

Samaranch Jr applauds city's sports spirit

Li Qian

Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr took some time off in Shanghai in late September as he was flitting about Chinese cities with the Hangzhou Asian Games in full swing.

The 63-year-old vice president of the International Olympic Committee pledged to continue as ambassador for the Shanghai Tower Vertical Marathon for another five years.

The event was inaugurated in 2017 and has been recognized by the Tower Running World Association as the tallest and largest in scale of its kind. This year's event will be held on November 19.

Samaranch Jr was named as a five-year ambassador in 2018 when he tried the first vertical marathon in his life. He took nearly 45 minutes to climb 3,398 steps and 119 floors.

In an exclusive interview with Shanghai Daily, he recalled that it made him feel good and he was proud of himself because he could achieve something.

"This is a wonderful feeling," he said.

Every time Samaranch Jr takes on endurance sports or races, he remembers the words — pain is temporary, glory is forever.

"When I'm suffering or my legs are hurting, I think this is temporary, I want the glory forever, so I keep going," he said.

Samaranch Jr believes vertical marathon has the potential to grow in popularity around the world because



People skate, bike and run alongside the Huangpu River. It has been put high on the government agenda to basically build Shanghai into a world-renowned sports metropolis by 2025, and fully complete the project by 2050. — IC

it brings people from all over the world together in a festive atmosphere, and it was a celebration of humanity rather than a fiercely competitive event.

"It gives you a sense of familiarity," he said. "I remembered vividly the camaraderie that I felt when we were about to start and throughout the whole race."

He pointed out that it exactly reflects the definition of the Olympic movement, "celebrate humanity through sport."

In the last 11 years or so, he has visited China more than 65 times. After the Samaranch Foundation was established in 2012, he had more reasons to come, such as in 2018 when he chaired the coordination commission for the Beijing Games.

The Samaranch family has developed a long friendship with China, in particular Samaranch Jr's father, Juan Antonio Samaranch (1920-2010), the former International Olympic Committee president who was honored with China Reform Friendship Medal for blazing a trail for China's Olympic dreams.

Samaranch Jr believed the foundation is kind of embodiment of how to keep this love story between Samaranch and China after his father passed away.

"It's an honor for our Samaranch family to have all these friends and recognitions in China," he said. "We are humbled by it."

As for Shanghai, he gave a thumbs-up to the city's pioneering spirit and vivid sports ambiance.

"Shanghai is a marvelous and perfect place," he said. "If you have the will, Shanghai will give you the means to do it."

In addition, he praised the Shanghai Sports Administration for being determined to work together with citizens

to make Shanghai an utmost sporting city.

"Shanghai is in the front of this fight to get people in the street," he said. "It doesn't matter if it's football, basketball, running, or even walking."

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Shanghai has ranked among the top cities in China in four rounds of national physique monitoring. Currently, there are nearly 30 sports and fitness organizations for every 10,000 people.

This year, Shanghai will be hosting 121 major international and domestic events, including the ongoing 2023 ATP Tennis Shanghai Rolex Masters and the 2023 Shanghai Super Cup.

Next year, the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix, the Shanghai Global Equestrian Championship and other international events will return to the city.

Especially, the Olympic qualification races for BMX freestyle, skateboarding, breakdancing and sport climbing will be held in May 2024 at the Huangpu riverfront.

Yu Tong contributes to the story.

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Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr

Vice president of the International Olympic Committee

A file photo shows Juan Antonio Samaranch Jr (right) crosses the finish line in the 2018 Shanghai Tower Vertical Marathon. — Jiang Xiaowei

