
The Politics of Globalization, Ideology, Gender and Olympic Sport

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Introduction

To contextualize the perspectives through which Olympic sport may be regarded it is important to consider academic' venues and those outside the academy such as radio, magazines, periodicals, film, or government and public interest organizations. What these have in common is that each is a site where bodies and politics meet - a site of 'biopower,' in the term coined by Michel Foucault. Thus in science and medicine, one might consider artificially assisted reproduction, genetics, biotechnology, and population health; in art and culture, pornography and the cultural and political treatment of gender and sexuality come to mind. Indeed, such facets of biopower have been under-analyzed and underestimated in the study, if not the practice, of politics.

Scholars share interests in understanding the myriad ways that sport directly and indirectly shapes personal experiences, gender styles, and gender arrangements. But studies should also consider how the culture of sport affects other political choices as well, notably in economic paradigms, state formation, and public policy, and to what extent sport culture can be described as a political agent in its own right. Because the Olympics are such an important part of the culture of sport, and because, of all the various sports associations and sport-subcultures, the Olympic movement and the IOC Games have most frequently been politicized at the level of the nation state and contending political ideologies, they are an important subject of observation for one with such interests, and particularly since the 1960s.

Even after considering the politics of the Olympic Games, one must still be moved and impressed by the performances of individual athletes - their struggles and their achievements. However, this is not to lend support to the Olympic structure of sport, or the economies, culture, and values it represents and promotes. One may be critical of the IOC Games for many reasons, only a few of which will be explored in this paper. In particular, this paper reflects on the question of the politicization of the Olympics first by nation states, then by transnational corporations; and on the ideological implications of their thorough-going commercialization. These developments in the economic order will then be linked to developments in the gender order - via sport - to address some important questions of political ideology and philosophy.

Background

Today, the Olympics are a powerful sector within the larger sport nexus. By 'sport nexus' I mean the constellation of institutions built around the sport-media

complex, but extending out to form a part of the transnational industrial corporate economy, governments, and the institutions of civil society (notably educational and recreational systems). From a political/ideological point of view, one may identify four important stages to the evolution of the IOC Games, and to their relationship to politics on the one hand, and the evolving sport nexus on the other.

- the foundation years (1896-1914), when the basic structures and credos of Pierre de Coubertin's IOC were established, and supporters in various nation states were recruited;
- the inter-war years (1918-1939) when the educational and cultural goals of de Coubertin and 'amateur' sport flourished alongside substantial, distinct working class and women's Olympic movements;
- the integrationist cold-war period (1945-1980) when nation states and empires, both American and Soviet, appropriated the symbolic value of the Olympics and Olympic athletics; and
- the corporate period (1980 to the present), when the corporate culture appropriated the symbolic value of nationalism via Olympic sport.

In the first two periods of IOC history, the de Coubertin Games were for and about the international elite - that is, the elites of nation states. Though rhetorically about brotherhood and a meritocratic democracy, in reality, their organization excluded working-class and women athletes. Working-class people early in the twentieth century in Europe were more likely to be part of sport associations that were linked to trade unions and socialist parties (social democratic and communist), and to focus their attention on their international contests - also Olympiads. Kidd reports that participation in working class sports associations included large numbers of working men and - far ahead of the de Coubertin Games - women as well. In worker's games in Vienna in 1931, there were over 75,000 participants, of whom roughly 25,000 were women.² Between 1920 and 1936, socialist and communist organizations conducted four international sets of Olympic games, before southern and central European fascism swept them away. French, British, and American women athletes of the affluent classes organized a series of women's Olympics in the 1920s and 1930s as a form of pressure on the IOC to include women's events - which it eventually did.³

The philosophical differences guiding the IOC, worker's, and women's 'Olympic' practices were rooted in the respective values of those who sponsored them. Broadly speaking, the ideals of both workers and women's sports associations and their practices were more inclusive, egalitarian, and participatory than those of the record-driven de Coubertin games. But the 1930s was a bad decade for women's organizing and for socialism. Feminism was in deep decline, and the Women's Olympics floundered. The socialist sport movement was annihilated in the 1930s and 1940s first through the rise of fascism and the armed suppression of left wing political culture, then through World War II, then through the triumph of Stalinist bureaucratization in the Soviet Union. The Soviet state joined the IOC after the war, and made its stunning debut in Helsinki in 1952, where the Cold War in sport was launched.

From then until 1990, the Olympic Games were intensely politicized - and their performances intensified in the name of politics - at numerous levels, thanks to how both Soviet and Western regimes understood the ideological role of sport: as an exemplar of the virtues of socio-economic systems and as a point of unification for the disaffected within those systems. The rise of Third World anti-colonial struggles and nation-building, and the growth, in both North America and Europe, of feminism and movements for minority rights, were also expressed in myriad struggles on the Olympic stage. In Mexico in 1968, violent demonstrations surrounded the Games, and black American athletes used the podium for a dissident political statement - the Black Power salute. In 1972, the Palestinian terrorist group Black September massacred Israeli athletes and were in turn massacred by German authorities. In 1976, the city of Montreal was an armed camp, and the Games served the police as an pretext to harass and disperse a number of leading Quebecois political figures.

However, in the last fifteen years, as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European Communist Party regimes, the rise of globalization and neo-liberalism in the 1980s and 1990s and the complete corporate commercialization and symbolic appropriation of Olympism, the Olympics became purely a showcase for the ideology of transnational capitalism. In 1992, in Barcelona, Nelson Mandela appeared, and used the Games to signal the emergence of the new South Africa. But since then, in terms of ideological contestation, all has been quiet on the Olympic front. Today, a different kind of politics reigns.

Early in the development of the sport nexus, associations between professional teams and entrepreneurial capitalists - stadium owners, team owners, etc. - established a commercial valence to professional sport. With early associations between sports entrepreneurs and local politicians, such teams took on strong civic meanings and identifications, but not national and international ones. The Olympics, however, held out a space that was relatively free of commercialization for a long time (until the late 1960s), and purported to support a different model of sport - 'amateur' sport- in which the intrinsic

sic benefits of athleticism were approvingly meant to outweigh the instrumental values of commercialization. Commercial values were seen to skew the athletic experience for athletes themselves, to unbalance the ideal of active physicality as part of a full life. Whatever the hypocrisies of this ideal - and they were legion - among the IOC and national Olympic organizations, at the level of athletic clubs and popular perception, it spoke to a recognition of the pre-requisites for well-being, and was identified with in positive ways. This charismatic wholesomeness, combined with the fraternal rhetoric and international nature of the IOC project itself, made Olympic athletics much more open to overt political usage (identification) on the national and international levels.

The Corporate Takeover

If cold war competition, anti-colonial, and anti-racist struggles marched across the Olympic stage from the 1950s to the 1980s in the 1990s we have witnessed the full appropriation of patriotism and national sentiment by the transnational corporate order via sport, particularly the Olympics, thanks to the qualitative new relationships of corporate capitalism to Olympic athletes and athletics. Prior to the mid-1970s the relationship of the commercial sector to Olympic sport was still basically patronage at arm's length - if not in terms of stadium construction and international sponsorships, then at least at the level of local clubs and associations. In the 1960s, when athletes competed at track and field meets, they won watches and silver cups. If they were lucky, they might also receive some free shoes and blankets from Adidas or Puma, the two leading shoe manufacturers of the time.

But all that started to change in the 1970s. By then, Western governments had convinced themselves that competing at the Olympic Games was important to international status. Through government subsidies (in Canada and Europe) and through a system of sports scholarships (in the United States), a cadre of highly trained but impoverished athletes was developed, competing in the name of their respective nation states. At the same time, in keeping with their expansive relationships with teams sports and the sport media in the 1970s and 1980s, a number of major corporations turned to Olympic sport and began to demand measurable returns for the funds they directed toward it. Once philanthropic patrons looking for prestige or moral credit, now they became investors who were seeking 'value' (profits), and they began to shape sport more directly for their own purposes.

The endorsement contract between an athlete and a firm whose product he or she would promote was a central pillar of the commercial turn by media and sponsors to Olympic sport. This athlete had long been economically vulnerable, exceedingly hard working, and thoroughly fixated on his or her goal. However, with the death of amateurism, by the 1980s if he or she became the one-in-a-hundred who would succeed in getting a major corporate sponsorship, he or (less often) she could now become a millionaire.⁴ In exchange, the corporation - Adidas, or Coca Cola, or Kodak, or VISA - could further extend its marketing reach. To enhance the spectacle that made this contract so lucrative, sponsors sought alliances with the IOC and National Olympic Committees on the one hand, and the mass media on the other. The introduction of media capital into the Olympic pot was so large during the 1980s and 1990s that it conferred virtual shareholder status on the major networks involved.⁵ NBC's late 1995 deal of \$2.3 billion for Olympic coverage until 2008 makes it as important a player in the Olympic economy as any other single player, and much more important than most. It also places all NBC journalists in the role of publicists, not reporters. *Sports Illustrated*, who paid \$40 million to sponsor the Atlanta Games, placed its writers in the same structural position.

The most important function of sport from the point of view of investing broadcasters and advertisers is audience creation. The ability to bring together young and adult males of means - the prime advertising audience, and what might be referred to as 'the masculinity market' - makes sports outstanding programming, and the Olympics the 'number one sponsorship event' on the planet. This status is the result of strategies pursued since the 1970s by the IOC, and more recently under the pro-corporate leadership of Juan Antonio Samaranch. Today, the contemporary Olympic constellation within the sport nexus as a whole comprises a full range of mature transnational capitalisms, fully engaged in, and committed to the spectacle of elite sport.

The Los Angeles Olympics in 1984 marked a new stage in the corporate metamorphosis of the Olympics that had begun, *sub rosa*, in the 1960s and 1970s⁶. These were the first full-fledged corporate Games, and they demonstrated a new, brassy, wide-open role, no longer covert, for corporate capitalism right at their physical heart. Before 1984, no one would ever have dreamed of suggesting a 'Mars Bar Olympic pool', or that training facilities should be supported by, and named for, McDonald's. In the old code of amateurism, such hybrids would have been abominable. But the L.A. Games came to be known as the 'McLympics' because they brought these new associations out in the open, and put the corporations, along with the IOC, in the Olympic driver's seat.

By 1992 in Barcelona, despite that city's anarcho-syndicalist traditions and Mandela's appearance, the integration of national-Olympic and commercial forms had proceeded even further.⁷ It was evident in the 'Barcelona Bausch and

Lomb Olympic Village' and the 'American Visa Relay Team'.⁸ Where the nation-state had been the dominant term of Olympic competition in the past, represented by the Olympic athlete, now the corporation achieved equal representational status. One Coca Cola commercial featured a blond, handsome, Slavic athlete who leaves behind his (undisclosed) war-torn totalitarian backwater and treks over mountains and valleys, seeking and finally reaching the democratic metropolis of Barcelona. The city, the West, the Olympic Games, and the bottle of Coke are all visually associated, and his reverent voice-over speaks of the 'freedom' he has found.⁹

Speaking of Nike endorser Michael Jordan's refusal to wear a US team uniform at the Games, Frank Deford wrote that 'Jordan essentially chose Nike over country, publicly protesting having to wear the US Olympic uniform just because it was made by the evil Reebokian Empire.'¹⁰ In this case in Barcelona, the corporation's importance surpassed that of the nation state within the Olympic framework. In early September 1998, television commercials were broadcast for an event taking place in Morocco, called 'The Eco-challenge'. This international event appeared to combine Olympic and extreme sports. With slogans such as Team AT&T Canada, once again the hype was patriotic and athletic, and collapsed the national into the corporate. (We also see an example of how corporate propaganda neutralizes dissent by seizing oppositional and transformative notions - in this case 'ecology' - to promote their opposites. There was nothing ecological about this sport event, as the visuals of spandex-covered individuals hammering spikes into desert cliffs and ascending en masse make clear in an instant. This event is a challenge *to* the ecology not a challenge *to be* ecological - but the verbal signage confuses this fundamental fact.)

The intimate association between athletes and the products they advertise, sought by corporate advertisers in the service of merging commercial and national themes, has been expressed in a style of television advertising that has virtually swallowed up the athletics. This style intercuts sporting events with sponsored messages that mimic the 'look' of sport actuality. The seams between sport 'verité' and 'advertising,' already tight in the 1970s simply disappeared in the 1980s and 1990s. In the summer of 1996, leading up to the Atlanta Games, *Time* magazine ran a promotional advertising series of photographic essays by well-known sport photographer Bud Greenspan, that were virtually indistinguishable from the 'journalism' surrounding them. This new visual conflation expressed a new economic association - one in which corporate sponsors have become the real paymasters of Olympism.

As actors who represented overt political agendas disappear from the Olympic stage, those who represent the pure ideology of the corporate order step forward. Today Olympic sport is a celebration of competition itself, and its accomplice, 'winning'. The dramas of Atlanta and Nagano were all personal - either individual rivalries (Donovan Bailey and Michael Johnson, Tara Lupinski and Oksana Baiul) and or athletes' struggles with injuries (Kerri Strug, Elvis Stojko). Televised, these dramas were relentlessly intercut with personal portraits, and with commercials that combined the close-ups of the portraits with the athletic footage of the events. The Russian and Eastern European athletes told of abandoning their countries for the United States, to make more money. Everyone who was anyone was sponsored by an equipment, or finance, or juice company, or all three.

With the riches of the performance contract, however, came a series of terrible pressures on athletes in Olympic sport - pressures that truly subverted many of the positive goals for which the Olympics had stood. The best known of these is probably the pressure to employ harmful performance enhancing drugs. The media make disapproving sounds whenever some poor athlete is caught, and usually that is the end of the matter. (The one notable exception being the long, traumatic inquiry after Ben Johnson's 1988 performance in Seoul).¹¹ Periodically studies are released by academics and *Sports Illustrated* claiming the problem has worsened, but declaring it unstoppable for scientific and economic reasons. This basic indifference is a clear sign that the use of such substances is not a problem that will be addressed seriously or systematically within Olympic and other professional sport. The athletes are punished while the real guilty parties go free and the systemic causes remain in place.

What is perhaps worse than the shameful periodic scapegoating of individual athletes is that we never debate publicly the values that drive this abusive drug culture. These values are embedded in the zero-sum contests glamorized in IOC Olympism. The message is that only 'winners' who win 'gold' count - to the marketing departments of the sponsoring corporations. In the contemporary Olympic economy and in its discourse two values dominate. Capitalist competition is evident, though incorrectly valued. The other - masculinism - is still largely invisible, but equally powerful from an ideological perspective.

Winners and Losers: Neo-liberalism and the Ideology of Competition

The rise of neo-liberal economics and neo-conservative politics in many of the most important industrial countries, and the transnational corporatization of the Olympics, have gone hand in hand. From Britain's Margaret Thatcher (ideologue and trailblazer), through the United State's Ronald Reagan, to our very own Brian Mulroney, generally large

‘C’ Conservatives first implemented the domestic and international fiscal and state policies demanded by neo-liberal economics. Hence, especially in the U.S., but also in Canada and the U.K., these policies were often cloaked in a neo-conservative rhetoric that invoked the sanctity of the individual and the traditional, father-headed family. Rhetoric aside, the objective import of these policies can now be measured. Judged by what has been accomplished, these policies have effected:

- the transfer of wealth from the less affluent to the more affluent: economic stratification has concentrated wealth into ever fewer hands, in all countries where such policies have obtained;¹² and
- the erosion of the powers of the nation state and its ability to regulate (‘set barriers’) to transnational capital.

Both these objectives have been pursued through similar strategies: divesting and privatizing public resources, enterprises and services; expanding the coercive apparatus of the state (prisons, police, military); restricting representative forums (through private concentration of the mass media); and divesting the state of key regulatory functions - including with respect to labour and employment, the environment, health, and education - that have to do, directly and indirectly, with restrictions on the flow of private capital.

The idea of competitiveness (accompanied by ‘higher productivity’ and ‘belt-tightening’) has been at the core of neo-liberal politics, the rhetorical *raison d’être* of its policies, the holy grail that, once attained, will somehow magically grant a return to former wealth. In reality, in its name, living standards have fallen for the majority of people, mass unemployment has taken place, degradation of the environment has been hastened, and the gains of thirty years of feminism and environmentalism, and many more decades of trade unionism have been eroded. The transnational corporate order has sought to naturalize the idea that the unregulated market is all, and that competition is its life blood. If enough people accept this idea, it will be possible to continue dissolving all of the constraints on private capital represented by national, social, and environmental state functions, laws, and structures brought into being by pro-social movements in the past. This is the process at the centre of what is referred to as ‘globalization’.

Sport plays a central role, if not *the* central role, in modeling and celebrating competitiveness in our culture. Sport is where competition is celebrated for its own sake, where the ideology of winners and losers is ritually confirmed and spectacularly celebrated. Sports’ heroic idols no longer aspire to be like Muhammad Ali or John Carlos, but to follow in the footsteps of Charles Barkely or Michael Jordan. Jordan gets more in advertising fees than the combined payroll of Nike’s southeast Asian factory workers making ‘his’ shoes - about \$30 million dollars. With the super-rich, corporate-promoting athlete as a model for the black ‘underclass’, for other minorities that identify with U.S. blacks, and for young boys in general, there is little need to worry about dissent, let alone revolution. No-one working to be like Jordan is going to rock the political boat. (Jordan declined to support a progressive black candidate running against Senator Jesse Helms because, in his words, ‘Republicans wear shoes too.’) Since its commercialization, Olympic sport now joins with other professional sports in creating compliance among young athletes in sustaining a system in which only a fraction of them can ‘win’. Those who do become iconic, thanks to sports journalism, advertising, and celebrity culture. They embody and symbolize the competitive and ultimately elitist performance principle of capitalism throughout the culture.

Contemporary sport is a sacrificial system and, like our socio-economic system, it sacrifices the many for the few. In addition, it sacrifices the bodies of successful athletes for the spectacle itself. The acceptance of sacrificial ideology as a core belief - though it is never named as such - is part of the ideology of ‘competitiveness’, for the reflex to demand why such sacrifices are necessary and to develop alternatives is effectively suppressed. At the same time, its heroics are mobilized to promote consumerism as a way of life that must be pursued, defended, and extended, even as the global environmental crisis shows us that it is a doomed socio-economic order.¹³ In this sense, the commercialization of sport has a (de)politicizing effect on professional athletes, and on those who identify with them - it encourages them to accommodate themselves to present socio-economic arrangements.

To note the obvious, perhaps, movements such as neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism tend to support cultural practices that promote the values inherent in their economic and political enterprises. They will gravitate to cultural practices that partake of, and symbolize, competition and domination, and emphasize active consumerism and passive citizenship. Neo-liberals and neo-cons love sport. Secular neo-liberals are extremely enthusiastic about sport: Bush, Reagan, Ford, and Nixon, to name the last four Republican presidents, were football crazy. But John F. Kennedy was an enthusiast, and Bill Clinton is a fan too. Sport has become the leading trope used in the discourses of patriotism, aggressive business practice, sexual performance, and war. Indeed, to further explore this, it is necessary to shift focus from the structures and ideologies of corporate capitalism in relation to sport and politics, to those of patriarchy or, preferably, masculinism.

Sport, Masculinism, and Globalization

Enthusiasm for the ideological power of sport is also a feature of the theocratic Right and is used as a way to speak to, recruit, and motivate men in their affiliated men's movements. The example of 'Promise Keepers' is most eloquent. This Christian men's movement has involved more than 20 million men in its rallies and activities in the last three years, and has an annual budget of more than \$60 million. It was founded by a university football coach and launched from the university basketball court in Denver, Colorado. Its whole rhetoric is based on 'combat and sport' and these are mobilized to help rebuild a battered sense of masculinity and construct an ideal of manhood based on the notion that men must 'lead in families and in the community, and that men have been unmanned by feminists and homosexuals.'¹⁴ Indeed, in its role as masculine and masculinist culture, sport is a very important unifying factor between the secular and religious right, as well as across classes, ethnicities, and nations.

Since the 1970s and the rise of second wave feminism, women in significant numbers have taken on sports that were previously the exclusive domain of men. Women athletes now compete in hockey, basketball, track and field, as well as in body building and boxing. While they are still far from equal participants, the principle of their equal right to participation has largely been established in Olympic rhetoric, and there has been a steady progression towards their integration. We may count this a major step forward for gender equality. On the other hand, we have seen nothing like a mass incursion by men into sports such as figure skating or gymnastics (sports that provide a more expressive gestural repertoire for men) or into non-sport physical disciplines such as dance. Thus women's inclusion in sport has changed the ratio of men to women in what was once a male preserve. But, at least to date, it has not changed its core culture, its rituals, or its values. These remain masculinist, with sports that involve zero-sum contests 'at the extremes of the male body', to paraphrase Messner's words. Hence, even if women become integrated into sport in its present forms and institutions, these would continue to have masculinist cultural and political implications in the broader society.

By far the most important of these implications, are the ways that ideas of athleticized masculine heroics colour ideas of government, social policy, and state formation. A culture that worships competition, domination, might-equals-right, winner-take-all, or hypermasculine qualities in its mass physical culture, will easily come to see the functions of the state that represent the socialization of women's and communal labour - work concerned with health, education and social well-being, and that requires cooperation - as soft, unnecessary, dispensable, as fat that can be trimmed. By contrast, expenditure on prisons, the military, and police will be seen as heroic, serious, hard, lean, competitive, and important. Within such a culture, measures to fund preventive programs will be seen as 'too expensive'; but money will be found to house hundreds of thousands of young offenders in the North American prison-industrial complex. In 1995, the amount the United States spent on prisons exceeded that spent on universities for the first time in its history. Canada lags behind in the neo-liberal political revolution, with its emphasis on the macho state, though it is quickly trying to catch up in Ontario at least.

The owners of sport teams and facilities, and their counterparts in other sport-related industries, present the public subsidy of sport infrastructure - which runs to the billions of dollars each year in North America - as a legitimate expense in the public interest. At the same time, through their support to neo-conservative governments and neo-liberal economic policies, they are complicit in withdrawing public subsidies not only from health, welfare, and education but also from publicly supported cultural enterprises (such as PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States, and the CBC and the Canada Council for the Arts in Canada).¹⁵ In Cleveland in 1995, for example, the city government managed to find \$540 million for stadium construction after laying off 400 staff members (including 200 teachers) from its school system. In effect, the city opted to subsidize the enterprises of masculinist culture, rather than decent public education.

The Right/Left distinctions between neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideas of government (with their support to the coercive state apparatus) on the one hand, and liberal and social democratic ideas of government (with their support to redistributive measures that secure the well-being of society as a whole) on the other, are usually ascribed to identifications rooted in economic positions and interests - capitalist or petit-bourgeois versus working class and socialist, for example. In addition to these identifications, those properly related to position and interests in the gender order are also powerfully at work. The ideas and the morality of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism have been informed by the relations of gender-class and the values of masculinism, as well as by those of economic class.

Morality in this instance refers to a set of values transmitted through socialization of the young, rewards to the successful, codification in law, and celebration in collective ritual. The dominant morality of the United States, like other moralities that have emerged from imperialist nations, is schizoid. On the one hand, much is made in political rhetoric of democracy, egalitarianism, peace, and national well-being. Every politician, regardless of affiliation, purports to speak in the name of these values. In sport discourse, these ideas are reflected in the ethos of good sportsmanship and inclusive

participation. We may call these the pro-social values. At the same time, in the elitist and coercive values endorsed and kept alive by various institutions of masculinist culture (with sport in the lead), an alternative, indeed opposite, morality that validates force is affirmed. What may be referred to as 'coercive entitlement', this system supports values that are anti-democratic, elitist, and bellicose or anti-social values.

Because of its power in childhood and young adulthood, the culture of sport helps to establish the values of coercive entitlement in emotional impulses and core identifications laid down early in life. When, later, adults who have absorbed the lessons of its socialization are confronted with political choices, these impulses and identifications may become more decisive in forming their views than the findings of social science about the value of public services, or impassioned appeals for socio-economic equality.

Conclusion

With great respect intended to the many accomplished scholars and dedicated sport reformers who are part of the Olympic movement, Olympic sport should not be regarded as a vehicle to advance either the physical well-being of the majority of Canadians, or the political well-being of democratic societies. Hence, Toronto's Olympic bid should be opposed. In late August, Premier Lucien Bouchard turned down a request for subsidy to the Montreal Expos, and declared that neither cash subsidies nor tax breaks would be extended to professional sport any longer, given the pressing needs of health and education. As suggested by Stephen Brunt of the *Globe and Mail*, and Dave Perkins of the *Toronto Star*, Olympic mega-projects (or other sport mega-projects) do not represent effective strategies for urban development. They do not have a track record of improving municipal economies or - most important - of helping to make active physicality more accessible to ordinary people.

According to the Surgeon-General of the United States, approximately fifteen per cent of U.S. adults engage regularly in vigorous physical activity during leisure time. Approximately twenty-two per cent of adults engage regularly in moderate physical activity. Walking, yard work, and gardening are, for example, by far the most popular of any physical activities. Still, this leaves the majority of Americans - over sixty per cent - without much exercise, certainly much less than the amount recommended by bodies such as The President's Council on Fitness and Sport and the Centers for Disease Control. Approximately twenty-five per cent of U.S. adults are not active at all. Among young people (age 12-21) only half are vigorously active on a regular basis. The patterns of activity and inactivity follow the patterns of privilege and disadvantage: 'inactivity is more common among affluent than non-affluent; more common among women than men, more common among African American and Hispanic adults than whites; and more common among older rather than younger persons'¹⁶.

Patterns for physical activity and inactivity in Canada show similar contours. According to the *1995 Physical Activity Monitor*, only two in five Canadian adults are active enough to benefit their cardiovascular health.¹⁷ Statistics Canada contends that only seventeen per cent of Canadians exercise regularly in their leisure time.¹⁸ Of active Canadians, the majority are only moderately active, and favour non-sport activities such as walking (seventy-four per cent), gardening, home exercise, social dancing, swimming, cycling, skating, baseball, bowling, jogging, weight training, and golf (in descending order of popularity). Gradual increases in population activity levels in the moderate-exercise category have been registered since 1981 in 'unstructured, low cost activities that can often be done outside facilities', reflecting a greater understanding of the importance of exercise in the population as a whole. But vigorous activity levels by about one fifth of the population, overlapping with competitive sport participation, have not increased.

The barriers to sport participation in Canada, as in the United States, are correlated to gender, socio-economic status, and age: affluent Canadians exercise more often than non-affluent Canadians; men exercise more than women; white persons more than people of colour; young people exercise more than adults. Indeed, as the *Monitor* noted: "The three resources or services that rank the highest in helping Canadians to be active are infrastructure supports: access to safe streets and public places, affordable facilities, services and programs, and paths, trails, and green spaces."¹⁹ The Olympic Games do nothing to advance these supports, and often drains funds away from them.

Advocates of high performance sport often maintain that there should be a seamless continuum between popular recreation and Olympic sport. However, in practice, by supporting high-performance and professional sport, our public authorities have starved popular sport, and other popular fitness and health related physical activities that have nothing to do with sport. In Canada, where the federal government funds elite (Olympic) athletes directly and supports these and team sports indirectly (through public university funding, business and tax concessions, and stadium subsidization), this trend can be plotted.²⁰

Hence, what is suggested here are policies that both expand the place of physical culture within our lives (vital to our individual and physical well-being), and work to diminish the centrality of high-performance sport in that culture, by offering many other ways for people to be active, and creating the real social supports that make it possible for the majority of people to be healthfully active.²⁰ In our educational and recreation systems, we need to broaden physical culture beyond sport to include dance, eastern disciplines, non-competitive games, and other, emergent physical activities. If we inculcate and valorize the anti-social values of contemporary sport culture, we should not be surprised to see those values replicated in the political arena. Acknowledging the power of physicality and ritual, if we want to use our physical culture to develop capacities for citizenship, we need to use it to teach different lessons and affirm different values.

Such a perspective is built around five principles, all of which have many strategic and tactical applications, depending on context and objectives. These are:

1. *Diminish the selective brutalization of males inside and outside sport.* Put an end to the ways that sport, in the name of masculinity, creates systemic maltreatment of young males, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. This does not mean that physical culture should not include elements of risk or danger; rather that such elements be bound by and related to pro-social values and goals, equalized between the genders, and achieved in non-abusive ways.

2. *Encourage girls and women to be vigorously active and to learn physical disciplines* that do not promote anorexia. This will help to diminish the disempowering impact of the way that sport and gender culture more generally treat women's athleticism, and encourage subjectivity in women.²²

3. *Change the 'sacrificial' nature of sport for both sexes.* Performance standards that involve harm to the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of athletes of both sexes send at least three anti-social messages: First, that we value gladiator-like contests, whether of brutal inter-male violence or the more refined self-administered violence of individual Olympic sports. Second, that such violence, and hence other kinds of economic and social violence, is legitimate and rewarding. Third, that self-harm in the service of conforming to physical and social standards is important for success in life.

4. *Shift the emphasis from aggressive and competitive to cooperative and expressive games and disciplines.* We need to develop a game culture of mutual benefit and personal realization through physical activity, not one of 'mutually exclusive goal attainment' or 'zero-sum' competition.

5. *Pursue lively physicality for the majority.* The governments of the United States and Canada have admirable goals and objectives for the fitness and health of their populations. But unless the resources are devoted to creating accessible services and facilities, and to providing the social supports necessary to make access meaningful, all ideas of democratizing physical culture will remain just that - ideas without any hold in reality.

These directions, if pursued, would take us a long distance from the present sport culture and economy of the Olympic Games. All of humanity is challenged today with the epochal task of devising greater means of cooperation - not competition; and with working to achieve peace and environmental balance, not war and the ecological destruction wrought by unregulated industry and resource extraction. Given the importance ascribed to the enculturating and socializing power of sport - and given many of the progressive ideas that Olympic sport has represented in the past - it is hoped that those within it will find ways to become a more progressive force in the future.

Endnotes

- 1 See Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics and the Culture of Sport*, University of Toronto Press (Spring, 1999).
- 2 Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*, University of Toronto Press (1996), 150-6.
- 3 See Paula Welch and D. Margaret Costa 'A century of Olympic competition,' in D. Margaret Costa and Sharon Guthrie, *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Human Kinetics, Urbana-Champaign (1994), 123-138.

- 4 Men get many more endorsements than women. Male athletes with a 'bad' image (e.g., NBA star Charles Barkley), get lots of endorsements, but only 'good women (read compliant in body styles and vocabularies of traditional femininity) like Nancy Kerrigan and Mary Lou Retton have any real chance at scoring the Olympic gold. Apparently black women athletes - who by racist definition seem incapable of achieving the 'sugar-and-spice' image - have gotten even fewer endorsements than white women; although now that women's professional basketball has been launched, and Venus Williams has emerged in tennis, we may see some change in this. In 1994, Debi Thomas, an African-American skater who competed in Calgary and Albertville, told PBS news (MacNeil-Lehrer Hour, February 1994) that she had received virtually no offers. Even Jackie Joyner Kersee, arguably the finest woman athlete in the world at the time, had received no major offers. Kristi Yamaguchi, on the other hand, the winning American figure skater, did extremely well as 'America's Sweetheart'.
- 5 Fees for television rights to the Olympics payable to the IOC have been enormously profitable in the corporate period. In 1984, the IOC charged ABC what seemed an outrageous \$175 million for the rights to the Los Angeles Games. The sport world, including the sport media, was horrified. Yet despite a dire prediction in 1986 by *Sports Illustrated* that television would begin to lose interest in covering the Olympics, NBC paid \$300 million for Seoul in 1988, \$401 million for Barcelona in 1992, and \$465 million for the rights to the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. Finally, we have NBC's \$2.3 billion. 'The implications for the other networks are potentially devastating from a programming standpoint... In 1996, the Super Bowls, the baseball All-Star Game, the NBA Finals as well as the Atlanta Olympics will all be on NBC, as well as the US Open gold tournament, Wimbledon, The French Open tournament and the Breeder's Cup. Never before will so many sport top events have been gathered in one place,' Sally Jenkins, 'Peacock Power', *Sports Illustrated*, (December 25, 1995).
- 6 See Vyv Simpson and Andrew Jennings, *The Lords of the Rings: Power Money and Drugs in the Modern Olympics* (Toronto 1992).
- 7 For a commentary on the ironies of the Barcelona Games, as well as on some of the ways Barcelona used the games to improve - rather than destroy - poor and working class neighbourhoods, see Vincente Navarro, 'The Olympic's untold stories', *In These Times* (September 2-15, 1992).
- 8 For a lament on the corporatization of the Barcelona games, see Frank Deford, 'Bring Back the Communists!', *Newsweek* (August 10, 1992), 23. For a lament on the reduction of the Lillehammer Winter Olympics to the sordid Nancy Kerrigan-Tonya Harding story, see Lewis Cole, 'Going for the green', *The Nation* (March 28, 1994), 426-428.
- 9 'Before, we had to win for the government, for politics, for communism. The freedom we now have can lead us to making very good money for ourselves. Now we can reap what we sow. Now, if I win, I become a famous person, I become a rich person. All athletes respond to this motivation.' Russian swimmer Yevgeny Sadovyi, in William Oscar Johnson and Jeff Lilley, 'Swimmers for sale', *Sports Illustrated* (August 10, 1992) 46.
- 10 Frank Deford, 'Running Man', *Vanity Fair* (August 1993), 54.
- 11 See Varda Burstyn, 'The Sporting Life,' *Saturday Night*, (March 1990), 44-49, Angela Taylor-Issajenko (as told to Martin O'Malley and Karen O'Reilly), *Running Risks*, Toronto (1990), and John M. Hoberman and Charles E. Yesalis, 'The history of synthetic testosterone', *Scientific American*, (February 1995) 76-81.
- 12 See Chris Mulhill, 'Poverty is the worlds greatest killer', *Guardian Weekly* (May 7, 1995). See also 'Poor and overweight', *Associated Press, Globe and Mail* (December 5, 1995) and Robert Evans, Morris Barer and Theodore Marmor, *Why Are Some People Healthy and Others Not? The Determinants of the Health of the Population* (New York 1994).
- 13 A current ad for Gatorade is exemplary of how specific communications for trivial products convey these meta-messages. Athletes shot in black and white action and close-up photography (signifying importance, seriousness) are enhanced by neon coloured sweat or tears, the same colour as the bottle of Gatorade the athlete is brandishing. 'Is it in you? the authoritative male voice-over demands, alluding at once to the performance principle and the commodity. 'Life is sport. Drink it up,' he commands over the final shot.

- 14 Joe Conason, Alfred Ross and Lee Cokorinos, 'The Promise Keepers Are Coming: The third wave of the religious right', *The Nation* 263, No.10 (October 7, 1996), 11-18, William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, (New York, 1996), 349-353, and Joan Breckenridge and Gay Abbate, 'Movement issues "wake up call" to Canadian men,' *Globe and Mail* (September 25 1995).
- 15 Regarding the politics of the NEA and broader Left/Right cultural conflicts, see William Martin, *With God on our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York 1996), Richard Bolton (ed.), *Culture Wars*, (New York, 1992), and Robert Hughes, *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America* (New York 1993). Regarding the politics of public broadcasting, see James Ledbetter, *Made Possible by...: The Death of Public Broadcasting in the United States*, (London, Verso, 1997), Willard D. Rowland, Jr. and Michael Tracey, 'Worldwide challenges to public broadcasting' *Journal of Communication*, 40 (2) (Spring) 1990, and Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Global Capitalism*, (London (1997)). Regarding the crisis of public broadcasting in Canada, see Wayne Skene, *Fade to Black: A Requiem for the CBC*, (Vancouver-Toronto, 1997).
- 16 These and other statistics in this paragraph from *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon-General*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington D.C. (July 1996) Chapter 5.
- 17 *1997 Physical Activity Monitor*, The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Ottawa, 1995.
- 18 *National Population Health Survey Overview 1994-95*, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, 1997, 12.
- 19 *1997 Physical Activity Monitor*, The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Ottawa, 1997.
- 20 Jean Harvey, 'Sport policy and the welfare state', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5 (1988), 313-329. On the ideological value of the 'ideology of excellence', see Bruce Kidd, 'Canada and the ideology of excellence', in Pasquale Galasso, ed. *The Philosophy of Sport and Physical Activity*, (Toronto 1988), 11-31.
- 21 'Women's double or triple workdays constitute one of the primary barriers to taking up a sport or physical activity as a leisure pursuit. For example, for women whose workdays include paid employment, child care and domestic work, part-time study and volunteer work...the idea of entitlement to leisure may seem laughable.' Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, 'What's sport got to do with it?' *Canadian Woman Studies*, 5, no. 4 (Fall 1995), 6-10.
- 22 '...[C]hildhood sports teach boys to use their bodies in skilled, forceful ways while providing them a detailed and accurate knowledge of their physical capacities, and limits. Boys learn how to develop force (through leverage, coordination, and follow-through) and to transmit this power through their limbs or through extensions, like balls, bats and golf clubs. In contrast ... the movement patterns of most girls are characterized by their partiality, by their failure to take ... advantage ... of the torque that is generated when the entire body is mobilized in a throw, a swing, or a tackle.' David Whitson, "The Embodiment of Gender: Discipline, Domination and Empowerment," in Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole, eds *Women, Sport and Culture*, (Urbana- Champaign, IL 1994), 354.