

## **TWO VIEWS**

What will become of the Olympic Games in the next millennium? Thus far the Olympics Games have managed to exist throughout the past century, but who is to say that they will not become a mere statistics we proceed into a new period of time. The attendees of this conference would like to believe that they will have a say in its existence and from my perspective, I think they are probably right.

I am an undergraduate university student who was presented with the opportunity to attend the conference 'The Olympics in the Next Millennium' as part of my degree. It is not everyday a student gets to attend a conference such as this with experts in a particular field presenting, so it could be quite conceivable that a student could feel a little overwhelmed entering into this event. Many of the people at the conference both attending and presenting, have had work published which I have read throughout my studies. Although this might be daunting for some, I found it a pleasant surprise to be able to put a face to the people's names I have read at a top of a paper. I must admit that my main attraction to the conference was the presence of members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The conference itself was most enlightening with respect to gaining a greater understanding about the Olympic movement. There were a substantial number of topic areas covered, which presented a diverse array of information related to the Olympics. It quickly became obvious that most participants were deeply involved in and passionate about the Olympic movement. Everything in this world has its critics, which greatly assists the understanding of a topic. Many of the presentations were interesting and presented some thought-provoking ideas regarding the future of the Olympics.

Before arriving at the conference, I thought that the most influential and informative speakers would be the two members of the IOC, Vice-President Anita De Frantz and IOC Member Jacques Rogge. However, by the end of the conference, I realised that an international position does not automatically ensure a comprehensive knowledge of an area, as one of the most informed speakers was Harry Gordon. Rogge spoke at the beginning of the conference and spoke positively and optimistically of the future for the Olympics. What impressed me was that he was not trying to fool himself or us into believing that the Olympic movement did not have any problems. He was willing to identify that there were certain challenges that needed to be met in order to

ensure that the Olympic movement would carry on into the next millennium. I do not feel he was over-optimistic in what he foresaw for the Olympics. De Frantz spoke about athletes in the next millennium. Her main point was that athletes will become more demanding, especially in the decision-making process, as the IOC want to include athletes on their committees in the coming century. Although I believe that this is a positive point, I was disillusioned even disappointed with the rest of her presentation. For a woman of her position and education, I thought the ideas she presented were a little naïve. Observing and listening to other presenters at the conference, I believe they were almost embarrassed by her address. This does not mean that I do not respect this IOC delegate as, after her address I was fortunate enough to meet her at the conference Cocktail Party and speaking to her one-on-one was much more illuminating and interesting. In fact, the Cocktail Party was probably where I learnt the most about the Olympic movement from this conference. It made the talking personal, and the challenge of having to provide my own input into conversations, and not just listening to people speaking, was far more thought-provoking and facilitated a more in-depth coverage of areas of interest and concern.

In general, the conference was an interesting experience that provided much food for thought. There were many people who have much to say about the Olympic movement and many of them were willing to share their views with students and listen to what we might think. The conference was a useful forum to express concerns for the future and approach the next millennium with confidence that the Olympic movement has a solid future.

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The Olympics in the Next Millennium provided, at least for this delegate, a timely opportunity to discuss the problems and controversies, the highlights and strengths of the Olympic movement as it approaches the next century. Located in the Olympic city of Sydney, the conference delegates dealt with topics ranging from the environment, Olympic education, drugs, communication and marketing. Sessions were held in the magnificent Scientia Building on the main campus of the University of New South Wales and was superbly organised by the Centre for Olympic Studies. Credit must be extended to Richard Cashman, Tony Hughes and their team for an excellent event.

Whilst the conference was organised to discuss the Olympic movement as it approached the next millennium, many of the papers tended to be backwards rather than forwards looking. It may seem an odd approach, though I felt this an appropriate method to examine the current crises facing the Olympics. As a sports historian, I was, however, disappointed that in general the historical bases of the IOC were not discussed as an explanation of the current problems the IOC faces. The IOC was designed as an exclusive club of like-minded men – are we really surprised that the movement is now under fire for back room deals between mates? Indeed, most of the historical papers tended to consist of largely nostalgic reminiscences of past Olympic glories. In a sense, these papers were reinforced by the presence of two IOC members, and confirmed for me that most people interested in the Olympic movement at this conference were sated with sentimentalism, fantasy and little vigorous examination of the moral, religious, ethical and political underpinnings of the movement as a whole. For people ostensibly interested and concerned about the future of the Olympics, I felt that there should have been more interest in such a rigorous analysis.

Whilst the two IOC members provided a bit of star-gazing for some, most interesting for me was the deft side-stepping of issues of real substance. With an audience that is both knowledgeable and interested in the Olympic movement, one might have expected detailed and considered presentations by these representatives. Instead, we were treated to a rehash of the party line. In a climate of scandal and corruption, when the inner workings of the IOC are being publicised and IOC delegates are being expelled for their participation in allegedly corrupt practices, I felt it was unfortunate that both IOC members chose to joke about their receipt of valuable gifts, asking the delegates to 'forgive' them for accepting the gesture of the organising committee. It makes not only a mockery of the reform process, but denigrates those who are genuinely concerned about these allegations of corruption.

Anita De Frantz presented a bizarre account of technological innovation at the end of the twenty-first century, indicating the likelihood of viewers literally 'tuning in' to events, via a series of electrodes (she wasn't sure of the exact terminology), to actually experience the feelings and emotions of athletes as they compete in events. She argued that athletes would come to

demand this kind of audience involvement. Of greater surprise, however, was the fact that many delegates indulged her fantasy, questioning her on the presence of other sorts of innovations. What was particularly interesting was de Frantz's response to Geoff Dickson's suggestion that spectators may simply pop a pill for the same 'rush'. The IOC-VP vehemently dismissed this prediction, failing to recognise the contradiction in her convoluted argument. I guess some technologies are better than others. A speculative essay of this nature may be appropriate for a lay audience, however, again, for a learned group, keen to hear insightful commentary on the Olympic movement, this presentation was more than disappointing.

Jacques Rogge delivered an address entitled 'The Challenge of the New Millennium', which promised to highlight some of the past failings of the movement and efforts to improve the IOC. Whilst some of these issues were discussed, Rogge chose to discuss challenges to the Olympic movement that had little to do with the problems the IOC is currently facing. These challenges included protecting the added value of the Games, preserving the credibility of sport, bridging the gaps between athletes and their clubs and finally, the challenge to achieve a real 'universality'. These may be noble and possibly even achievable aims, however, until the IOC deals privately *and* publicly with its internal disarray, then these will fall, like so many other ideals, by the wayside. Indeed, the only paper that dealt in any comprehensive sense with the IOC and its process of reform was presented by Angela Burroughs.

Other highlights of the conference included papers by James Weirick on the relationship between Greenpeace, the environment and the Sydney 2000 Games. His exploration of the development of the environmental guidelines was not only informative, but indicated a dearth of academic analysis of environmental planning strategies to do with major sporting events. A personal highlight for me was the honour of introducing Olympic filmmaker, Bud Greenspan. Greenspan's films and documentary series were part of the inspiration for me to become a sports historian and I was most proud to meet this artist. Greenspan broadcast excerpts from his films and delighted the audience with anecdotes about the process of producing these works.

Overall, this was a conference that could have achieved much more. It was professionally executed and well attended, yet there was a feeling of simply going through the motions. I encourage Olympic scholars to delve more thoroughly into their topics, to remove the nostalgia-tinged glasses and to critically analyse their chosen subject of interest. There is passion in this field – why let the academic debate of the Olympics slide into mediocrity? The Olympic movement can only improve as a result of critical endeavours.

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