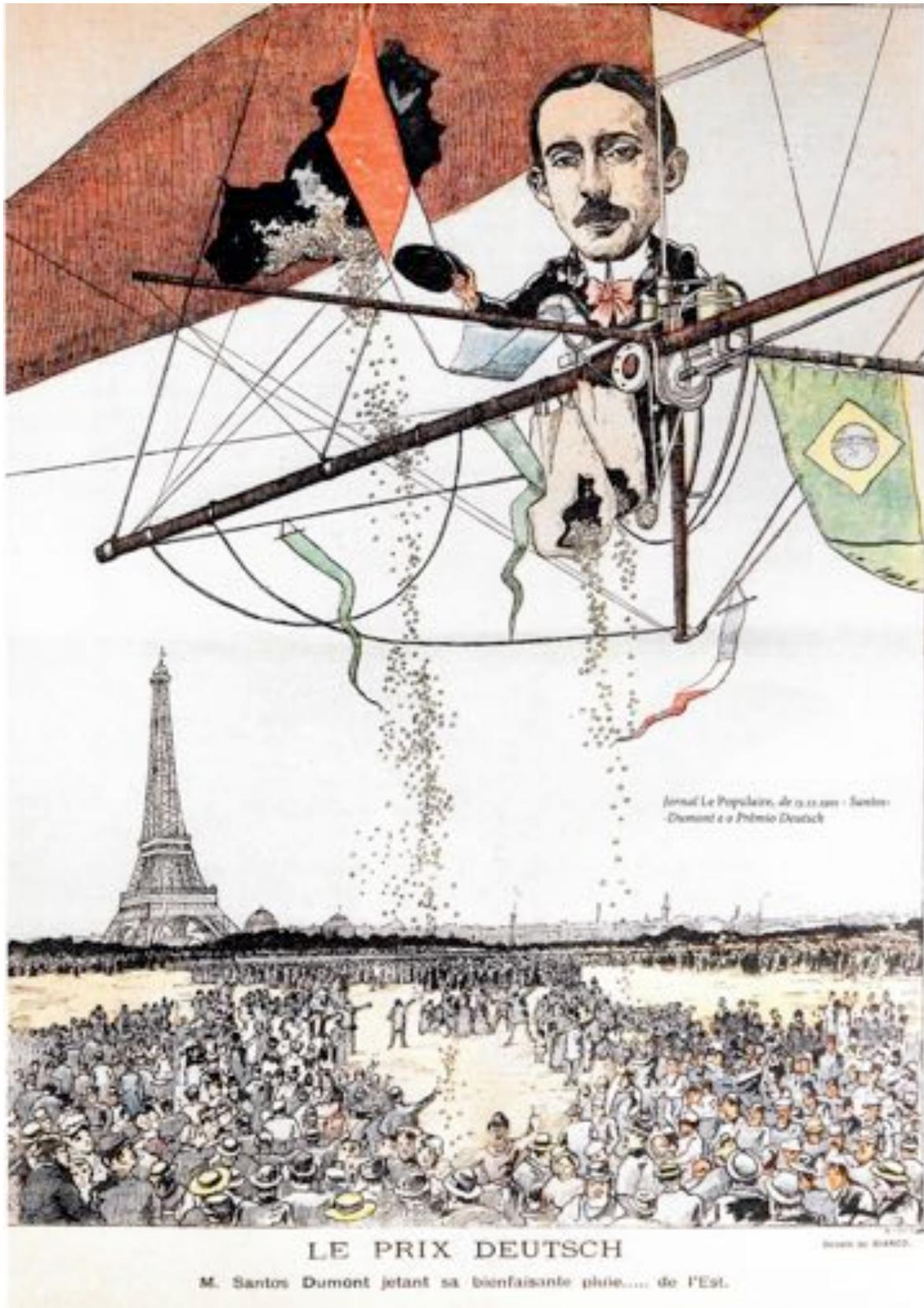


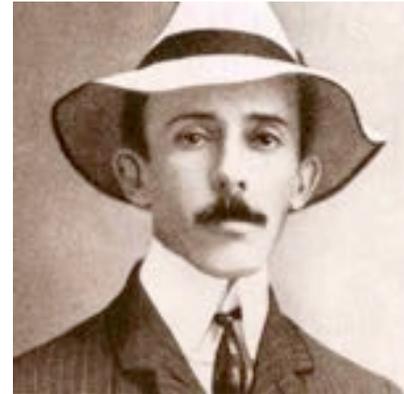
1905: Santos Dumont, Brazil's first Olympic hero



Santos-Dumont wins the "Deutsch" Prize, 1901
© Collection Roberto Gesta de Melo

In 1905, the Brazilian adventurer and bourgeois Santos DUMONT was one of the first personalities to be honoured with the Olympic diploma by Pierre de COUBERTIN.¹ Alberto Santos DUMONT was born on 20th July 1873 on the estate of 'Cabangu' in João Aires, Minas Gerais, and took his own life on 23rd July 1932.² It was not until many decades later, on 26th July 2006, that his name was included in the official register of Brazilian national heroes and, since 1947, Santos DUMONT has been adopted as the patron of Brazilian aviation.

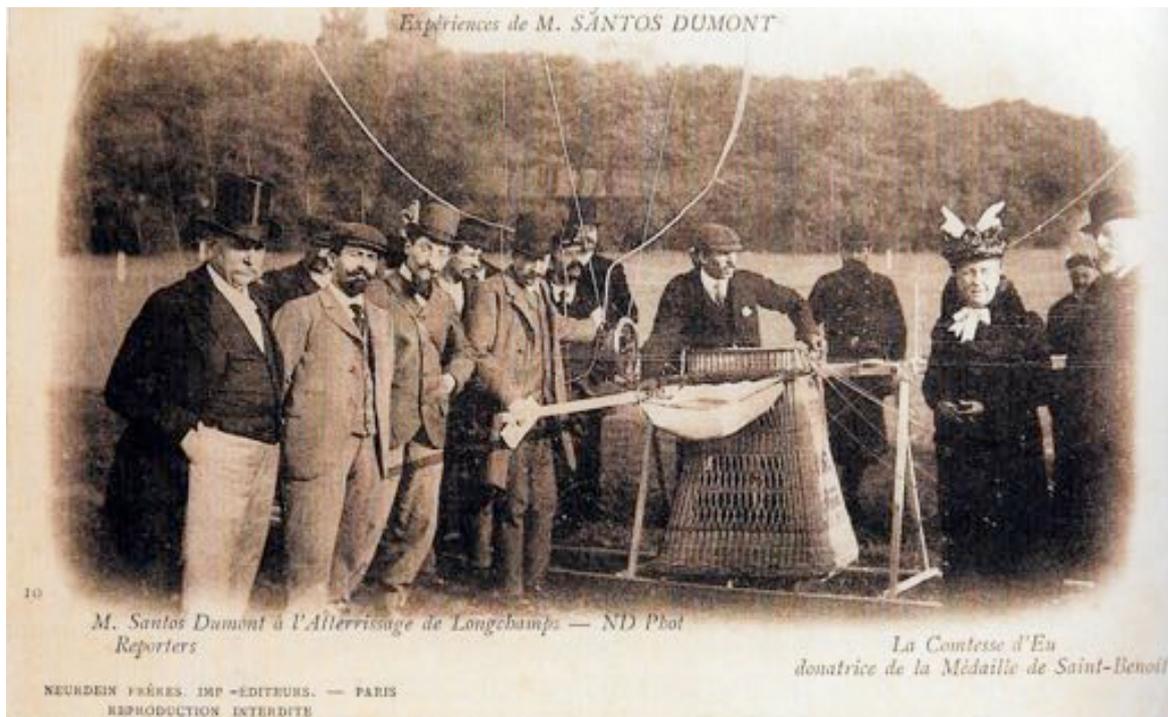
At the age of 18, Santos DUMONT travelled for the first time to Paris accompanied by his parents and there he first ventured into balloon free flight. For financial reasons, he was initially unable to devote himself to this future passion; however, he also developed an enthusiasm for innovations in automotive technology. Santos DUMONT'S parents recognised their son's talents and, shortly after their return to Brazil, they sent him back to Europe, where he was able to further develop his ideas. Santos DUMONT lived in Paris until 1922 and became famous thanks to the numerous inventions he made between 1898 and 1906. When he returned to Brazil in the twenties, he was already a world-famous and highly respected inventor.³



Alberto Santos-Dumont
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Until 1897, Santos DUMONT experimented with automobiles and gained experience in driving cars. It was not until this time, that he successfully completed his first solo balloon flight in a balloon borrowed from Henri LACHAMBRE. After this pivotal experience, Santos DUMONT devoted himself almost exclusively to ballooning and became a pioneer in this field. The aim of every balloon pilot at the time was to win the coveted *Deutsch de la Muerthe* prize, named after the French industrialist Henri DEUTSCH DE LA MUERTHE, a pioneer in the business of oil field development and sponsor of a number of prizes for aviation and automobile technology.⁴ The *Deutsch de la Muerthe prize* was awarded to those balloon pilots, who circumnavigated the Eiffel tower within 30 minutes, the start and finish of this flight being in Saint Cloud Park, nine kilometres distant and to the West of Paris. With an award and an associated prize of 100,000 Francs received from the scientific commission of the *Aero Club de Paris*, Santos DUMONT was able to properly prepare for the great event. He also endowed his own so-called *Santos Dumont* prize, the course being the same as that of the *Deutsch de la Muerthe* Prize, but with no time limit. The *Aero Club de Paris* administered and awarded the prize; however, it was never presented. Santos DUMONT won the *Deutsch de la Muerthe* Prize on 19th October 1901 and

allegedly divided the 120,000 Francs prize money amongst his team and the poor people of the City of Paris.⁵



Santos-Dumont waiting with compatriots to announce the "Deutsch" Prize, 1901
© Collection Roberto Gesta de Melo

The Brazilian elite used Santos DUMONT's award to raise the national consciousness, international recognition and to promote Brazil's progress. Brazilian aviation was founded with a major event!⁶ In the very same year of 1901, Santos DUMONT was also awarded a prize in London and was celebrated as a hero in the English press. The portrait of this ballooning hero was published on postcards, photographs and knick-knacks throughout France.⁷

Within the framework of the 1904 St. Louis International Exposition, apart from the Olympic Games, a congress and an aviation competition were also organised. Santos DUMONT was invited to the United States to co-ordinate and to participate in these competitions. On the day of the competition, Santos DUMONT discovered, that his balloon had been sabotaged and its fabric had been badly slashed, whereupon he left immediately and the event was called off. Nevertheless, the American press had only words of praise for this sportsman, who not only designed but also tested and flew his own balloons.⁸

At the fourth meeting of the Olympic Committee in 1901 in Paris, Pierre de COUBERTIN proposed, to honour certain personalities, who had rendered outstanding services to the 'Olympic Cause', sport or physical education with an Olympic diploma.

"Le Comité International décide en outre, la création d'un Diplôme d'Honneur d'une grande valeur artistique et qui, attribué en de rares occasions à ceux qui avont rendu les services les plus longs et le plus signalés à l'œuvre Olympique, et à la cause du sport et de l'éducation physique, deviendra la plus haute récompense que puisse être obtenue dans cet ordre d'idées..."⁹

In 1905, the first diplomas were awarded to ROOSEVELT, Fridjoff NANSEN, William-Hippolyte GRENFELL and Santos DUMONT. The award was not intended for a sporting achievement, but for services to sport in general.¹⁰ The festive diploma presentation ceremony was held on 13th June 1905 in the *Palais des Académies* in Brussels under the chairmanship of Pierre de COUBERTIN. The hall was decorated, inter alia, with the flags of Belgium, the United States, Norway, Brazil and England reflecting the host and the native countries of the honoured guests. It must have been regrettable and disappointing for the event organisers, that, apart from William-Hippolyte GRENFELL, none of the honoured celebrities attended the ceremony personally. Henry WILSON, the United States ambassador



Santos-Dumont surrounding the Eiffel-Tower
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to Belgium represented Theodore ROOSEVELT, Fridjoff NANSEN sent Henrik ANGELL, the Norwegian representative in Belgium, and Santos DUMONT was represented by his personal friend Brunetta DUSSEAUX, who received the diploma to the strains of the Brazilian national anthem. The reason for awarding the diploma to Santos DUMONT is defined in the relevant citations.

"Ce que nous apercevons dans celle de M. Santos-Dumont c'est, Messieurs, le génie de la persévérance. Il l'a poussé à ses limites extrêmes. Nul n'a jamais atteint plus loin dans cette voie. La persévérance, Messieurs, est une des bases les plus essentielles du sport. La persévérance suppose l'échec; les victoires musculaires ont ceci de supérieur au point de vue éducatif qu'elles résultent toujours d'une série d'échecs et aboutissent presque nécessairement au succès, pourvu seulement que la persévérance puisse s'y superposer aux autres qualités nécessaires."¹¹

Whereas Theodore ROOSEVELT and Fritjoff NANSEN had sent messages of thanks to their representatives, Santos DUMONT abstained. Moreover, the diploma itself is also missing, which can be deemed further evidence that Santos DUMONT had little interest in this award. Apart from this episode, there are no other indications, that Santos DUMONT was interested in the Olympic Games or

even that he would have been concerned with the Olympic Idea. Neither he nor his biographers mention the Olympic diploma; it seems to have played no part in Santos DUMONT's life.¹² One reason might have been that Pierre de COUBERTIN'S Olympic involvement was virtually unknown internationally, whereas Santos DUMONT was a media star.¹³ The same also applied to Theodore ROOSEVELT and Fritjoff NANSEN, who both failed to attend the Olympic diploma award ceremony. For the international Olympic committee at that time, it must have been a privilege to be able to honour such personalities and not vice-versa.



The house of Santos-Dumont in Petrópolis, Brazil
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It seems that Santos DUMONT, in principle, set no great store by awards. He attached no value to the numerous medals presented by the *Aero Club de Paris*, the Brazilian government, the French Academies of Sciences or the numerous other institutions, which had decorated him. Santos DUMONT only set great store by two things; a small St. Benedict coin and an ornate rosette. The former was presented to him as protection against accidents by Princess

Isabel, the heir to the throne of Dom PEDROS II, whilst the latter was the emblem of his investiture as *Grande Oficial da Legião Honra*.¹⁴

Apart from Santos DUMONT's Olympic diploma, bestowed at the beginning of the 20th century there was not the remotest contact to the IOC and Olympic Games. The interlude in St. Louis in 1904 was detached from the Olympic Games nor can any relationship be traced concerning Santos DUMONT's friendly contact with Antônio PRADO JUNIOR, who was later to become the first President of the *Comitê Olímpico Brasileiro*.¹⁵ One could describe Santos DUMONT as 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.

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¹ DACOSTA, Lamartine: "Santos Dumont: O primeiro herói Olímpico do esporte brasileiro", in: *Coletânea do IV Encontro Nacional de História do Esporte, Lazer e Educação Física*, Belo Horizonte 1996, p. 229 to 233. Three autobiographies by, and more than 24 biographies about Santos DUMONT have been written. They are summarised in the most recent biography by JORGE, Fernando: *As lutas, a glória e o martírio de Santos Dumont*, Rio de Janeiro ⁵2007, p. 339.

² The cause of Santos DUMONT's death was undisclosed for 23 years until 1955. The Governor, Pedro de TOLEDO instructed the doctor tasked with the investigation of the cause of death not to make the suicide public. After all, the Brazilian national hero's reputation might have been damaged. JORGE, Fernando: *As lutas, a glória e o martírio de Santos Dumont*, Rio de Janeiro 2007, p. 327.

³ AZEVEDO, Fernando: *A cultura brasileira*, Brasília 1996, p. 379.

⁴ JORGE: *Santos Dumont* (2007), p. 74.

⁵ JORGE: *Santos Dumont* (2007), p. 82.

⁶ SEVCENKO, Nicolau: "O prelúdio republicano, astúcias da ordem e ilusões do progresso", in: SEVCENKO; *História da vida privada no Brasil Vol. III*, São Paulo 1998, p. 34.

⁷ NAPOLEÃO, Aluizio: *Santos Dumont e a conquista do ar*, Belo Horizonte 1998, p. 57.

⁸ JORGE: *Santos Dumont* (2007), p. 198-200.

⁹ "The International Committee also decided in favour of the creation of an 'Honorary Diploma' of great artistic value to be awarded on rare occasions to those who have rendered long-term and highly significant service to the Olympic Cause and to the cause of sport and physical education. This will become the highest compensation that can be obtained in this context...". COUBERTIN, Pierre de: "La réunion du Comité International Olympique", ("The reconvening of the IOC") in: *Revue Olympique*, Juillet 1901, p. 37.

¹⁰ COUBERTIN, Pierre de: *Une campagne de vingt-et-un ans. (A 21-year Campaign)* Paris 1909, p. 151; DACOSTA: *Santos Dumont* (1996), p. 229 to 233.

¹¹ “What we see in Mr. Santos-Dumont, gentlemen, is the spirit of perseverance. He has pushed himself to his limits. No one has ever gone further in that direction. Perseverance, gentlemen, is one of the most essential principals of sport. Perseverance requires failure; the muscular victories are, from an educational point of view, always the result of a series of setbacks and almost necessarily lead to success. Therefore perseverance can be superimposed on other necessary qualities.” COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIQUE (ED.): Congrès International de Sport et d'Education physique, Bruxelles 9-14 Juin 1905, Auxerre 1905, P. 242-245.

¹² JORGE: *Santos Dumont* (2007). Even in this last and detailed publication on Santos Dumont, there is no reference to a relationship between Santos Dumont, Pierre de Coubertin or the IOC.

¹³ JORGE: *Santos Dumont* (2007), p. 127. During the 1900 Paris World Exposition, the *Concours internationaux d'exercices physiques et de sports* and the Olympic Games organised as a part thereof were an insignificant fringe event, whilst Santos DUMONT was treated as one of the main attractions.

¹⁴ DUMONT VILLARES, Henrique: *Quem deu asas ao homem: Alberto Santos Dumont, sua vida, sua gloria*, São Paulo 1953, p. 463.

¹⁵JORGE: *Santos Dumont* (2007), p. 97, 237 to 238, 255, 277, 298, 307, 314.