

Alberto Santos-Dumont, Sport Aviator and Olympic Hero*

By Lamartine DaCosta and Ana Miragaya

Brazilian Alberto Santos-Dumont (1873-1932) is regarded as one of the pioneers of motorised flight. In 1906 the Brazilian succeeded in making the first public flight in the world. The airport in Rio was named in his honour.

Below: postcard with a caricature of Santos-Dumont. The text on the card reads: "My homeland is the air ... on the ground I am in exile!"

Photos: Marcia Neto-Wacker/
Christian Wacker, O BRASIL
TORNA-SE OLÍMPICO



In 1905, the first ceremony to award Olympic Diplomas to relevant personalities linked to sports at the time took place at the Olympic Congress in Brussels. Theodore Roosevelt, later President of the United States; Alberto Santos-Dumont, Brazilian joint inventor of the airplane and sporting aviator; Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian explorer of the North Pole; and William H. Grenfell, well-known educator in the United Kingdom and later Lord Desborough would receive the very first awards.

At that time, Pierre de Coubertin, President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) founded in 1894, described the purpose of Olympic Diploma thus:

*dont la rareté dit le prix et qui, ne visant point récompenser telle victoire sportive, tel record battu, telle performance accomplie pût être attribué à un homme pour l'ensemble de qualités athlétiques et surtout pour l'emploi qu'il en aurait pu faire*¹.

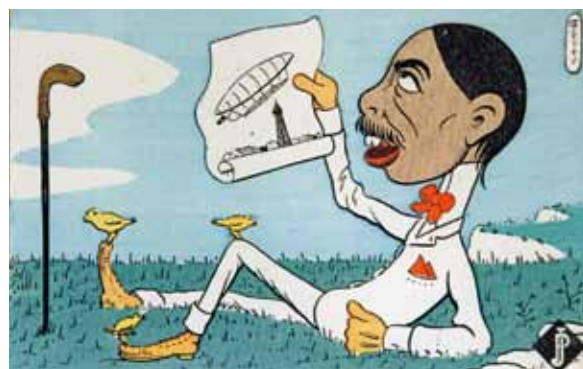
[a rare prize, given to reward not this sporting victory or that record broken, but in recognition of a man who, above all, has used all his athletic talents to the utmost of his ability.]

By 1909, Olympic Diplomas had already been awarded to ten international recipients, all of whom were

respected personalities in their own societies and renowned sportsmen internationally². In the case of Santos-Dumont, the honour seemed relevant because he was famous not only in France but also all over Europe as a sportsman, and typical of the pioneer aviators of the *Belle Époque*³. As one of the inventors of the airplane, this Brazilian sportsman was a hero in his own country during the period he was most active with his inventions (1890-1910), which coincided with Coubertin's creation of the Olympic Diploma (1901) and the first nominees in 1905⁴.

Santos-Dumont and Coubertin were contemporaries, the Brazilian, born in 1873, being ten years younger than Coubertin. His family had French and Portuguese ancestry. As a child, Santos-Dumont was influenced by his father, an engineer of French descent, and fascinated by machinery. While still a young child, he learned to drive the steam tractors and the locomotive used on his family's farm. He also participated in excursions by bicycle and, later on, in automobiles and hot air balloons, the latter two constructed by Santos-Dumont himself. His favourite sport was tennis, which he played right up until his death in 1932. He also played golf and skied when he lived in Europe⁵.

With such devotion to sport, it was not surprising that the World Air Sports Federation (Fédération Aéronautique Internationale – FAI), founded in 1905, had Santos-Dumont as one of its inspirational symbols⁶, and their records provide a source of reference for his life. The purpose of this research was to set out a historiography beginning at the end of the 19th century, period which coincides with the reinvention of the Olympic Games, and reached its climax during the first decade of the 20th



century, and finally extended until the 1930s, following the expansion of sports worldwide.

Again, it is relevant that the origins of aviation as a sport had several pioneers, including the American brothers Orville and Wilbur Wright, whose motivation was more commercial and pragmatic than that of Santos-Dumont. In fact Santos-Dumont, who came from a wealthy family, did not want to register any patent for his inventions. Furthermore, during his adult life he showed himself to be the epitome of a sportsman – daring and romantic, becoming great personality in Paris – which had become the world's center for the arts, creation of fashion and flamboyant lifestyle during the *Belle Époque*⁷ – thus confirming Coubertin's decision that he should be awarded the Olympic Diploma.

While the Wright brothers constructed their machines in secret, Santos-Dumont saw aviation as an amateur sport, always searching for and counting on public audiences and striving for measurable results to verify and legitimize the records of his performances (DaCosta, 1996; Hoffman, 2003)⁸. Moreover, he instigated fashion for clothes, hats and accessories for aviation as a sport. These included the wristwatch, originally commissioned by him from Maison Cartier de Paris, whose design "Santos Dumont" as a brand name became a commercial success that has survived for more than a century (Lins de Barros, 2006)⁹.

Although Santos-Dumont enjoyed enormous popularity in a dynamic and sportive Paris, so open to the modern world he consciously wanted to represent, he preferred to send a representative to the award ceremony of the first Olympic Diplomas in Brussels in 1905, a procedure also preferred by Roosevelt, Nansen and Grenfell. It may well be that the reason for this decision by the four celebrities was that they had a higher public profile than the IOC itself at the time. However, when historians Neto-Wacker and Wacker (2010)¹⁰ reported the ceremony and the absence of the nominees, they also highlighted that Santos-Dumont had become "a reluctant Olympic hero who, together with important personalities of the day, was awarded the first Olympic Diploma, in which, however, he showed little personal interest".

This interpretation is confirmed by other sources that reveal him to have been a personality who ignored homage and tribute according to his mood or his health. A similar thing happened when Santos-Dumont declined to answer Charles Lindbergh's invitation for dinner in 1929 to celebrate the first transatlantic flight. Santos-Dumont also refused to receive the Brazilian President in his home in 1930, according to his American biographer, Paul Hoffman¹¹.

As a result of the distance Santos-Dumont took from the IOC tribute, his Olympic identity was not cemented



either in his home country or abroad, in spite of the fact that he declared his identification with sports in general and with sport aviation in particular in his memoirs. For example, the "father of flight" wrote in his 1918 autobiography (...):

Eu, para quem já passou o tempo de voar, quisera, entretanto, que a aviação fosse para os meus jovens patrícios um verdadeiro esporte ["I, for whom the time to fly has passed, wanted, however, aviation to be a true sport for my young countrymen"]¹².

Santos-Dumont may have been to some extent forgotten, which undermines the narration of his accomplishments as a sport aviator pioneer, besides his negligence in relation to the Olympic ceremony to award Olympic Diplomas, finally reducing the meaning of aviation itself as a sport. Within this context, Santos-Dumont can be understood as a case of sportsman-symbol whose influence became merely potential, once his legacy was mostly fixed on the images of an inventor, an enthusiast of technology and of adventurous life molded by his Parisian public.

Recognition Santos-Dumont's aeronautical feats in Brazil only happened in the 1940s, almost a decade after his death, according to Lins de Barros (2003), the aviator's

The Olympic Diploma presented to Alberto Santos-Dumont. He was one of the first recipients of this award. It was designed by André Slom (1844-1909), known in Polish as Slomszyski. From 1871 he divided his time between Switzerland and Paris. The Diploma was endowed by the Greek Mercati Committee. Pierre de Coubertin proposed its introduction, a decision approved at IOC Session in 1901. The Diploma for Santos-Dumont unfortunately is lost!

Photo: Olympic Museum, Lausanne



Lamartine DaCosta | *1935, holds a Ph.D in Philosophy (1988) and Sport Management (1989). He started his research in Olympic Studies focusing on the 1968 Olympics and has prominent academic production in sport history devoted today to research of Olympic values. As a sports volunteer, he is currently curator of Maria Lenk's memory, Brazil's first Olympic heroine.



An Aeronautic event in Paris organised by the Brazilian aviator Santos-Dumont in 1900. He had a similar philosophy to Coubertin, although they were not personally related. Both frequently referred to the idea of Utopia. For Santos-Dumont it was the world of Jules Verne. Coubertin's was that created by Thomas Hughes (*Tom Brown's School Days*).

Photo: CEME, São Paulo

most famous biographer. Nevertheless, the rescue of Santos-Dumont as an Olympic hero only started 46 years later with Lamartine DaCosta's research (1996), published only in Portuguese. The research was subsequently reinterpreted by the same author in the book *Atlas of Sports in Brazil* (2005) and also by Marcia Neto-Wacker and Christian Wacker (2010).¹³

This present reconstruction of Santos-Dumont's historiography as a sportsman draws on original sources – in Portuguese, French and English – and follows research by the authors of this essay in recent years and focuses on an Olympic Santos-Dumont, taking the sporting environment as the basis for his inventions in the field of modern aeronautics.

The vision of Santos-Dumont as a sportsman was first revived through research done at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland, by Ana Miragaya, co-author of this study. She located two illustrated magazines with sporting themes published in Paris in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: *La Vie au Grand Air* and *Le Sport Universel Illustré*. These publications detailed the conquests of Santos-Dumont, always in the context of the sporting world in Paris and throughout France. His triumphs and disasters are put into context by information, also related to sport, found in contemporary literature about the heroic aviation pioneer.

Both *La Vie au Grand Air* and *Le Sport Universel Illustré* focused on competition events, descriptions of airships, performances, competition sequencing and the public's reaction. It was a different way of reporting, untypical of the newspapers of that time, which were more oriented not only to the daily life of France but also to the novelties represented by the aeronautic experiments conducted by the flamboyant personality of Santos-

Dumont. The newspapers focused on sensationalism, fads and gossip, as can be seen from the analyses of Paris press by Paul Hoffman a century later¹⁴. Another characteristic of the two magazines is that the articles were written by specialist commentators, providing technical observations, which made them different from the reports of the daily newspapers habitually written without attribution and usually subject to editorial influence.

Sport-aviation role model

A first indication of the distance between Brazilian and international historians on the subject of Santos-Dumont as a sportsman is found in the collection of documents about the pioneer aviator's life, published in 1940 by Godin da Fonseca¹⁵. In this publication is an 18-page list of people of different nationalities who were connected to the feats of the first 'aeronaut'. This list did not include Pierre de Coubertin nor any others of the small group that made up the IOC at the dawn of the 20th century.

However, the texts recovered by Norbert Müller and Otto Schantz, historians of IOC President Pierre de Coubertin, describe the Olympic Diploma¹⁶. These records show evidence of the reasons Santos-Dumont was chosen by Pierre de Coubertin as a model of Olympic values. Coubertin considered aviation to be a sport at that time. Indeed, Müller & Schantz highlighted the *Revue Olympique* (IOC's official magazine), July 1907 edition, in which Coubertin penned an article with the title "Les Frontières Sportives de l'Aviation" (The Sporting Borders of Aviation)¹⁷. But even before that publication, Coubertin had already written a note emphasising balloon racing as a sport¹⁸.

Away from Coubertin's influence, based on documents in collected writings celebrating Santos-Dumont's accomplishments, it is possible to confirm that sport aviation had reached its climax at the beginning of the 20th century. The first FAI *Bulletins* – especially the 12th November 1906 edition – features Santos-Dumont as a "sportsman"¹⁹ and related to the word "record" and to other sports rituals, such as referees, stopwatches, programmed competitions, etc.²⁰ According to Cabrero dos Reis (1974), Santos-Dumont established the first certified records of aviation in the world, controlling time and distances²¹. Also, he was the very first man to be called "aeronaut"²².

Lavener Wanderley (1974), who collected news about Santos-Dumont's performances in the international press of that time, transcribes a note that appeared in the newspaper *Paris Sport* on 15th July 1901, which defines the pioneer of the "heavier-than-air flight" as "a true sportsman, in every sense of the word"²³. This very source also registers Santos-Dumont's visit to the

United States in 1902 to participate in a balloon race at the Saint Louis Exposition, the venue for the third edition of the Olympic Games in 1904.

At that time, President Theodore Roosevelt invited Santos-Dumont for dinner in Washington, which reveals the guest's relevance²⁴. This fact was also confirmed by Paul Hoffman²⁵. Hoffman reports Santos-Dumont's visit to the United States as traumatic after his balloon was found irreparably and deliberately damaged by the New York customs. As a result, Santos-Dumont was unable to compete in Saint Louis. To this biographer, this malicious action reveals the aggressiveness of the so-called "patent war" between the first airship manufacturers in North America²⁶.

In the USA, Santos-Dumont also met Thomas Edison, at the time a renowned inventor of international standing. Edison, on that occasion, declared to the press his admiration and respect for Santos-Dumont's technological solutions as well as for his ethical stance in public, highlighting Santos-Dumont's gentlemanly attributes²⁷. A view endorsed three years later with Coubertin's nomination of Santos-Dumont for the Olympic Diploma.

The leading promoter of sport aviation

Santos-Dumont's attitudes towards sport from a historical perspective can be better understood when looking at aviation as a sport, before airships became means of transportation and tools of war. Considering only Paris and France – world centers of aeronautical innovation during Coubertin's and Santos-Dumont's lifetime – the environment conducive to sporting contest was linked not only to a privileged lifestyle in the great outdoors but also to people's mobility – something always associated with freedom of choice. As a corollary, it is possible to see that such options stimulated the use of bicycles, automobiles, balloons and airships in a sporting context, as Santos-Dumont himself experimented and, very likely, influenced Pierre de Coubertin in his writings about ballooning and aviation.

These new social practices supported by technology were the subject of individual articles in the French publications mentioned above: *La Vie au Grand Air* and *Le Sport Universel Illustré*. A typical writer was *La Vie au Grand Air's* columnist Emmanuel Aimè, who frequently wrote about sport aviation and about Santos-Dumont.²⁸

Aimè discourses on a demonstration of ballooning promoted by the Aéro-Club de France, which took place in the streets and central parks of Paris – Bois de Boulogne, in particular – under the leadership of Santos-Dumont. The text examines discussions of possible balloon competitions to be held in the city with a high circulation of people and vehicles,

discussing the possibilities of creating a more efficient and manoeuvrable balloons. To the journalist, Santos-Dumont's solutions for the dirigibility of airships (wires and petrol engines) demonstrated increasing progress. In addition, Aimè included personalities of great social and political representation in Paris, who would guarantee the continuity of the Aéro-Club de France's project.

This text marked the start of the exposure of Santos-Dumont's successful flights in the French press, especially with its provocative title: "Le Pari de M. Santos Dumont" ("Santos-Dumont's Bet"). Likewise, in the edition of December of 1899 (pp. 178–180), Emmanuel Aimè discourses about the theme "L'Aeroestation" ("The Aeroestation") as a new sporting discipline, basically focusing on the role played by aero clubs in the organisation and rules of competitions between airships. He mentions various examples of French balloonists who classify the "dirigeables" by type of equipment, location of practice and chances in forthcoming competitions with money prizes. At the end of the article, Aimè goes back to Santos-Dumont, describing him as the greatest promise for the development of "Aeroestation" as an emerging sport, as Santos-Dumont had until then experimented two types of dirigibles and put into practice his balloon No. 3, with 500 cubic metres (20 metres in length and 7.5 metres in diameter). To sum up, both 1899 selected texts allow us to understand the initial inventions of Santos-Dumont in the sports world as well as his own means to support his next undertakings in airships, going from "lighter-than-air" to "heavier-than-air" with diversified repercussions not only in France, but also in other European countries, the United States and Brazil.

Next, Santos-Dumont's photograph appeared on the cover of *La Vie au Grand Air* of 30th September 1900. The magazine broke the news of dirigible No. 3's good performance, emphasising its manageability and engine. The headline names the Brazilian inventor "gentleman-aeronautique" praising once more his ingenuity and tenacity, welcoming the arrival of a phase of progress for the foundation of "Aeroestation" as a sport.²⁹

Another relevant event is shown in the edition of 26th October 1901, in which Frantz Reichel announces, with several photographs, the conquest of the Deutsch de la Meurthe prize of 100 thousand francs by Santos-Dumont, when he rounded the Eiffel Tower in his dirigible No. 5 on a marked trajectory and taking the maximum time of 30 minutes (pp. 692–694). In this edition, the title "Aerostation" is used, with the noteworthy subtitle: "Santos Dumont Triomphe" ("Santos-Dumont Succeeds"). This article also shares the information that the victor would share part of the prize with the poor of Paris.

Santos-Dumont became a popular figure in Paris because of his efforts to promote aviation as a sport. The cartoon above was drawn by the famous artist Georges Goursat, called SEM, who captured the important personalities of the Parisian Belle Époque of the 1900s.

Photo: CEME, São Paulo

Returning to *Le Sport Universel Illustré*, it is important to point out that the 17th July 1906 edition announced the "Grand Prix Aéro-Club de France", featuring more than a dozen dirigibles, including Santos-Dumont's. However, the most relevant news of the year was found in the 17th November edition, when with great prominence and illustrated by photographs, the magazine proclaimed the historic flight of the aircraft 14 Bis, created and piloted by Santos-Dumont. According to *Le Sport Universel Illustré*, it was the first public and successful exhibition of a heavier-than-air aircraft. Before the edition of 23rd September of the same year, the airship 14 Bis had been introduced with all its technical details (pp. 560-561). This fact suggests that Santos-Dumont had chosen this magazine as the instrument to create a public forum to gain support for his greatest invention.

This thesis becomes more sound with the examination of four editions of *Le Sport Universel Illustré*, which analysed the state of the art of the "Sport Aéronautique", published during the second half of 1906. In the very first edition, on 3rd October 1906, G. Lemeunier comments in his article on the recent developments of the "Aerostation" from the Great Prize of the Aéro-Club de France, with its first dirigibles contest in 1903, by its fourth edition in 1906, seven countries had participated. To Lemeunier,

il semble qu'une heureuse rivalité se soit élevée entre les nations pour la conquête de l'air. L'Allemagne, l'Espagne, l'Angleterre, l'Amerique se préoccupent fiévreusement de la question. Toutes ces nations ont leurs aéronautes et leurs aérostats, toutes également ont étudié différents modèles de dirigeables.

[It appears that a happy rivalry has arisen between nations for the conquest of the air. Germany, Spain, England, the United States are feverishly worried about the question. All these nations have their aeronauts and their aerostats, all have equally studied different models of dirigibles".] (p. 638)

In the same sequence, the 11st November 1906 edition of *Le Sport Universel Illustré*, also under G. Lemeunier's name, there is an analysis of the arrival of relevant institutional and financial support to aviation as a sport.

The third article, which appears in the 23rd November 1906 edition, follows in theme and title the new development of aviation as a sport after the impact caused by 14 Bis and by Santos-Dumont's declarations regarding replacing dirigibles with airplanes (p. 702). Lemeunier, in this case, writes about his interviews with various French sport aviators, concluding that the general atmosphere was one of creativity and adherence to innovations (p. 703). This optimism explains the continuation of the theme, which



concludes with an article by Lemeunier entitled "Dirigibles and Airplanes", published on 30th December 1906 in *Le Sport Universel Illustré*. Several experiments with aeroplanes in various locations around France are introduced, anticipating a greater contest in technology, suggesting that the field of Bagatelle in Paris, occupied first by Santos-Dumont's dirigibles, would become an aerodrome. Lemeunier declares:

Si l'aerostation ne chôme pas, l'aviation est loin d'être inactive.

[If the aerostation is not active, aviation is far from being inactive.] (p. 799)

Santos-Dumont, in this context, stayed faithful to his principles, gradually abandoning the industrial competition, but concentrating on the concept of an airplane model for sport competitions.

In brief, from what has been reviewed here, the specialist magazines writing about the role played by Santos-Dumont in terms of aviation as a sport, can finally be encapsulated by citing another French publication, the newspaper *Le Miroir des Sports*, founded in 1920. This newspaper led the sports press in France until 1944, following standards of journalism closer to reality and the present time. The chosen excerpt is a reproduction of the edition of 19th November, 1924 (p. 370), which featured the article "Il y a Dix-huit Ans l'Audacieux Aviateur Santos-Dumont, à Bagatelle, Volait sur une Distance de 220 Mètres et Tenait l'Air 21 Seconds" ("Eighteen years ago, at Bagatelle, the daring

aviator Santos–Dumont flew a distance of 220 metres in the air for 21 seconds”).

It thus sums up career of the Brazilian aeronaut and inventor in France, two decades apart from his most relevant achievement:

Santos–Dumont, qui est un précurseur et qui doit aux romans de Jules Verne sa carrière de conquérant de l'air, n'est pas, on le voit, un visionnaire indifférent aux jeux athlétiques de notre époque. Il vit avec son temps, mais il dédaigne les honneurs et la tribune officielle; il goûte le sport pour le sport.

[Santos–Dumont, who is a pioneer and owes to Jules Verne's novels his career of conquest of the air is not, as we see him, a visionary indifferent to the athletic games of our times. He moves with the times, but he looks down on honours and official recognition; he enjoys the sport for the sport.]

Santos–Dumont: the Olympic hero of sport aviation

Certainly, the “enjoyment of the sport for the sport” today appears to be a synthesis of Santos–Dumont's reconstructed memory. On the other hand, Santos–Dumont himself admitted the influence of Jules Verne in his 1918 autobiography, when he declared that he had read the adventures with flying machines narrated by the famous French writer, whose collection of novels he had already read before he was 10 years old³⁰. Later on, when he was 18, Santos–Dumont, in his first trip to Europe in the 1890s, competed in bicycle, automobile and hot air balloon races, and climbed Mont Blanc. These achievements were forever imprinted in Santos–Dumont's memory (Wykeham, 1962)³¹.

Significantly, during adulthood, Santos–Dumont was recognised more clearly as a sportsman, as can be observed from the documents collected by Aluizio Napoleao in 1988. For example, the 11 November 1901 edition of the *Times* of London, reports a banquet offered by the Aero Club of England in honour of the Brazilian inventor, the practitioner of the “sport of ballooning”³². Years later, in November 1915, the magazine *Flying* (published in the United States) reports the achievements of the pioneer of aviation, introducing him as “Alberto Santos Dumont, the Brazilian Sportsman ... who took up cycling, automobiling and aeronautics when they were in their embryonic state”³³.

In turn, the relationship between cycling, motor racing, and aeronautics in Santos–Dumont's sporting career, was interpreted by Godin da Fonseca. Crossing sources, this author concluded that Santos–Dumont found inspiration for the construction of his first hot air balloon in 1897 while following the Paris–Amsterdam car race on the tricycle he rode in his everyday outings and also on long routes³⁴.

However, Godin explains, “To be a sportsman at that time did not mean to do gymnastics or play this or that sport: it meant to be chic, to be a member of a club ...” (19), and he adds the following, based on interviews of Santos–Dumont to the French press: “He did not consider himself as a technician of aerostation, but as a sportsman of aerostation”³⁵. The expression “sportsman”, taking into consideration the Olympic ideal, was the attitude of fair play in competitions, according to the English tradition that was extended to the European continent. For this reason, Coubertin added to the expression a sense of spirit, of ethics and of example within the Olympic model³⁶. Therefore, the award of the Olympic Diploma to Santos–Dumont by the IOC was more in recognition than reward.

Reinforcing the amateur cult of sports and the spirit of fair play of the Brazilian inventor, we can cite instances of his value–led actions. In this, it is relevant to mention Santos–Dumont's declarations to the press in the United States soon after his meeting with Thomas Edison when they discussed the problem of patents impeding the development of aviation in that country: “I have never tried to patent my airships and I do not intend to do so. I will allot the money I get from the prizes I get to future experiments in aeronautics” (Hoffman, p. 174).

At this historic meeting, Edison asked Santos–Dumont to create the first aeronautics club in the United States. He declared himself in favour of community participation in the way suggested by the Brazilian pioneer in Paris (Hoffman, p. 177). On the same occasion, Santos–Dumont declared, “I am an amateur”, to explain his refusal to give commercial demonstrations at the Saint Louis Exposition, adding that “to do exhibitions according to the proposed conditions would demand professionalism” (Hoffman, p. 178).

This “Olympic” spirit of sportsman Santos–Dumont was meaningfully evidenced when he relinquished the rights of the sports competition aircraft “Demoiselle”,

“Demoiselle” was the name given to the invention by Santos–Dumont which had the greatest impact: the world's first aircraft specialized in aeronautic competitions. The first “Demoiselle” was built in 1909.

Photo: CEME, São Paulo



starting in 1909 as reported earlier in this essay. The international success of this pioneer airplane was due not only to the merits of innovation but also to the delivery of the drawings and rights to pilots and sports clubs at no cost whatsoever and under cooperation. This procedure gave initial support to aviation as a sport, turning “Demoiselle” into a symbol of historical value (Hoffman, p. 249 and p. 314 upon citation from Lins de Barros).

Alberto Santos-Dumont in front of his memorial in Saint Cloud, France. Post-card with a dedication in his own hand from 1922.

Photo: CEME, São Paulo



In short, the “Olympic” Santos–Dumont as a public figure actually existed, a man who espoused fair play, gentlemanly behaviour, and had a straightforward and continuous association with sports clubs and a devotion to the practice of sports. These manifestations continued even after he returned to Brazil before First World War, where, until his death in 1932, he devoted himself to various sports clubs, especially Fluminense Football Club in Rio de Janeiro and the Tennis Club of Petropolis (today, Petropolitano Foot–Ball Club), his last residence in his home country.

In 1920, Santos–Dumont made his most ethical stance yet, when he started an international campaign against the use of aircraft in wars, according with the Olympic value of Peace as propounded by Pierre de Coubertin in

his personal and professional guise. On this occasion, Santos–Dumont discovered the limitations of his sports philanthropy and of his popularity when found no echo for his ideals (Hoffman p. 274). He may have been portrayed by his supporters on a wall of the restaurant Maxim’s of Paris, but it was not enough to overcome the warlike realpolitik of international relations in Europe, already fragmented by First World War (Hoffman, pp. 64–65 with reference to Maxim’s).

Santos–Dumont’s ambitions were frustrated and his reputation declined with the suggestion that as an inventor or as a sportsman he was a myth. This interpretation is shared by the French historian Pierre Paquier who, in 1952, had labeled Santos–Dumont’s accomplishments as no more than an adoring public’s imagination. A piece of evidence then consisted in the observation of the first generation of aviation pioneers who had remained active until the 1930s. “Victoire égale volonté” (“the victory comes from the will”) says this author as he describes the evolution of aeronautic competitions of the first decades of the 20th century³⁷.

In addition, Paquier emphasises the shift in perception of the aviation pioneers in Europe and in the United States: while the former aimed at creation–competition, the latter focused on invention–performance.³⁸ That is why, in 1914, the American magazine *Flying* also characterised the evolution of aviation, placing the sports sense in first place and the transportation objective secondary: “Aviation as a sport then transportation”³⁹. Although pragmatic, this very source recognised the mythic posture of Santos–Dumont, placing him within the tradition of “Verne’s heroes”.⁴⁰

Nevertheless in Brazil, the tradition of the sporting–legend–folk–hero was already in existence in 1903, when the “father of flight” visited Rio de Janeiro for the first time after winning the Deutsch de la Meurthe prize. In order to welcome the emergent Brazilian hero, a group of mountain climbers ascended the Sugar Loaf, a monumental rock located at the entrance of Guanabara Bay and a symbol of the city and at the time, capital of the country, fixing on the side facing the sea an enormous banner saluting Santos–Dumont on his return from Europe⁴¹. Significantly, in 1973, in the centennial of his birth, the Santos–Dumont myth survived internationally when a lunar crater was named in his honour by the International Astronomical Union⁴².

But the myth persisted in Brazil in 1936 in a very special manner, when four years after the Brazilian aeronautical engineer’s death, the Vargas administration passed Law No. 218 of 4th July 1936, creating the “Aviator Day”:

para que esta comemoração tenha sempre condigna celebração cívica, esportiva e cultural, esta especialmente escolar, e acentuando-se a iniciativa do notável brasileiro Santos–Dumont.

[so that this special date always should be a civic, sporting and cultural celebration, especially in schools, to recognise the initiative of this remarkable Brazilian, Santos-Dumont.]⁴³

Conclusions

This memento of the aviator folk hero for his celebration in the sports world has been neglected not only by the Brazilian sports institutions but also by today's sports historians, as it has happened with other relevant facts related to the Olympic Movement in Brazil⁴⁴. This "oblivion" from Olympic history viewpoint and from broader perspectives would also include the meanings of the Olympic Diploma, a theme which has been little studied, but which also reveals Pierre de Coubertin's perception in relation to the sportsman's ideal profile during the phase of restoration of the Olympic Games, "not only for his athletic qualities but for his attitudes in sports competitions and his life in society", as it has been here previously quoted from the Olympic Games reinventor.

Pierre de Coubertin and Alberto Santos-Dumont had a lot in common⁴⁵, which addresses the typical competitiveness of in the *Belle Époque* of sport. This period between the late 19th to the early 20th century represented the climax of innovation by both Pierre de Coubertin and Santos-Dumont. The Olympic Diploma thus takes on a new meaning in the deep bond between them in modern sport's journeys, despite their different roles in Olympic history, as usually depicted today. ■

- 1 Coubertin, P. Une Campagne de Vingt-et-un Ans (1887 – 1908), Paris 1909, pp. 162 – 171. In Müller, N. et Schantz, O., Pierre de Coubertin-Texts Choisis, Weidmann, Zurich, 1986, tome II, p. 209–210. See also Revue Olympique, février, 1906, no. 2, pp. 19–20.
- 2 IOC. The International Olympic Committee and the Modern Olympic Games. Imprimerie de la Plaine du Rhone 8. a., Aigle, 1950, p.15.
- 3 DaCosta, L. Atlas of Sport in Brazil, Shape, Rio de Janeiro, 2005, p. 868. For further information on Brazilian aviators during the Belle Époque see Sevchenko, N., Orfeu Extático na Metrópole, Companhia das Letras, Sao Paulo, 1992, pp. 23–88.
- 4 Ibidem, p. 869. See also Sarment, T. *Histoire de Paris: Politique, urbanisme, civilisation*. Editions Jean-Paul Gisserot, Paris, 2012.
- 5 Noel, F. L. & Lima, P.S. *Uma Casa Muito Encantada – A Invencao Arquitectonica de Santos-Dumont*, Escrita Fina, Petrópolis, 2010, p. 79–89; for the participation of Santos-Dumont in the UK National Championship of Golf 1915, see Anderson, J.G. *Many Eminent Men Players of Golf*. Sporting Life, London, Nov. 13, 1915.
- 6 <http://www.fai.org/about-fai/history>
- 7 <http://historiahoje.com/santos-dumont-moda-e-aviao>. For background acknowledgement in this issue see Visconti, R.M., Os Baloes de Santos-Dumont. Capivara Editora, Sao Paulo, 2010, pp. 13–83.
- 8 DaCosta, L. Santos-Dumont: O Primeiro Herói Olímpico do Esporte Brasileiro. IV Encontro Nacional de História do Esporte, Lazer e Educaçao Física, UFMG, 22–26 outubro de 1996. Coletânea, Belo Horizonte, 1996, p. 229–233; Hoffman, P. Wings of Madness – Alberto Santos-Dumont and the Invention of Flight. Hyperion, New York, 2002, pp. 97–138 (pages for the Brazilian edition of the book, Editora Objetiva, Rio de Janeiro, 2003).

- 9 Lins de Barros, H.; *Santos-Dumont and the Invention of Airplane*, Ministério da Ciencia e Tecnologia, Brasília, 2006. For Cartier wrist-watch see <http://www.chrono24.com/en/cartier/santos-dumont>.
- 10 Neto-Wacker, M. & Wacker, C. Brazil Goes Olympic. Agon Sportverlag, Kassel, 2010, p. 81.
- 11 Hoffman, p. 274.
- 12 See Napoleao, A.; *Santos-Dumont e a Conquista do Ar*. Instituto Histórico e Cultural da Aeronáutica – Editora Itatiaia, Rio de Janeiro, 1988, p. 174; page 98 in the 1918 autobiography "O que Eu Vi, o que nos Veremos".
- 13 Op. Cit. DaCosta, 1996; DaCosta, 2005 and Neto-Wacker&Wacker, 2010.
- 14 Hoffman, pp. 229–252.
- 15 Fonseca, G.; *Santos-Dumont*. Editora Vecchi, Rio de Janeiro, 1940. p. 306–324.
- 16 Op. Cit. Muller & Schantz, 1986.
- 17 Ibidem, p. 318–321, tome III; pages of original source: pp. 293–298.
- 18 Ibidem, p. 325–327, tome III; original source: Revue Olympic, Octobre, 1906, pp. 151–154.
- 19 See data set by Alexandre Brigole, *Santos-Dumont – The Air Pioneer*, Aero Clube do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, 1943, pp. 86–87.
- 20 Ibidem, pp. 88–89.
- 21 Cabrero dos Reis, A.; Santos-Dumont – Os seus Avioes e a Primazia do Voo do Mais Pesados que o Ar. in: *Revista do Instituto de Geografia e História Militar do Brasil*, Vol. LIV, 1974, pp. 71–90.
- 22 Ibidem, p. 88.
- 23 Lavenere Wanderley, N.F.; Santos-Dumont e a sua Glória, in: *Revista do Instituto de Geografia e História Militar do Brasil*, vol. LIV, 1974, pp. 125–166.
- 24 Ibidem, p. 159.
- 25 Hoffman, pp. 174–176.
- 26 Ibidem, pp. 139–187.
- 27 Ibidem, pp. 171–187.
- 28 In the edition of May 28, 1899, pp. 439–440.
- 29 Similar approaches are found in the magazine *Le Sport Universel Illustré* of 27 July, 1901, in an article by the aeronautic sports news analyst Frantz Reichel, wherein he describes the performances of dirigible No. 5, constructed in Santos-Dumont's hangar. In this case, the praise is more emphatic, considering that the Brazilian was searching for perfection, but justifiable (p. 483). At the end of the article, Reichel declares: "Pour les débuts, le XIX^e siècle sera um siècle heureux. Il aura donné à l'homme la direction des ballons; Jules Verne et Robida auront été de bons prophètes" (p. 485). ("From the start, the 20th century will be a happy century. It has given mankind the direction of balloons; Jules Verne and Robida have been good prophets").
- 30 *Santos-Dumont's autobiography*, Op. Cit. p. 4.
- 31 Wykeham, P.: *Santos-Dumont – o Retrato de uma Obsessao*. Civilizacao Brasileira Editora, Rio de Janeiro, 1962, p. 9.
- 32 Napoleao, A. Op.cit., p. 491.
- 33 Ibidem, p. 731.
- 34 Fonseca, G. Op cit. p. 50.
- 35 Ibidem, p. 70.
- 36 Pierre de Coubertin. *The Olympic Idea. Discourses and Essays*. Editions Internationales Olympiques, Lausanne, 1970.
- 37 See comparative data elaborated by Hoffman, p. 326 and interpretations from Santos-Dumont in his autobiography about the design of "Demoiselle" as an airplane "for amateurs", Cf. "O Que Eu Vi, o Que Nos Veremos", (1918 edition). Universidade do Amazonas – DEAD, 2015, pp. 15–19.
- 38 Paquier, P.; *Santos-Dumont Maître d'Action*. Editions Conquistador, Paris, 1952, p. 72s.
- 39 Ibidem, p. 734.
- 40 Ibidem, pp. 732–734.
- 41 See Lavenere Wanderley, Op. Cit. p. 160.
- 42 <http://www.vaztolentino.com.br/conteudo/533-Cratera-brasileira-SANTOS-DUMONT>
- 43 The full text of Law 218 is found in Napoleao, A., Op. cit. pp. 264–265.
- 44 For comparisons see the overview of the Brazilian Olympic History that has been elaborated by Neto-Wacker, M.F. & Wacker, C. Rio de Janeiro Goes Olympic, in: *Journal of Olympic History* vol. 17, Dec. 2009, pp. 6–20.
- 45 The relationship chart was constructed by means of consult to the previous sources referred in this essay in addition to MacAloon, J. J. *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981.