

Watching the
OLYMPICS

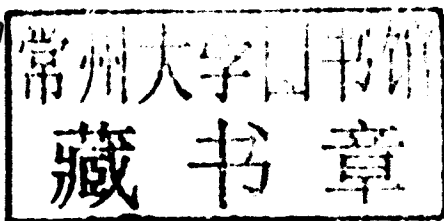
Politics, power and representation

Edited by John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson

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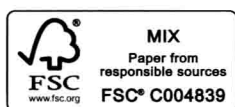
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WATCHING THE OLYMPICS

Global sporting events involve the creation, management and mediation of cultural meanings for consumption by massive media audiences. The apotheosis of this cultural form is the Olympic Games. This challenging and provocative new book explores the Olympic spectacle, from the multi-media bidding process and the branding and imaging of the Games to security, surveillance and control of the Olympic product across all of its levels.

The book argues that the process of commercialisation, directed by the IOC itself, has enabled audiences to interpret its traditional objects in non-reverential ways and to develop oppositional interpretations of Olympism. The Olympics have become multi-voiced and many themed, and the spectacle of the contemporary Games raises important questions about institutionalisation, the doctrine of individualism, the advance of market capitalism, performance, consumption and the consolidation of global society.

With particular focus on the London Games in 2012, the book casts a critical eye over the bidding process, Olympic finance, promises of legacy and development, and the consequences of hosting the Games for the civil rights and liberties of those living in their shadow. Few studies have offered such close scrutiny of the inner workings of Olympism's political and economic network, and therefore this book is indispensable reading for any student or researcher with an interest in the Olympics, sport's multiple impacts, or sporting mega-events.

John Sugden is Professor of the Sociology of Sport at the University of Brighton, UK, and has researched and written widely around topics concerned with the politics and sociology of sport. He is Academic Leader of the Sport and Leisure Cultures subject group and Director of Football for Peace, an international collaborative project based in Israel.

Alan Tomlinson is Professor of Leisure Studies at the University of Brighton, UK. He is Deputy Chair of the University Research Degrees Committee and Director of Research in the Chelsea School, teaching predominantly in the social history of sport, the sociology of leisure and cultural studies.

The editors and numerous among the other contributors to this volume owe an intellectual debt to John Hargreaves, who died in 2010.

John was Visiting Professor of Sociology, in the Sport and Leisure Cultures Area, Chelsea School Research Centre, for several years up to 2000–2001. We dedicate this book to the memory of his wide influence and global impact in the sociology and politics of sport.

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PREFACE

Watching the Olympics: the critical social scientific gaze

Ever since the Olympic Games secured financial independence in the 1980s, when its marketing strategy attracted exclusive corporate partners to complement the media revenues that the USA network companies in particular were willing to pay, a minor offshoot of its survival and prosperity has been the academic study of the Olympics itself. Centres for the study of the Olympics had been established prior to those boom years, sometimes sanctioned or supported by organizing committees and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) itself. These have produced valuable scholarship and reflection, in Canada, Spain/Catalonia, Australia, and Norway for instance, but not all have had long-term impact and profiles.

Nevertheless, and now more than ever, each Olympics generates a torrent of academic analysis of the Games. And much of this is produced in the national context of the host city. Economists discuss and evaluate financial impact; political scientists explore the citizenship issues and persisting expressions of nationalism; sociologists theorise on social and cultural meanings, values and ideologies; anthropologists and media scholars comment on the experience and mediation of the rituals and ceremonies that in any other context would seem wacky, antiquated, and contrived; historians tell us that we've all been there before, and that De Coubertin's Olympism certainly wasn't the only show in town for much of its early history. And that's just the mainstream disciplines. Cultural studies specialists explore Olympic identities; policy analysts review the cultural and social impacts of Olympic policy; environmentalists interrogate the IOC's commitment to the environment; urban studies scholars check up on infrastructural legacies; and sport studies generates individuals, groups, and teams who have either studied the Olympic phenomenon for some time or feel that their particular specialism has something to say to an Olympics that has turned up on their doorstep. Research

into high-level performance and the making of Olympic champions has also provided widespread opportunities for sport scientists in their home nations, and in some countries less ethical scientists have been willing to apply their science to the use of performance-enhancing substances and processes.

This book is to some extent the product of an established sport studies team. Of the 19 contributors, all have worked in sport studies groups or departments. A dozen or so have written on the Olympics before July 2005 when London won the 2012 Games at the IOC meeting in Singapore. And of the 19, all but 4 have worked or spent time as a researcher or visiting scholar at the University of Brighton's Chelsea School, in the Sport and Leisure Cultures (SLC) group. The book is therefore also a product of Brighton's approach to the socio-cultural study of sport, labelled by some as critical interpretivism (Gratton and Jones 2004). This approach was outlined in a previous collaborative product (Sugden and Tomlinson 2002), and need not be repeated here. But the core elements of that Brighton approach characterise this book's principles for critical Olympic scholarship: a healthy disrespect for disciplinary boundaries; an adventurous cross-cultural curiosity; and a commitment to critical social scientific scholarship not beholden to patrons, agencies or sponsors. The colleagues lining up alongside the Brighton and Brighton-linked contributors, those from Durham, Loughborough, and Western Sydney, share these principles.

As editors, we have asked all contributors to focus upon their topic and write in as accessible a fashion as possible to produce informed and well-evidenced accounts and analyses that take us beyond taken-for-granted notions of Olympism and its values and institutions. This is not to say that we all think the Olympics are a bad thing. The Olympics are in fact a hugely complex socio-cultural phenomenon. They offer hope, whatever the hyperbole and the rhetoric; they accelerate infrastructural development and even transformation, but at a cost to displaced communities; they speak of ideals in an ideologically soiled world. We have sought no party line on this, and have asked contributors to keep an open mind as they have investigated their individual themes and topics.

So if our underlying methodological principles are so general, and the theoretical frameworks varied and open-minded, what in fact holds this book together? The answer is in the title – 'watching' the Olympics. We conceive the academic's role as that of the disinterested critical observer, informed by appropriate theory, and focusing upon the construction of Olympic phenomena at each stage of their remaking. In asking all contributors to turn their own critical gaze upon particular themes and issues, the volume as a whole becomes a form of watching and interpreting, asking what the Olympics actually means, what sustains the Games, what ideological purposes the Olympic phenomenon serves. In doing this, as the subtitle says, authors concentrate as appropriate upon historical and sociological dimensions of politics, power and representation. Chapters 1–4 question many of the assumptions about the meaning of the Games and the ways in which past Games have been understood, and Olympic ideals and values appropriated and remade: London's three Games were very different things, sought for very different

reasons; whatever De Coubertin wrote and thought, certain core themes have endured in modern understandings of Olympism; a fundamental philosophical or intrinsic meaning to Olympism may account for the hold of the phenomenon on the global imagination; and the implicit internationalism of the Olympic idea raises intriguing issues of sovereignty. Chapters 5–7 address specific policy issues, as they bear upon the cultural politics of Olympic events: urban and social regeneration and multiculturalism; governmental policies on legacy/participation; and the threat that will not go away – drug-use and anti-doping policy. Chapters 8–10 look at cultural forms and practices generated by and within the Olympics: official Olympic films; the torch relay; and the cultural Olympiad. Chapters 11–13 focus the critical gaze upon the athletes and their performing Olympian bodies: the anomalies and injustices of sex-testing; the criteria relating to and the framing of disability in the Paralympics; and the targeting of young, stylish and attractive bodies by the IOC in its changes to the competitive agenda of the Games. Chapters 14–16 address in varied ways issues of representation and politics: the construction of the notion of Team GB in a political climate of devolution; the pressures and constraints upon the campaigning journalist in Olympic settings; and the rise and rise of surveillance and security at the Olympics.

This book is in many ways a response to the fact of London 2012. But it is also an accumulation of independent scholarship that has subjected the Olympics, and diverse other sporting events, practices, and institutions, to the critical social scientific gaze. In an afterword, we develop some of the overarching themes that arise from subjecting the Games to this kind of interrogative scrutiny, drawing too upon some of the work of the late John Hargreaves. The latter's seminal book *Sport, Power and Culture* signposted an intellectual journey for a generation of critical social scientists of sport. In locating London 2012 within a broader historical narrative as well within the contemporary politics of global culture, we are proud to be able to carry a torch fuelled by the spirit of John Hargreaves's interdisciplinary and critical scholarship.

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John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson
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Our gratitude is owed too to Routledge's commissioning editor, Simon Whitmore, and to his colleague Joshua Wells: the former believed in our conception of the book and encouraged us to deliver it as early as possible; the latter chased us as our deadlines slipped, but did so with unfailing courtesy and good humour. We are also pleased to acknowledge the six anonymous referees whose reports on the proposal were insightful and valuable, and whose points have been borne in mind in the production of the book. The Afterword benefits from extended conversations and collective thinking on the London 2012 Olympics between Jim McKay and Alan Tomlinson.

Myrene McFee brought her inimitable sharpness and rigour to the home-stretch task of smartening up both prose and presentation, and her outstanding skills will have made the publisher's job a lot smoother than if the manuscript had come only via the editors' hands.

John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson
January 2011

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1

LORDING IT

London and the getting of the Games

Alan Tomlinson

Introduction

In 2012 London will become the only city to have staged the Summer Olympic Games more than twice (the so-called interim Games in Athens in 1906 are largely dismissed from recognised and authoritative records of the Games). For much of the 2012 bidding process up to July 2005, it seemed that Paris would win the race to be a three-times host, especially as its two previous Games were in the first quarter of the twentieth century, in 1900 and 1924. Athens, arrogantly and incorrectly assuming a sentimental vote for the centenary 1996 event, eventually hosted its second Games in 2004, and thereby helped precipitate its country's economic crisis. Los Angeles, with a half century between its 1932 and 1984 events, is the only other city to have held the Summer Games twice. Others have tried including Tokyo and Berlin. Some major cities have sought the Games but without success: New York, Istanbul, Madrid. The latter, along with Chicago and Tokyo, lost out in the final bidding round for the 2016 Games, awarded in October 2009 to Rio de Janeiro. Much has changed since Los Angeles laid down its ultimatum to the IOC for the 1984 Games, effectively rewriting the rules of engagement for any host city, allowing levels of commercialisation of the event not previously seen: the sponsoring of the Olympic torch relay being one particularly controversial initiative. And since then, television rights, sponsorship programmes, and the attraction of hosting an event claimed to deliver the world's largest-ever television audience have sustained the Olympics through crises of corruption (by officials and administration), cheating (the use of banned drugs for performance-enhancement), and economic volatility. It is remarkable that, for all these problems, the Olympics continues to stimulate bidding wars. What draws cities, states, and corporate allies in to this dynamic and towards this aspiration, and how is the prize won? It is these simple questions that underlie the

consideration in this chapter of London's successful bid for 2012, and the wider mechanics of the bidding process. As a prelude to this it is illuminating, for the purposes of comparison, to reflect on the city's previous Summer Olympics.

London 1908 and 1948

1908

The first modern Games were held in cities on the basis of the networks of the founder of the modern Olympics as we know them, Pierre de Coubertin, and the pragmatics of innovation: make the event and then document its history. They were small-scale: Athens 1896 involved a mere 245 or so competitors from 14 nations, competing in 43 events. Paris in 1900 had double the number of nations and a little over 1,000 competitors competing in 75 events, but the transatlantic venue of St. Louis 1904 exposed the European anchorage of Olympian internationalism, more than halving the number of competitors, at a Games that spread out over four and a half months and was the least representative of any in the history of the event, with just 7 European countries participating (Wallechinsky and Loucky 2008). Chicago had actually been awarded the event, but the organisers of the 1904 World's Fair (the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition) gained the support of US president Theodore Roosevelt to get this decision reversed. De Coubertin had little option than to accept this. With such a fragmented, scarcely international event – Tswana tribesmen at the Fair as part of a Boer War exhibition were hauled in to compete in the marathon and add international spice – the Olympic initiative looked to have derailed. Greece organised its own Athenian Games, what has become known as an 'interim' Olympics for 1906, with 20 nations and 847 athletes, and planned four-yearly celebrations intended to dovetail with the Olympics. Rome (chosen over Berlin: see *Revue Olympique* 1904: 72 for an account of this decision at the fourth session of the IOC in London) had been allocated the 1908 Games, but a fragile national economy, competing city factions across the country, and lack of support from the national Italian government in 1906 caused De Coubertin to doubt the strength of the commitment.

British fencer Lord Desborough (see Box 1) had competed in Athens in 1906, doubling up as King Edward VII's 'British Representative . . . on the same auspicious occasion'. With the uncertainties in Rome, and the future of the De Coubertin project in doubt: 'It was therefore with every prospect of success that the suggestion was made that the Games of 1908 should be celebrated in England . . . Lord Desborough was able to carry out that suggestion, not only because of the personal influence he possessed, but also because the Central Organisation from which the management of these games might be created had already come into existence in this country' (Cook 1909: 19).

The fourth IOC session in London in June 1904 proved palatable to all concerned: meetings with sportsmen C.B. Fry and W.G. Grace; the Lord Mayor's reception in Mansion House; dinner at the Corporation of Fishmongers' splendid

BOX 1: LORD DESBOROUGH

Beckett (2004) summarises: *'For all his public duties, Grenfell [Desborough] was probably best-known by contemporaries for his sporting prowess. He had represented Harrow at cricket and Oxford in fencing, athletics, and rowing. He made two appearances in the university boat race in 1877 and 1878: the first was a dead heat and the second a victory for Oxford. He won the Thames punting championships for three successive years (1888–90), stroked an eight across the channel, sculled the London–Oxford stretch of the Thames in a crew of three in twenty-two consecutive hours, and rowed for the Leander club in the Grand Challenge Cup at Henley while an MP. Having won foils at both Harrow and Oxford, Grenfell also represented Britain, and became founding president of the Amateur Fencing Association. He twice swam Niagara, crossing the pool just below the falls, and he ascended the Matterhorn by three different routes. In one eight day period he ascended the Matterhorn, the little Matterhorn, Monte Rosa, the Rothorn, and the Weisshorn. On one occasion he was lost for three days in the Rocky Mountains. He was also a keen horseman, hunter, and fisherman. He went big-game shooting in India, Africa, and British Columbia, and caught tarpon off Florida. He had been master of the draghounds at Oxford and maintained his own harriers at Taplow Court, which had formerly been hunted by King Edward VII as prince of Wales. An excellent whip, he was president of the Coaching Club and the Four-in-Hand Club. One of the conservators of the Thames, he was the founding chairman of the Thames Salmon Association. Three times acting president of the Life Saving Society, he was also president and chairman of the Bath Club from 1894 to 1942. At various times Desborough was also president of both the Marylebone Cricket Club and the Lawn Tennis Association as well as being president of the Olympics held in London in 1908. He was chairman of the Pilgrims of Great Britain from 1919 to 1929 and president of the Amateur Athletic Association from 1930 to 1936.'* See too Rebecca Jenkins (Jenkins 2008: 4–5), on Desborough as a symbol of the contemporary ideal of amateur all-round excellence. He was also a student at Balliol College, Oxford, personifying in its athleticist and sporting version what incoming British prime minister Herbert Asquith called in 1908 the Balliol man's 'tranquil consciousness of an effortless superiority' (Matthew 2004). Baker (2008: 89) notes that Desborough at one particular point of his busy life is said to have sat on 115 committees.

hall by London Bridge; visits to the MCC/Lord's and the Toxophilite Society; a reception hosted by the Prince of Wales in Marlborough House; and a detailed tour of the palace of Westminster. All this made favourable impressions on both sides. In under a year, the British Olympic Association had been formed (May 1905) at a meeting at the House of Commons, with Lord Desborough as its President. This was the 'Central Organisation' to which the 1908 report referred.

The following year Desborough was lobbying in Athens, Rome was abandoned (the tragic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in April 1906 provided a rationale for Rome/Italy's withdrawal), lobbying within the IOC for Budapest was proving relatively ineffective (IOC minute, 1905). So London's first Olympics was handed to it on a silver platter, with the Games planned as a core element of the Franco-British Exhibition, whose 'organisers . . . were powerful advocates of the Olympic Movement and intended to make the Games the centrepiece of the festival' (Miller 2008: 58).

Desborough was a typical champion of the amateur and athleticist ideal. Under his leadership London gained the 1908 Games via a combination of networking (three Great Britain members on a small and malleable IOC), backroom diplomacy, get-up-and-go confidence, and a degree of *hauteur* characteristic of the sporting elite of the time. This aristocratic networking included use of the stateroom in Lord Howard de Walden's yacht moored in Athens's Bay of Phlerum (Kent 2008: ch. 2).

1948

Another prominent English Lord played a central role in securing London's second Olympics. David George Brownlow Cecil, sixth Marquess of Exeter, or Lord Burghley (see Box 2), had been a prominent Olympian in the 1920s (the model for the aristocratic Lord Lindsay in the 1981 Oscar-winning film *Chariots of Fire*), and was chairman and chief executive of the London Organising Committee.

BOX 2: LORD BURGHELEY

Janie Hampton writes: '*In the chair was 43-year-old Lord Burghley, formerly a Conservative MP and Governor-General of Bermuda, who had won a gold medal in the 1928 Olympics. Educated at Eton and Cambridge, he owned a pack of fox hounds and had recently divorced his wife, the daughter of a duke. "On the maiden voyage of the Queen Mary, for the gratification of H.G. Wells and Lord Camrose he ran 400 yards after dinner, in evening dress, round the upper deck in 58 seconds", wrote the Observer . . . Handsome and articulate, calm and genial, Burghley successfully torpedoed opposition to the Games with charm and persuasion.*' (Hampton 2008: 27)

Burghley's words at the closing ceremony of the London 1948 Olympics, displayed on the stadium scoreboard, evoked quintessential Olympic and Coubertinesque ideals: 'The spirit of the Olympic Games, which has tarried here a while, sets forth once more. May it prosper throughout the world, safe in the keeping of all those who have felt its noble impulse in this great Festival of Sport'