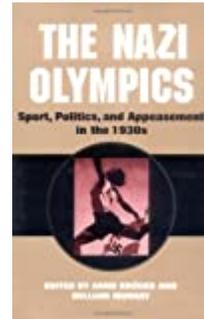


Arnd Krüger, William Murray, eds. *The Nazi Olympics: Sport, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930's*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003. ix + 260 pp. \$44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02815-1.



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In *The Nazi Olympics: Sport, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930's*, editors Arnd Krueger and William Murray offer a fine survey of the political debates that unfolded in eleven countries involved in the 1936 Winter and Summer Olympic Games held in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and Berlin. Although the history of the “Nazi Olympics” has been dealt with in several studies, the authors in Krueger and Murray’s volume expand our knowledge by offering insight beyond the deliberations and discussions of athletes, officials, and politicians in the United States and Germany. Their study includes fascinating treatments of the discussions over participation in the Games in Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands. The result is a well-conceived and well-executed study that greatly increases our knowledge of the domestic conflicts that impacted the various countries’ decisions to attend the Winter and Summer Olympics in Hitler’s Germany.

The text can be roughly divided into three sections. The first treats the decision by Hitler and the Nazi leadership to host the Games and use them to further their own political agenda, and, the consequent debate over participation in the Games in the United States, Great Britain, and France. A second section deals with the ambitions of Nazi Germany’s allies, Italy and Japan, for the Games and what they hoped to realize by participating in them. Fi-

nally, the book turns to debates in the smaller European countries over participating in Olympic contests hosted by a known transgressor of civil and human rights.

In chapters 1 and 2, Krueger offers a penetrating and insightful look at the situation in Germany. Examining some new primary and recent secondary sources, Krueger describes the process that led to the selection of Germany as host nation for the 1936 Winter and Summer Games. He then details how the Nazis promptly turned the Games into an opportunity to spread favorable propaganda for the regime both inside and outside the country. To secure their propaganda objectives, the Nazis spared no expense, building the most modern facilities, hosting the most lavish parties for Olympic officials and visiting dignitaries, and using all of the technological tools at their disposal—newspapers, radio, and film. As a result of their propaganda and organizational facility, the Summer Games in Berlin attracted almost four million spectators, shattering the previous attendance record of just over one million at the 1932 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. In addition, many of the dignitaries, Olympic officials (including the Games’ principal creator, Baron Pierre de Coubertin), and athletes who participated deemed the Berlin Games the greatest Olympics ever. Krueger does an excellent job of explaining how the National Socialists organized the Games and carried them off to such gen-

eral acclaim, while at the same time they fended off the efforts of many groups to boycott the Games altogether.

Krueger also handles the chapter that discusses the boycott movement in the United States and its eventual failure. Here too he does a masterful job of indicating how those who sought to take a principled stand against the corruption and brutality of the Nazi regime were derailed by a combination of factors. The widespread belief that sport and politics could be kept in separate spheres allowed many sport leaders to defuse criticisms of the Hitler regime and its anti-Semitism and brutality. Secondly, the cunning manipulation by Avery Brundage (head of the American Olympic Committee) of American Olympic politics and opinion insured that the boycott movement failed. And, finally, the willingness of Olympic Committee officials, both in the United States and abroad, to be seduced by empty promises from the Nazis that German Jewish athletes would be allowed to compete for positions on German Olympic teams undermined one of the chief arguments brought forward by boycott advocates.

The ideas and arguments Krueger advances are further developed in the remaining articles of the volume. Richard Holt and co-editor William Murray treat the events surrounding the 1936 Games in Britain and France respectively. Their essays amplify the notion that the arguments surrounding the Games had as much to do with internal politics and self-evaluation as they did with attitudes toward the Olympics or Nazi Germany. In the British case, Holt suggests that concerns about the maintenance of pure amateur sport in the face of government support for Olympians in Germany and Sweden (among others), were really about British unwillingness to enter the modern world and perhaps fear over the loss of influence after WWI. Decreasing athletic success against the new “state amateurs” of Germany, Holt argues, was almost expected. Still, Britain could claim a moral victory for upholding the “old traditions” of amateurism. Similarly, Murray shows that French anxiety about internal political strife (clashes between Left and Right) manifested itself in French concern over their relatively poor Olympic performance compared to the growing success of Germany. Athletic fitness appeared to equate with national “fitness.”

Nazi Germany’s allies saw sport in this way as well.

For both Mussolini’s Italy and Imperial Japan, Olympic competition offered an opportunity to win international glory that, they hoped, would reflect well on their respective regimes. In addition, like their Nazi allies, Italian and Japanese sports ideologues never tired of developing new ways to connect sport success with future victories in combat. To them, sport really was just a training ground for the troops. Literally, they believed, to the Olympic victor would go the spoils of war.

Finally, the articles that consider the reaction of the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands merit comment. The authors in each article do a thorough job of discussing their nation’s reaction to the Nazi assumption of power and subsequent hosting of the Games. All identify their public’s reaction along ideological lines. Those of the Left and Labor favored boycott, while those from bourgeois or Right parties favored participation. For some of these states, the decision to participate in the Games actually led to an increasing accommodation and compromise between erstwhile opponents. Matti Goksoyr’s essay on Norway and its deliberations over the Games does an especially good job of showing how domestic factors played out in the debate over whether to boycott or participate in 1936.

In an epilogue, Krueger acknowledges my own criticisms of the text. It focuses almost solely on the political debate surrounding the Games. It does not consider issues of gender or any broader social and cultural history of either the Winter or Summer Games. Still, Krueger does offer several areas for further research and one hopes that these will be pursued and collected in a future volume (or volumes).

All in all, the authors in *The Nazi Olympics* should be commended for furthering our investigation into the 1936 Olympics and their role in the creation and development not only of the National Socialist regime, but of modern sport and the Olympic movement as well.

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