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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



E.J.Veal K.Toohy. *The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective.* New York: CABI Publishing, 1999. 268 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-85199-342-3.

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Published on H-Arete (February, 2001)

Inside the Olympic Games

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Many books and articles have been written about this grandest of spectacles, but few have achieved the broad coverage as does this book. By the authors' admission there is a shortage of depth in the book, but it is more than compensated by the sweep of the study. A sort of looking at the forest not the trees. And not to be overlooked are the tidbits of trivia which one finds like raisins in a muffin; for example, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern games, was nominated in the 1930's for a Nobel prize by none other than Adolph Hitler!

The ten chapters include everything from the relationship of the modern to the ancient games up to the possible future of these vastly changed and ever-changing athletic spectaculars. The fact, for example, that Montreal in 1976 ran up a huge debt (\$1 billion) so fearsome that no other city besides L.A. bid for the right to host the 1984 games. When, however, L.A. made a profit, the band wagon was boarded with alacrity. That begot a level of commercialism that continues to expand. The dollar numbers have become mind-boggling, and the so-called cost benefits have been chewed over and minced by supporters and detractors alike. Toohey and Veal take no stand on the commercialism issue but do report both sides of the argument in elaborate detail which, when presented in the context of all the other influences on and by the games, gives a more complete picture of the scope and influence of the Olympics. Interestingly enough, a KMPG Peat Marwick study revealed that for all the astronomical numbers, the economic impact of

the Sydney Games of 2000 amounted to only 0.1 percent of the GDP spread over 13 years of their preparation. It is this sort of information and perspective that the book gives insight to.

This book is comprehensive in its approach dealing as it does with sociological issues, political science, history and the economics of the Games. Being so broad makes it difficult to create an all-encompassing review. A few chapters then will have to be sufficient to illustrate what a truly outstanding piece of research this is.

The longest chapter in the book is chapter four, "The Modern Olympic Phenomenon," which deals with a number of topics and includes a listing of all 119 members of the IOC. To help put the Games in context, the authors treat the subjects of contracts (hundreds of pages), ceremonial attributes (80 % of the public identify the Olympic five ring symbol), critics (Lords of the Rings), various commissions of the IOC (p. 6) and related games such as the Para Olympics which have piggy-backed onto the Games themselves. The information herein is the backbone of the book.

Apart from the recent scandals involving bribes to the IOC members, nothing has had a more dire effect or generated more negative coverage for the Olympics than the drug issue. And it won't go away. The authors, by writing the history of drug taking, and it is a long history, present a somewhat bleak picture of the problem especially when they quote President Samaranch who, in effect, is softening the conventional approach to drug users. Could the Olympics become something for

chemists only? It could happen. Such is the information currently at hand.

The Olympic Games is a well-researched book (there are 40 pages of references) that belongs in the forefront of the libraries of those who study the Games. The writing is lucid and the parameters studied are complete.

The only flaw, a slight one, is occasional misuse of punctuation—commas where none are called for and incorrect spacing of words and punctuation. Otherwise the book is very solid and thorough and surprisingly easy to read despite being an academic tone. The authors' purpose was to elucidate the impact and scope of the Olympic Games, and he has succeeded most admirably.

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Citation: Glynn A. Leyshon. Review of K.Toohy, E.J.Veal, *The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective*. H-Arete, H-Net Reviews. February, 2001.

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