountain biking officially became an Olympic sport at the Atlanta Games in 1996, shortly after its international development in the late 1980s.⁷ The recognition of table tennis in the Olympic Games is interesting in that it was a complex process based on recognition criteria that varied according to the context and depended as much on the principles and rules adopted by the IOC as on the wishes of the international federation. As the Olympic movement expanded internationally, to what extent did the strong domination of table tennis by the Japanese and subsequently the Chinese from the 1950s onwards play a role in its recognition? The policy of Olympic expansion on the Asian continent was asserted as early as 1964 with the Tokyo Games and the admission of judo, a Japanese national sport, at the request of the Organizing Committee.⁸ The objective of this paper is therefore to explain the influence of the stakes involved in the Olympic recognition of a sport, in this case table tennis, ranging from political and cultural influences to the impact of sporting popularity.

Although the ITTF dates back to 1926, table tennis did not seek to become part of the Olympic movement until 1967. In fact, the Olympic ideal of amateurism, understood as pecuniary disinterest, was seen as elitist and opposed to the idea of social and apolitical democratization, as promoted within the ITTF and by its long-serving president Ivor Montagu.⁹ Essentially, the ITTF believed that financial constraints should not be a barrier to the participation of players in international competitions. However, by the late 1960s, the economic and symbolic kudos of being an Olympic sport radically changed the ITTF's position and its policy for development. The federation gradually began to comply with Olympic requirements, in particular the IOC's rules of engagement. The process was carried out in two stages: first, the federation itself requested institutional recognition, then it sought the inclusion of the sport in the Olympic Games – an outcome that was far from certain. The precept of Olympic

amateurism, evolving even within the IOC, was finally accepted as it did not prevent the participation of non-amateur players in the discipline's world championships.¹⁰ By the 1980s, with the Seoul Games on the horizon, the inclusion of table tennis, as a popular sport in Asia, was in line with the goal of accelerating the globalization of the Olympics. The Games had been opening up to the Asian continent since the Tokyo Olympics in 1964.¹¹ The new president of the IOC, Juan Antonio Samaranch, elected in 1980, promoted a vision of expanding the Olympic movement and took table tennis over the finish line. The inclusion of table tennis was a means to financially redress the Olympic movement from the controversies over its deficits. Table tennis thus became an additional lever in this goal for the IOC, demonstrating that Olympic recognition could be a win-win situation for both institutions.

The ITTF stands apart from the Olympic ideal (1926–1967): allegiance to Ivor Montagu

Table tennis, a high-society lounge pastime in Europe and the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, officially became an international sport on 7 December 1926, with the creation of the ITTF.¹² From the 1880s, this game would also be popular in English army camps attended by soldiers from all social classes in the Western world and its colonies, such as India.¹³ While its image as a sport was still in its infancy and there were few affiliated federations (nine in 1926), as early as 1931 the annual Table Tennis World Championships gave members the idea of participating in the Olympics.¹⁴ After agreeing to explore the possibilities relating to the Olympic Games and then to hold competitions simultaneously with the 1936 Winter Games, the majority of member countries favoured participating in the 1940 Summer Olympics to be held in Tokyo.¹⁵ Although members attending the ITTF Congress in the 1930s expressed a strong wish to participate in the Olympics, its chairman and later president, England's Ivor Montagu, managed to persuade them not to apply for recognition. This stance would be held for almost 41 years (1926–1967). The reticence of table tennis was

no exception: many sports federations were opposed to the Olympic movement in the interwar period due to tensions concerning amateurism. To cite just one example, the issue of professionalism in football led the International Football Federation to refrain from sending a team to the 1928 and 1932 Olympic Games and to set up its own world championship.¹⁶ Like football and other sports, such as lawn tennis, the ITTF had a conflict of values with the IOC.

In the interwar period, the Olympic festivals took on an undeniable importance, particularly because of the associated political and diplomatic stakes, yet the ITTF deliberately distanced itself from the Olympic movement.¹⁷ The main reason for this reluctance was its president, Ivor Montagu. A wealthy supporter of the British Socialist Party and then, from 1931, of the Communist Party, Montagu held a populist view of table tennis.¹⁸ This position was in line with his political convictions, but was criticized by his social class.¹⁹ He saw the sport as a means of providing cheap entertainment for the working classes, while maintaining a certain aristocratic vision inspired by the social ideals of his family, school, and the University of Cambridge.²⁰ In this sense, the ‘amateur player’ advocated by the IOC was seen to be elitist and to hinder ambitions of democratizing sporting leisure activities.²¹ Montagu felt that adopting a doctrine of amateurism within the ITTF would be an obstacle to the development of the sport in the lower middle classes, where it was gaining popularity in England and France in the 1930s.²² The majority of ITTF members shared Montagu’s view. From 1935, the federation’s statutes no longer distinguished between professional and amateur players.²³ Only the notion of ‘player’ counted.²⁴ ITTF-affiliated federations were thus free to select amateur or professional players for international competitions, provided that they received no reward or remuneration other than expenses. Players were, consequently, not prevented from taking part in international competitions, whatever their financial relationship with the sport. However, the ITTF refused to use the term ‘amateur’ if the player received financial benefits.²⁵ These rules distanced the ITTF from the ideal of the Olympic athlete, as the *Olympic Charter* rejected the participation

of professionals and ‘shamateurs’, i.e. those who received any form of remuneration, reward or expenses. Given this difference in approach, the IOC would have certainly refused a request for Olympic recognition by the ITTF. Another reason behind the desire not to adhere to the IOC’s strict policy was also undoubtedly fear of a bid being rejected. Such an outcome would likely have damaged the image of the discipline, which was still perceived as a minor activity, a secondary sport, or even a dilettante parlour game.²⁶

This voluntary distancing of the ITTF from the Olympic movement, driven by Montagu, was scarcely disputed until the end of his presidency in 1967. This reveals the dominant position of his leadership for the members of the ITTF. His mastery of languages (he spoke seven), his charisma and his pioneering role in structuring and regulating the game all made him a very influential figure in the international network.²⁷ Moreover, his numerous arguments against inclusion in the Olympics were part of more general considerations. He felt the Olympic Games should be reserved for athletic sports; a category that covered nearly all outdoor athletic exercises, such as running, jumping, and throwing, as well as other outdoor sports that were not part of the Olympic Games.²⁸ As an ‘indoor sport’, table tennis would therefore have no place; this was a consensual position in discussions on the Olympic movement in the mid-twentieth century. In addition, table tennis already had a world championship, which would make the Olympics a duplication of effort.²⁹ Thus, like his ‘unanimous’ elections as president in 1937 and 1957, and ‘unopposed’ elections in 1963 and 1965, his positions often ended up being approved by the congress and reflected in its decisions.³⁰ In 1952, a suggestion of participation in the Olympic Games, mooted by Belgium, was rejected.³¹ Similarly, during a discussion raised by the Swiss federation at the Annual General Meeting in 1954, the president was forced to reiterate the ITTF’s position on the Olympic question.³² In view of the growing divergence of opinions on the matter, it was agreed that feasibility surveys could be carried out by the table tennis associations in countries where the Games would take place, or with the assistance of the

representatives of Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland, who were members of their respective National Olympic Committees (NOCs).³³ By allowing indirect surveys, the ITTF avoided officially requesting anything from the IOC. In this way, Montagu curbed all Olympic ambitions and calls for the official IOC recognition of table tennis until 1967.

Nonetheless, without any request from the ITTF, table tennis began to be discussed within the IOC itself. In 1946, the Argentinian NOC, which could then make a request on its own behalf, asked for the inclusion of table tennis, along with handball and chess, in the 1948 Winter Games in St. Moritz, Switzerland. This was refused.³⁴ As an 'indoor sport', it was considered to detract from the outdoor character of the Winter Games. A new bid for participation from the Costa Rican NOC was sent in 1960.³⁵ Although table tennis had been part of the Asian Games since the late 1950s, the IOC-sponsored Pan-American and Central American Games persisted in rejecting the sport, despite the efforts of the countries where it was played.³⁶ The NOCs of Central and South America continued to lobby to have table tennis on the programme of the Continental and Regional Games, but their petitions could not be taken into consideration; from 1960, only one international federation was now entitled to address this type of request.³⁷ According to the secretary of the NOC of Costa Rica, the 'amateur' nature of the discipline did not satisfy the IOC.³⁸ This stance was maintained despite the fact that some countries, such as England and the United States, already had a register of professionals to select amateurs to participate in the Games³⁹. The weight of the 78 associations affiliated to the ITTF and the low costs of table tennis, compared to other sports competing in the Olympics, were not enough to convince.⁴⁰ In spite of these IOC-motivated surveys, table tennis was not recognized by the Olympic movement.

By the mid-1960s, the ITTF came to believe it was necessary to make a formal request for recognition on its own behalf. To do so, however, it had to bring its statutes in line with the

rules laid down by the IOC, in particular on the question of amateurism. And this counted on the departure of Ivor Montagu.

Towards Olympic recognition: the path to the victory of the pro-Olympic camp (1967–1977)

In 1967, the ITTF's political standpoint shifted following Montagu's retirement. In an election on 13 April, the Welsh H. Roy Evans, ex-General Secretary of the ITTF, defeated Sweden's Ake Eldh by 57 votes to 49. He vowed that as president he would continue the efforts of his predecessor.⁴¹ However, this was not the case for the Olympic strategy. Just seven days after his election, following a proposal by the French Table Tennis Federation, the new president agreed to take all necessary measures to obtain information on the possibility of IOC recognition.⁴² If the democratization and development of this sport by Ivor Montagu was based on keeping sport apolitical and rejecting strict amateurism, the commitment of H. Roy Evans 'was based on giving dignity to table tennis and on promoting its popularity throughout the world'.⁴³ Becoming an Olympic sport was gradually taking shape as a path for the development of table tennis, and a marker of true sporting recognition. In fact, the political and social stances of H. Roy Evans were much less marked than those of Ivor Montagu. He belonged to a class of sports leaders whose main interest was the international development of sport, beyond purely political or social reasoning. Hugo Urchetti, President of the Swiss Table Tennis Federation, was asked to make contact with the IOC authorities, which he did by letter in November 1967.⁴⁴ The ITTF's former distance from the Olympic movement, championed by Ivor Montagu, abated. The federation argued that the authority of the Table Tennis World Championships would not be threatened by the 'duplication' of participating in the Games. As this participation need not be systematic, the World Championships could remain a priority.⁴⁵ The ITTF had begun to make its mark on the international scene, with 89 member associations by 1967, and

the federation could not afford to miss out on the potential for further developing the sport.⁴⁶ IOC affiliation allowed some of the ITTF's national federations 'to benefit from material and financial advantages' provided by their National Olympic Committees.⁴⁷ In some cases, NOCs only accepted federations whose sports were included in the Games.⁴⁸ Consequently, a majority of ITTF members backed the request for affiliation to enable some of their respective federations to benefit from substantial aid.

However, as things stood, affiliation was impossible. Exchanges between the General Secretary of the ITTF (A. K. Vint) and that of the IOC (J. W. Westerhoff) show how the ITTF statutes did not comply with the 1968 *Olympic Charter*. In the ITTF's official manual, there was no limit on cash prizes, no mention of 'amateur federation', nor even a paragraph on the remuneration and marketing of athletes, although IOC requirements were that these be included.⁴⁹ The ITTF only refused to allow players to be paid to participate in competitions: it did not prohibit them from being professional coaches, giving paid exhibitions or receiving prizes of up to £100.⁵⁰ In contrast, the IOC's position, as stated by Westerhoff in 1968, was that 'amateurs' must not depend, directly or indirectly, on income linked to practising their sport, or on their knowledge or contracts in the field of sport.⁵¹ It was thus clear that affiliation with the IOC would be refused, since the ITTF constitution did not include these guidelines on amateurism.⁵² From 1967 to 1974, ITTF members pursued discussions with the IOC, but the federation was not prepared to comply with the latter's requirements for recognition. The question was all the more thorny as many table tennis champions, particularly Hungarian players, benefited from money earned during exhibitions, an arrangement existing since the 1930s.⁵³ As the 'amateur sport' ideal remained a key principle of the Olympic movement under the IOC presidency of Avery Brundage (1952–1972), any official request for recognition by the ITTF would be futile.⁵⁴ At the very least, it would run the risk of coming up against the dogmatic opposition of the IOC president, known for his strict standpoint. In 1956 this was

demonstrated by his resistance to the re-affiliation request of the International Lawn Tennis Federation (ILTF), which was accused of promoting a 'shamateur' sporting culture.⁵⁵ Thus, while in the history of the Olympic movement, amateurism was tackled with a 'case-by-case' approach, throughout the 1960s it remained the key requisite for IOC recognition, thus excluding the ITTF.⁵⁶

In the mid-1970s, pressure from pro-Olympic national table tennis federations, which felt they were being undermined by non-recognition, was such that the ITTF president began negotiations with the IOC. The process started in May–June 1974.⁵⁷ However, the ITTF encountered difficulties complying with the Olympic rule on amateurism. The ITTF proposed a statutory alternative to the IOC, suggesting the possible withdrawal of the cash prize rule for so-called 'amateur' players after a vote at the general assembly scheduled for February of the following year.⁵⁸ It was clear that the issue of NOC recognition of national table tennis federations in their countries was at the heart of this process.⁵⁹ The ITTF considered the proposed amendments satisfactory, and finally made a formal request for recognition in July 1975.⁶⁰ The request was renewed in November 1976.⁶¹ While the federation did still not distinguish between amateurs and professionals, 100 of the 115 affiliated national federations were already 'amateur' in nature, according to H. Roy Evans.⁶² However, the IOC maintained that the autonomy granted to the national table tennis federations and the ITTF's ambiguous position on amateurism still failed to conform to its statutes. While the ITTF prohibited all its national federations from paying their players to take part in its international competitions, it allowed them managerial autonomy in matters relating to players who benefited from coaching or exhibition money.⁶³ As a result, in February 1977, the Olympic Programme Commission still expressed reservations about recognizing the ITTF. After almost ten years of negotiations, the amateur status of the players, which the ITTF left to its national federations, was now the only obstacle to its recognition.⁶⁴

By this point, the vast majority of ITTF members supported Olympic recognition. Internal pressure from national federations; the lack of response, positive or negative, from the IOC; and concern over the time needed for yet another request submission in the event of a rejection prompted a change in the ITTF's strategy.⁶⁵ Thus, at its General Assembly in March 1977, representatives finally bowed to the IOC's wishes, voting to abandon the term 'player' in order to distinguish between amateurs and professionals.⁶⁶ Secondly, they recommended the creation of a special committee to supervise professional players, who would be the only ones eligible to earn money.⁶⁷ Finally, they advised reserving regional competitions for amateurs only.⁶⁸ These proposals were approved by 65 of the 77 member federations.⁶⁹ Only six Western European countries, which quite definitely had professional players in their ranks, were opposed to the changes, indicating that Olympic affiliation had become a priority for the majority of ITTF member countries.⁷⁰ The new ITTF application for recognition was then submitted with these changes and was approved by the 79th IOC Session held in Prague in June 1977, subject to the inclusion of an eligibility code for competitors at the Games.⁷¹ This last change was a minor detail, which the ITTF president hastened to settle.⁷² In October, the IOC Executive Committee announced the desired modifications,⁷³ and the ITTF received a letter in November 1977 stating that it was now recognized by the IOC as the body controlling table tennis.⁷⁴

In the end, the material and financial interest of Olympic recognition for the national federations, which would ultimately be linked to the sport's inclusion in the continental and regional games sponsored by the IOC, changed the ITTF's position on amateurism. However, this was less of a change in philosophy than a development imperative. Proof of this is that while the ITTF had proposed setting up a supervisory commission for professionals in March/April 1977, this had still not been established by the time of the 1979 General Assembly.⁷⁵

Becoming an Olympic sport in a changing world: the run-up to the Seoul Games (1978–1988)

Despite previous attempts to include table tennis in the programme of the Olympic Games, this goal became a race from 1978.⁷⁶ The recognition of a sports federation by the IOC does not mean that the sport will be automatically included in the official programme of events at the quadrennial event. Further discussions were needed between the IOC and the ITTF on the potential inclusion of table tennis in the 1988 Summer Olympics.⁷⁷ The table tennis bid faced widespread opposition, linked to the increasing number of Olympic sports, and in particular the organizational difficulties encountered by the host cities.⁷⁸ The prospect of competing therefore appeared unsure. In fact, at the start of the negotiations, the Summer Games Organizing Committees voted against adding two further sports to the programme.⁷⁹ The proposal did not obtain the necessary two-thirds majority at the 80th IOC Session in Athens.⁸⁰

The capacity of cities to host an increasing number of athletes and different competitions was the main argument hindering the inclusion of table tennis. At the same time, between 1977 and 1978, the Olympic Programme Commission started discussing the possibility of transferring sports to the Winter Games.⁸¹ As an ‘indoor sport’ practised throughout the winter season, table tennis was a potential candidate for the said Games.⁸² However, this proposal did not meet with unanimous agreement and was eventually rejected by the commission.⁸³ The counter-arguments were legion. For Konstantin Andrianov, a member of the Olympic Programme Commission, the Winter Games should only include ice or snow sports.⁸⁴ In addition, other new sports were likely to become part of the winter programme, according to the commission chairman, Arpad Csanadi.⁸⁵ Table tennis seemed to be caught up in a fundamental debate within the commission on the identity and future of the Winter Games. Moreover, the ITTF had difficulty adapting to the IOC’s administrative procedures, and no formal request for inclusion in the Olympic programme was presented in 1978.⁸⁶

Finally, a formal request was made in July 1979, with its submission to the members of the Olympic Programme Commission scheduled for September.⁸⁷ It was still under consideration in January 1980.⁸⁸ In the April 1980 session, an opinion in favour of the inclusion of table tennis was finally issued, subject to details being worked out quickly on prize money and competition format.⁸⁹ With 122 affiliated national federations and approximately ten million competitors worldwide in 1979, ITTF table tennis was now played in at least 40 countries on three continents, as required by the IOC.⁹⁰ Moreover, the discipline appeared to be a popular sport, as pointed out by Arpad Csanadi.⁹¹ Although never explicitly mentioned in the correspondence consulted, the fact that table tennis was a competitive and leisure sport well established in Asia was no doubt an additional argument. Table tennis could contribute to the Olympic goal of spreading peace throughout the world, and more specifically penetrating Asian markets – a trend already underway since the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.⁹² The recognition questionnaire sent out by the ITTF in July 1979 shows that table tennis was already included in the African and Asian Regional Games, presented as a demonstration sport in the Pan-American Games, and planned to be included in the future Mediterranean, South Pacific and South-East Asian Games.⁹³

Yet despite the positive opinion expressed by the Executive Committee, the members of the 83rd IOC Session in July 1980 rejected the increase from 21 to 22 sports in the summer programme.⁹⁴ Table tennis, on the list as the potential 22nd sport, was therefore once again excluded.⁹⁵ As the French mountaineer and IOC member Maurice Herzog pointed out, all members were concerned about the size of the Games and sought a solution to reduce the number of events for existing sports.⁹⁶ The popularity of the discipline was not enough to grant its entry to the Olympics.

At the same time, it can be seen that there was a broader debate. It was not just about adding more sports (tennis was also on the list), but about the future of the Olympic movement.⁹⁷ Under

Michael Morris, Lord Killanin, president of the IOC from 1972 to 1980, the Olympic Games were plagued by political and economic controversies over large deficits, boycotts and ideological tensions stemming from the Cold War.⁹⁸ The new IOC president, Juan Antonio Samaranch, elected in 1980, sought to address these issues. Considered a business reformer and progressive thinker, his goal was to ensure the financial prosperity of the Olympic movement.⁹⁹ His election quickly unblocked the Olympic acceptance of table tennis, as well as tennis.¹⁰⁰ As ITTF President H. Roy Evans stated, Juan Antonio Samaranch was clearly eager for change and new ideas.¹⁰¹ Through his presence on the Olympic Programme Commission, he put forward certain guidelines concerning the future of the Olympic programme. In theory, the latter should be reviewed after each Olympiad, but this had not taken place for two Olympic terms.¹⁰² While he agreed that a reduction in the number of athletes and events was desirable in the interests of controlling the size of the Games, Samaranch did not recommend the exclusion of new sports.¹⁰³ On the contrary, telegenic sports, such as tennis, and the growing economic lure of selling television rights (such as the \$100 million contract for American broadcasting rights of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles), were strong arguments for including popular sports.¹⁰⁴ As a result, concern for the increased size of the Games waned, as did resistance to the official addition of new Olympic sports. At the 84th IOC Session in Baden-Baden on 30 September 1981, table tennis, along with tennis, was accepted in the Olympic programme of the 1988 Summer Games in Seoul.¹⁰⁵ Although this was never explicitly voiced by officials, the inclusion of table tennis clearly reflected the desire of the Olympic movement to gain ground in Asia, a region where the discipline was popular, with many Asian champions of Japanese and Chinese origin since the 1960s and 1970s.

All in all, a number of factors allowed table tennis to become an Olympic sport: its worldwide popularity, the ITTF's efforts to comply with IOC requirements, and Juan Antonio Samaranch's new strategy for developing the Olympic movement.

Conclusion

This in-depth analysis of archival documents concerning the discussions within the ITTF and its relations with the IOC sheds light on the complex institutional process of gaining Olympic recognition for sports that can be considered ‘minor’ on the international scene. For almost 40 years, the risk of discrediting the image of table tennis, still an incipient sport, was certainly a significant concern of the ITTF under its undisputed president Ivor Montagu. This kept it from making an application for IOC recognition, which would likely be rejected. However, this distancing from the Olympics between 1926 and 1967 was fundamentally based on the federation’s refusal of the ideal of ‘amateur sport’, which it considered discriminatory. The majority of table tennis professionals ‘survived’ from their earnings rather than making a proper living, unlike other sports such as professional football. This philosophy of allowing remuneration was rooted in an apolitical practice that went beyond to the social status of the players.¹⁰⁶ It was only in 1977 that the financial and material stakes, in the form of potential contributions by NOCs to the national federations, forced the ITTF, under pressure from its members, to comply with IOC rules in order to gain Olympic recognition. However, while, by the end of the 1970s, the ITTF satisfied the criteria of the popularity of the sport and the creation of an amateur category, as required for admission to the Olympic Games, this was not sufficient for table tennis to be included. It was not until Juan Antonio Samaranch introduced the policy of supporting the addition of new sports from 1980 that the discipline was allowed to participate in the Seoul Games in 1988.

Beyond these internal institutional deliberations, in a period of progressive liberalization of the Olympic movement, table tennis could also be seen as an overture to popular sports in Asia. Some 59,139 people attended the table tennis matches during the nine days of competitions at the 1988 Seoul Olympics.¹⁰⁷ China, Japan and South Korea were forging their

place among the leading nations in the discipline. Hence, the history of the Olympic recognition of table tennis is equally linked to late twentieth-century changes in Olympic doctrine, in particular its globalization.¹⁰⁸ While the archives consulted do not explicitly mention this, the inclusion of new sports in the Olympics from the 1980s shows an accelerated grasp of the challenges of sports globalization. For the IOC, Asia certainly represented new potential for development and sporting hegemony. For table tennis, the attitude to the Olympics also shifted, moving beyond the issue of amateurism (which was officially abandoned in the early 1990s) to a strategy of developing the sport at a global level.

Last but not least, it should be noted that the history documented here does not exclude the possibility of more scattered influences in the process of Olympic recognition of table tennis, such as those of specialized journalists or the players themselves. One such example is the late creation of an IOC Athletes' Commission in 1982. Such influences on the Olympic movement seem to have fluctuated until the twilight of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁹ For this reason, although the players' stance on Olympic recognition did not appear explicitly in ITTF records, this question offers interesting research perspectives on the role of stakeholders who are not in a leadership position.

Notes

¹ Paul Dietschy, *Histoire du football* (Paris: Perrin, 2014), 130; Florence Carpentier, 'Aux origines de l'exclusion du tennis des Jeux olympiques. Un conflit institutionnel multiforme dans les années 1920', *Le Mouvement Social*, 215 (2006): 51–66; Matthew P. Llewellyn and Robert J. Lake, "'The old days of amateurism are over": the Samaranch revolution and the return of Olympic tennis', *Sport in History* 37, no. 4 (2017): 423–447.

² Jaime Schultz, 'Going the Distance: The Road to the 1984 Olympic Women's Marathon', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 1 (2015): 72–88; Callie Batts Maddox, "'Under One Banner": The World Baseball Softball Confederation and the Gendered Politics of Olympic Participation', *Sport History Review* 51, no. 1 (2020): 125–144.

³ Mayumi Itoh, *The origin of ping-pong diplomacy. The forgotten architect of Sino-U.S. Rapprochement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Nicholas Griffin, *Ping-Pong Diplomacy: The Secret History behind the Game that Changed the World* (New York: Scribner, 2014); Given its development in the contemporary era, the

diplomatic theme is frequently associated with the Olympic movement. See: Aaron Beacom, *International Diplomacy and the Olympic Movement: The New Mediators* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012)

⁴ Chuck Hoey (unsigned), *A History of Table Tennis in the Olympic Games*, document transmitted by email directly by the author. (website: <https://www.ittf.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/History-of-Table-Tennis-in-the-Olympic-Games.pdf>).

⁵ ITTF Minutes digitized and transmitted by Chuck Hoey, Honorary Curator of the ITTF Museum in Shanghai; also editor of *The Table Tennis Collector* magazine. We warmly thank him for sharing these documents and the digitized archives made available by the IOC Museum in Lausanne.

⁶ Toby Miller, Geoffrey Lawrence and Jim McKay, *Globalization and Sport* (London: Sage Publications 2001); Gerald R. Gems and Gertrud Pfister, 'Sport and globalization: power games and a New World order', *Movement & Sport Sciences* 86, no. 4 (2014): 51–60.

⁷ Frédéric Savre, Thierry Terret, and Jean Saint-Martin, 'An Odyssey Fulfilled: The Entry of Mountain Biking into the Olympic Games', *Olympica, The International Journal of Olympics Studies* 18 (2009): 121-136.

⁸ Allen Guttmann, and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 178.

⁹ Jacques Defrance, 'La politique de l'apolitisme. Sur l'autonomisation du champ sportif', *Politix* 50, no. 13 (2000): 13–27; Matthew P Llewellyn and John Gleaves, *The Rise and Fall of Olympic Amateurism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

¹⁰ In 1981, the 11th Olympic Congress in Baden-Baden marked the end of the principle of pure amateurism in Olympic competitions.

¹¹ Sandra Collins, 'East Asian Olympic desires: identity on the global stage in the 1964 Tokyo, 1988 Seoul and 2008 Beijing games', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 16 (2011): 2240–2260; Paul Droubie, 'Phoenix arisen: Japan as peaceful internationalist at the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 16 (2011): 2309–2322; Jessamyn R. Abel, 'Japan's Sporting Diplomacy: The 1964 Tokyo Olympiad', *The International History Review* 34, no. 2 (2012): 214–16;

¹² Kilian Mousset, Jean-Nicolas Renaud and Christian Vivier, 'La mode du ping-pong en France en 1902 : une autre façon de questionner les classiques transferts culturels dans le domaine du sport', *Modern & Contemporary France* 26, no. 4 (2018): 413–42; Minutes of the ITTF foundation meeting, Holborn, 7 December 1926.

¹³ Robert Crego, *Sports and Games of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 112.

¹⁴ Kilian Mousset and Aurélie Épron, 'La difficile naissance d'un spectacle sportif : l'exemple de la médiatisation des championnats du monde de ping-pong à Paris en 1933', in *Histoires(s) de balles et de plumes*, ed. Thomas Bauer and Doriane Gomet (Limoges: Presses universitaires de Limoges, 2020), 155–67; Paragraph 11(b), Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the International Table Tennis Federation (hereafter, AGM ITTF), Budapest, 15 February 1931.

¹⁵ Paragraph 8, AGM ITTF, Prague, 29–30 January 1932, 4; AGM ITTF, Baden, 5 February 1937, 9; No correspondence was found in the IOC archives on this subject; Sandra Collins, *The 1940 Tokyo Games: The Missing Olympics. Japan, the Asian Olympics and the Olympic Movement* (London: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁶ Florence Carpentier, 'Le conflit entre le CIO et la FIFA dans l'Entre-deux-guerres. Les Jeux olympiques contre la Coupe du monde de football', *Staps* 68, no. 2 (2005): 25-39.

¹⁷ Martin Polley, 'Olympic diplomacy: the British government and the projected 1940 Olympic games', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 9, no. 2 (1992): 169–87; Florence Carpentier, *Le Comité international olympique en crises. La présidence de Henri de Baillet-Latour, 1925–1940* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).

¹⁸ Jim Riordan, 'The Hon. Ivor Montagu (1904–1984): Founding Father of Table Tennis', *Sport in History* 28, no. 3 (2008): 518; For Ben Macintyre, Ivor Montagu was spying for the Soviet Union. However, there was nothing strange about his interest in ping-pong. He simply loved the sport (Ben Macintyre, *Opération Mincemeat: L'histoire d'espionnage qui changea le cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Bruxelles: Ixelles Publishing SA, 2011). Conversely, Nicholas Griffin defended the hypothesis that Ivor Montagu played a role in ping-pong diplomacy, particularly after the Second World War. (Nicholas Griffin, *Ping-Pong Diplomacy*.; Hiroaki Sakakibara, 'Ping-Pong Diplomacy: The Secret History behind the Game that Changed the World', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 2 (2015): 405-407). No empirical evidence allowed us to discuss these assertions in relation to the Olympic movement.

¹⁹ Jim Riordan, 'The Hon. Ivor Montagu (1904–1984)', 522.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 528.

²¹ James Riordan, 'Amateurism, Sport and the Left: Amateurism for All Versus Amateur Elitism', *Sport in History* 26, no. 3 (2006): 471.

²² Jim Riordan, 'The Hon. Ivor Montagu', 524; Kilian Mousset, Jean-Nicolas Renaud and Christian Vivier, 'Interwar Crazes and Sport Diffusion: The Case of French Ping-Pong, 1932-1939', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 11 (2020): 973-991.

²³ Paragraph 10, AGM ITTF, London, 16 February 1935, 4.

²⁴ Other arguments were evoked by Ivor Montagu himself in 1948 during a conference in London, as revealed in minutes found by the Honorary Curator of the ITTF Museum, Chuck Hoey in Chuck Hoey (unsigned), *A History of Table Tennis in the Olympic Games*.

²⁵ Paragraph 10, AGM ITTF, London, 16 February 1935, 4.

²⁶ Kilian Mousset and Jean-Nicolas Renaud, 'Divertissement de salon ou sport moderne ? Représentations du tennis de table dans L'Auto-Vélo et L'Auto (1900–1939)', *Réseaux* 5 (2016): 208.

²⁷ Jean Devys, 'Ivor Montagu: président fondateur de la Fédération internationale de tennis de table', in *Jeu et enjeu culturels du sport*, ed. Françoise Bosman, Pierre Lambin and Arnaud Waquet (Biarritz: Atlantica, 2011), 184.

²⁸ Chuck Hoey (unsigned), *A History of Table Tennis in the Olympic Games*.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ AGM ITTF, Baden, 5 February 1937, 9; AGM ITTF, Stockholm, 11 and 14 March 1957, 2; Report of the Biannual General Meeting of ITTF (hereafter cited as BGM ITTF), Prague, 9 and 14 April 1963, 23; BGM ITTF, Ljubljana, 19 and 25 April 1965, 20.

³¹ AGM ITTF, Bombay, First session, 6 February 1952, 6.

³² The ITTF Secretary refers to a communication from the Swiss Federation in AGM ITTF, London, First session, 8 April 1954, 2.

³³ AGM ITTF, Bombay, First session, 6 February 1952, 6; AGM ITTF, London, First session, 8 April 1954, 2.

³⁴ International Olympic Committee, 40th Annual Session, Lausanne, 3–6 September 1946, 14, Olympic Studies Centre, Lausanne, Switzerland (hereafter cited as IOCA).

³⁵ Ibid., 19; Adolfo Castro to IOC Secretary, 9 February 1960, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

³⁶ IOC, 53rd Annual Session, Sofia, 25 September 1957, 13, IOC Archives; Adolfo Castro to IOC Secretary, 9 February 1960, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

³⁷ IOC Secretary L. Zanchi to Adolfo Castro, 19 February 1960, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

³⁸ J. Rufford Harrison to IOC Secretary, 16 March 1960, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Adolfo Castro to IOC Secretary, 9 February 1960, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁴¹ BGM ITTF, First session, Stockholm, 13 April 1967.

⁴² BGM ITTF, Second session, Stockholm, 20 April 1967.

⁴³ Zdenko Uzorinac, *ITTF. 1926-2001. Table tennis legends* (Zagreb: Skaner Studio/ITTF), 2001.

⁴⁴ Hugo Urchetti to J. Westerhoff, 17 November 1967, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁴⁵ BGM ITTF, Second session, Stockholm, 20 April 1967.

⁴⁶ *ITTF, Handbook*, Revised edition adopted at the BGM ITTF, 1967, 4, D-RM02-TENTA/001, IOC Archives. And not 105 affiliated federations, which are mentioned by Hugo Urchetti. Hugo Urchetti to J. Westerhoff, 17 November 1967, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ A. K. Vint, 13 February 1968, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁴⁹ J. Westerhoff to A. K. Vint, 26 April 1968, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁵⁰ A. K. Vint to J. Westerhoff, 19 March 1970, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁵¹ J. Westerhoff to A. K. Vint, 30 July 1968, D-RM02-TENTA/002, 1, IOCA.

⁵² A. K. Vint to J. Westerhoff, 19 March 1970, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA; BGM ITTF, Second session, Nagoya, 5 April 1971.

⁵³ Kilian Mousset, 'La mode du ping-pong de 1901 à 1939: d'un jeu de salon mondain à un sport moderne' (PhD thesis, University of Rennes 2, 2017), 187.

⁵⁴ Matthew P Llewellyn and John Gleaves. *The Rise and Fall of Olympic Amateurism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

⁵⁵ Matthew P. Llewellyn and Robert J. Lake, "'The old days of amateurism are over'", 427.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ H. Roy Evans to H.-R. Banks, 7 September 1974, D-RM02-TENTA/002, 3, IOCA; A. K. Vint to H.-R. Banks, 20 May 1974, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA; H. Roy Evans to H.-R. Banks, 7 September 1974, D-RM02-TENTA/002, 1, IOCA; Hugo Urchetti to H.-R. Banks, 25 June 1974, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁵⁸ H. Roy Evans to H.-R. Banks, 7 September 1974, D-RM02-TENTA/002, 3, IOCA.

⁵⁹ H. Roy Evans to H.-R. Banks, 7 September 1974, D-RM02-TENTA/002, 3, IOCA.

⁶⁰ Copy of questionnaire of July 1975, A. K. Vint to H.-R. Banks, 3 July 1975, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁶¹ Reply to questionnaire from ITTF concerning the recognition of a sport by the IOC, 15 November 1976, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁶² H. Roy Evans to H.-R. Banks, 7 September 1974, D-RM02-TENTA/002, 2, IOCA.

⁶³ Copy of questionnaire of July 1975, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁶⁴ The president referred to eight years of negotiations. The first exchanges took place as early as 1967. BGM ITTF, first session, Birmingham University, 28 March 1977; Annex 2, Minutes of the meeting of the inner

commission of the Olympic Programme Commission, Lausanne, 23–24 February 1977, 10, IOCA; Note on H. Roy Evans' telephone call to IOC, 8 March 1977, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA; H. Roy Evans to H.-R. Banks, 3 March 1977, D-RM02-TENTA/002, 2, IOCA.

⁶⁵ H. Roy Evans to H.-R. Banks, 3 March 1977, D-RM02-TENTA/002, 1, IOCA.

⁶⁶ BGM ITTF, first session, Birmingham University, 28 March 1977.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ H. Roy Evans to Tony Brooks, 14 April 1977, B-ID04-PROOL/006, IOCA; The archives are concise and do not specify the countries concerned.

⁷¹ IOC, 79th Annual Session, Prague, 15–18 June 1977, 44, IOCA; H.-R. Banks to H. Roy Evans, 1 July 1977, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁷² H. Roy Evans to H.-R. Banks, 30 June 1977, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁷³ IOC, meeting of the executive committee, Lausanne, 19–20 October 1977, 65, IOCA.

⁷⁴ H.-R. Banks to H. Roy Evans, 15 November 1977, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁷⁵ BGM ITTF, first session, Pyongyang, 28 April 28 1979.

⁷⁶ Annex 2, Minutes of the meeting of the inner commission of the Olympic Programme Commission, Lausanne, 23–24 February 1977, 10, IOCA.

⁷⁷ Monique Berlioux to Tony Brooks, 17 July 1978, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁷⁸ John R. Short, 'Globalization, cities and the Summer Olympics', *City* 12, no. 3 (2008): 321–40.

⁷⁹ Monique Berlioux to Tony Brooks, 7 June 1978, B-ID04-PROOL/009, IOCA.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Annex B, report presented to the IOC Plenary Commission for the programme, Lausanne, 7 March, in the meeting of the executive committee, Lausanne, 19–20 October 1977, 74–75, IOCA.

⁸² Tony Brooks to Monique Berlioux, 11 September 1978, B-ID04-PROOL/009, IOCA; Meeting of the executive committee, Lausanne, 19–20 October 1977, 35, IOCA.

⁸³ Tony Brooks to Monique Berlioux, 11 September 1978, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA; Monique Berlioux to Tony Brooks, 20 September 1978, B-ID04-PROOL/009, IOCA; Minutes of the meeting of the IOC inner commission for the Olympic programme, Lausanne, 26–27 September 1978, 2–3.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Arpad Csanadi to Tony Brooks, 26 September 1978, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁸⁷ Arpad Csanadi to Nadia Lekarska, 10 July 1979, and ITTF reply to questionnaire for review to be carried out by the Olympic Programme Commission, June 1979, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

⁸⁸ Arpad Csanadi to H. Roy Evans, 11 January 1980, B-ID04-PROOL/012, IOCA.

⁸⁹ Arpad Csanadi to H. Roy Evans, 20 June 1980, B-ID04-PROOL/012, IOCA; H. Roy Evans to Arpad Csanadi, 28 June 1980, B-ID04-PROOL/012, IOCA; Arpad Csanadi to H. Roy Evans, 18 August 1980, B-ID04-PROOL/013, IOCA.

⁹⁰ The ITTF reply to questionnaire for review to be carried out by the Olympic Programme Commission, June 1979, B-ID04-PROOL/035, IOCA; IOC 83rd Annual Session, Moscow, 15 July to 3 August 1980, 31, IOCA.

⁹¹ Ibid., 30.

⁹² Joseph Maguire, *Global sport: Identities, societies, civilizations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Sandra Collins, "'Samurai' Politics: Japanese Cultural Identity in Global Sport – The Olympic Games as a Representational Strategy', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24, no. 3 (2007): 357–74.

⁹³ The ITTF reply to questionnaire for review to be carried out by the Olympic Programme Commission, June 1979, B-ID04-PROOL/035, IOCA.

⁹⁴ H. Roy Evans to Arpad Csanadi, 17 September 1980, B-ID04-PROOL/013, IOCA.

⁹⁵ Copy to letter from Arpad Csanadi to H. Roy Evans, 21 July 1980, B-ID04-PROOL/013, IOCA.

⁹⁶ IOC, 83rd Annual Session, Moscow, 15 July to 3 August 1980, 31, IOCA.

⁹⁷ Ibid.; Matthew P. Llewellyn and Robert J. Lake, 'The old days of amateurism are over', 435.

⁹⁸ Éric Monnin and Christophe Maillard, 'Pour une typologie du boycottage aux Jeux olympiques', *Relations internationales* 162, no. 2 (2015); Philippe Vonnard and Grégory Quin, 'Studying international sports organisations during the Cold War', *Sport in History* 37, no. 3, (2017): 265–272.

⁹⁹ Matthew P. Llewellyn and Robert J. Lake, 'The old days of amateurism are over', 435.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of the meeting of the IOC Commission for the Olympic programme, Lausanne, 18–19 December 1980, 15, IOCA; IOC, 83rd Annual Session, Moscow, 15 July to 3 August 1980, 31, IOCA.

¹⁰¹ H. Roy Evans to Juan Antonio Samaranch, 23 October 1981, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

¹⁰² Minutes of the meeting of the IOC Commission for the Olympic programme, Lausanne, 18 and 19 December 1980, 15, IOCA.

¹⁰³ Annex 4, Report of the Programme Committee presented by Arpad Csanadi, President, Minutes of the meeting of the IOC Executive Commission, Los Angeles, 23–24 February 1981, 10, IOCA.

¹⁰⁴ Garry Whannel, *Fields in vision television sport and cultural transformation* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Matthew P. Llewellyn and Robert J. Lake, 'The old days of amateurism are over', 436.

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of the meeting of the IOC Session, Baden-Baden, 29 September to 2 October 1981, 34, IOC Archives; Juan Antonio Samaranch to H. Roy Evans, 19 October 1981, D-RM02-TENTA/002, IOCA.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Taylor, 'Work and Play: The Professional Footballer in England c.1900 - c.1950', *Sports Historian* 22, no. 1 (2002): 16–43; *International table tennis, the first fifty years (1926–1976)*, (St-Leonards-on-Sea: ITTF), 55, D-RM02-TENTA/005, IOCA.

¹⁰⁷ Official Report of the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympic Games, Vol. 1, available at <https://library.olympic.org/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/56641/official-report-games-of-the-xxivth-olympiad-seoul-1988-pub-by-the-seoul-olympic-organizing-committee?lg=en-GB>, 345.

¹⁰⁸ George H. Sage, *Globalizing Sport: How Organizations, Corporations, Media and Politics Are Changing Sports* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2010).

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of the meeting of the Athletes commission, Rome, 24 May 1982, IOC Archives