

---

# *The Olympic Flame and Torch: Running Towards Sydney 2000*

Janet Cahill  
University of Technology-Sydney, Australia

---

## **Introduction**

The Olympic flame and torch are significant symbols of the Olympic Games and are important in linking the general public with the festival. They are internationally recognized symbols, particularly important at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. "It is through the opening and closing ceremonies and the torch relay that the Olympiad must distinguish itself from another series of world championships" (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976: 280).

Greenberg describes the Olympic flame as symbolising "the endeavour for perfection and the struggle for victory" (1983:244). This paper will look at the history and evolution of the Olympic flame and the Olympic torch and discuss the significance each has had in past Olympic Games. The Olympic flame which is ceremonially kindled in Olympia, Greece provides the flame for the Olympic torch. The term Olympic flame also refers to the flame that burns in the Olympic Stadium, after having been lit by the Olympic torch. The International Olympic Committee (IOC), in its Olympic Charter, defines the Olympic flame as that which is kindled in Olympia under the authority of the IOC. The IOC holds all rights of any kind relating to the use of the Olympic flame (IOC, 1994:27). The Olympic torches are the receptacles on which the Olympic flame is carried to the Olympic Stadium, where it lights the Olympic flame that will burn for the duration of the Olympic Games. The IOC, in its Olympic Charter, defines the Olympic torch as:

An Olympic torch is a torch, or a replica thereof, on which the Olympic flame burns. The IOC holds all rights of any kind relating to the use of the Olympic torch (IOC, 1994:27).

Any of the celebrations or ceremonies held in relation to the Olympic flame and/or lighting of the Olympic torch must be approved by the IOC. The organising committee for the Olympic Games in the designated host city is responsible for transporting the Olympic flame from Olympia in Greece, where it is lit under the direction of the Hellenic Olympic Committee, to the Olympic Stadium prior to the Opening Ceremony. The Olympic torch is generally transferred from Greece to the Host City by relay. It is taken into the Olympic Stadium by a relay of runners, the last of whom circles the Stadium before lighting the Olympic flame. "The lighting of the Olympic flame shall be followed by a symbolic release of pigeons" (IOC, 1994:111). The pigeons, or doves, are a sign of peace, and this symbolism was demonstrated at the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympic Games with the release of dove-shaped balloons. Attached to each bio-degradable dove was a message of peace from the children of Nagano.

Once the Olympic flame is lit, it must be placed in a clearly visible position within the Olympic Stadium. It is also desirable that the Olympic flame be visible from outside the Olympic Stadium. The Olympic flame remains afire in the Stadium for the duration of the Olympic Games. At the Closing Ceremony it is extinguished, signalling the end of the Games, and the cue for the Olympic Anthem to be played and the Olympic flag to be lowered. These rituals have become an important part of an Olympic Games, in addition to watching the world's elite athletes compete, since "it's the Games' rich, evocative ceremonies that leave us with lumps in our throats" (Pousner, 1996:n.p.).

However, the Olympic flame is not merely the flame that burns in the Olympic stadium, nor is the Olympic torch simply the vessel that carries the flame. The significance of these two symbols has grown with each successive modern Olympiad since their introduction, although they were not without significance in the Ancient Games.

It has been suggested by historians that the flame was born in a temple erected by the ancient Greeks to honour Hera, the powerful queen of the mythological gods. To kindle the flame, the ancient Greeks used a *skaphia* (a type of crucible) to concentrate the Sun's rays and set fire to dry grass. The use of a parabolic mirror to light the flame for each modern Olympic Games, was directly inspired by this ancient ceremony (History of the Olympic Torch Relays: 1936-1992", 1996). Research also indicates that this ceremony, conducted at the Temple of Hera, is over 2000 years old (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1992). In ancient Greece, vestal nuns (or vestal virgins) dedicated their lives to guarding the sacred Olympic fire to ensure that it was never extinguished. They took a vow of chastity and received special privileges and rights for their solemn dedication to the flame (Yalouris, 1979). Based on this tradition, the flame lighting ceremony in modern-day Olympia is re-enacted by Greek women portraying "vestal virgins" for each Olympic Games in accordance with the "customs of antiquity", as related by Plutarch in 'the Life of Numa Pompilius' (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976:282). This re-enactment consists of the official entourage of the Olympic torch relay entering the precinct of the holy Altis, (the sanctuary of Zeus), to witness the ritual lighting of the flame by a "high priestess" (in the absence of modern day persona for this role, the part is played by a Greek actor). The high priestess kneels near the temple of Hera and "draws a pure flame from the sun's rays", when the flame is kindled, the "high priestess" lifts the Olympic flame towards the sky before placing it in a clay urn (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976:282).

In respect of the torch in ancient Greece, an examination of narratives from this period and their Games reveal that a race called the *Lampadedromia*, derived from the Greek work "lampas" meaning torch, and "dromos" (course or running), was staged. Yalouris (1979) describes the *Lampadedromia* as beginning in approximately the 4th century B.C., whilst Slowikowski states that it possibly could have originated at the end of the 8th century B.C., but was definitely a torch-relay race by the 6th century B.C. (1991:241). Originally, this race was run by individuals as a part of local Greek Games held in honour of a god or a patron of the city. The race was considered to be more ritualistic than competitive and its purpose was to carry the torch safely from one point in the city to another without its being extinguished. This "sacred" meaning of the race remained long after it had become a relay-race. In either type of race, the torch had to be transported swiftly "to preserve its purity and power" (Yalouris, 1979:248). The relay ended at the altar of the god or patron in whose honour the festival was being held, where the winner used his torch to light the sacrificial fire.

Yalouris (1979) also describes a torch race where the competitors were the Epheboi, the different tribes of a city. At official events, each tribe submitted a team into the torch running event. This gives an interesting insight into the torch relay of the modern day Olympics. The torch relay is often run by a cross section of various communities, the last runner having the honour of lighting the "sacrificial fire", these days epitomised by the Olympic flame in the main stadium.

Research thus indicates that the origins of the use of fire and torches in the Ancient Greek Games stems from both a religious ritual and a team race, although it was first and foremost a religious ceremony. The modern-day torch relay and flame lighting ceremonies, both at Olympia and at the Olympic Stadium following the torch relay, may be considered to have religious ceremonies or rituals similar to their counterparts in ancient times.

The modern tradition of the presence of an Olympic flame was introduced at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam where "above the Marathon entrance tower a flame was burning, not at the Opening Ceremony but in the evening, when the stadium was lit up" (Müller, 1994:108). For the duration of these Games, the smoke from the flame by day and the glow of its fire at night announced that the Olympic Games were in progress. Subsequently, the flame has not only been present, but has become an important symbol of the Olympic Games, having gradually increased in stature over the years. "The lighting of the flame at Olympia and its delivery to the central arena of the Games has become an important tradition of the Games" (Olympic Games Moscow, 1980:260). So much of a tradition in fact, that the flame has become central to the public's perception of the Olympic Games.

Whilst the Olympic flame was introduced at the 1928 Olympic Games, a torch relay did not precede the lighting of the flame cauldron. However, at the Closing Ceremony, an "unknown hand spelled out on the scoreboard "*May the Olympic torch pursue its way through the ages*" (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976: 290). This may have given ideas to the organisers of the 1936 Olympics to introduce a torch relay ceremony at those Games. Whilst Borgers

(1996) concedes that it has not been possible to determine who should be given credit for the introduction of the flame at the 1928 Olympic Games, Carl Diem is generally given credit for the idea of introducing the torch relay at the 1936 Olympic Games. Another theory proposed by Borgers (1996) and Müller (1996) is that the idea of such an event may have been sown in the minds of the German NOC by Pierre de Coubertin as early as 1912, and may have also influenced the organisers of the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games.

Berlin was to have hosted the 1916 Olympic Games which were cancelled due to the first World War. At a dinner on 27 June 1912, closing the Stockholm Games, Pierre de Coubertin addressed the guests stating “through our mediation a great people has received the torch of the Olympiads from your hands, and has thereby undertaken to preserve and if possible to quicken its precious flame” (Borgers, 1996:12). Borgers (1996) presents the idea that perhaps Pierre de Coubertin can be referred to as the “re-igniter” of the Olympic flame, with further comments made by de Coubertin at the closing of the 1920 Games in Antwerp “May the Olympic Torch follow its course throughout the ages for the good of a humanity ever more ardent, courageous and pure” (Borgers, 1996:12). Regardless of who may take credit, the 1936 Olympic Games staged the first torch relay, and the significance of the Olympic torch became “one of the strongest symbols of the Games with the first relay of the Flame from Olympia to Berlin, the host city that year” (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976: 280).

Around 1940, during World War II, criticism arose suggesting the introduction of the torch relay at the 1936 Olympic Games may have been a National Socialist addition to the Games by the Nazi regime. As the Olympic Games of 1940 and 1944 were cancelled due to World War II, it was another eight years before the next torch relay was run. The first Games to be held after the War were the Winter Games of 1948 in St. Moritz, and the organising committee decided against continuing with the “Nazi” introduction of a torch relay. The IOC later decided to continue with the idea of a torch relay for the 1948 summer Olympic Games in London. However, the torch relay route would detour around Germany, which led to the idea that the route include Lausanne, Switzerland, and include a ceremony at the graveside of Pierre de Coubertin (Buschmann and Lennartz 1996: 130). Further, the first torchbearer for this relay, Corporal Dimetrelis of Greece, ran in his athlete’s uniform instead of military uniform to “symbolise the Olympic truce of Antiquity, which was declared in ancient Greece during the period of the Olympic Games so that spectators and athletes could travel safely to and from Olympia” (IOC, 1996: 16).

Since the 1948 summer Games, the tradition of the Olympic torch relay has been followed by each ensuing Olympic Games as a prelude to the Opening Ceremony. As with other Olympic traditions, the Olympic torch relay has evolved and Slowikowski (1991) alleges that “in consecutive Games, the (Olympic) sport-flame altar is higher and/or larger than the previous Olympiad” (1991:246). This is perhaps adding another dimension to the Olympic Motto “Citius, Altius, Fortius” (IOC, 1994:20), in attempting to advance the flame as ‘faster, higher, stronger’, the flame becomes bigger, therefore brighter and more conspicuous at each successive Olympic Games, allowing it a stronger influence in the Games, and over those who revere it as a symbol of the Games. It may also encourage the host nation to have a greater level of awareness and pride in staging the Olympic Games.

In the past two decades, the official Olympic Games Organising Committee reports have increasingly depicted the flame ceremony and torch relay as being central elements of the Olympic Games. The first in-depth description of the Olympic flame and torch relay was found in the official report of the 1984 Games in Los Angeles. This topic has since been included and expanded in each subsequent Olympic Organising Committee’s official report, providing descriptive and logistical details of the ceremonies and relays. Some official reports on the Summer Olympic Games, such as those prepared by the British Olympic Committee and the Australian Olympic Committee, include a brief report on the Winter Olympics held in the same Olympiad. However, these rarely comment on the torch lighting ceremony.

This non-inclusion, and then limited coverage of the Olympic flame and torch in the official reports from 1928 to 1984 indicates that the Olympic torch events have not been an important focus of the Olympic Games until recent Olympiads, even though the symbols of the flame and torch have become increasingly important. However, it must be noted that prior to mass media, mobile camera crews and the Internet, the torch relay could not be easily broadcast live across the world. In such times, the torch relay would have been the only possible chance for many of the general public of the host nation to witness an “Olympic event,” and therefore would have been very significant to those who had this opportunity (Martin, 1996, pers. comm., 9 May).

Today, the Olympic flame and torch have become a strong symbol to athletes and spectators. When the flame is kindled at Olympia it is this moment that signifies the beginning of the Olympic saga. The length of the torch relay can run from a few days (Montreal, 1976) to a few months (Los Angeles, 1984 and Atlanta, 1996). This time-span offers a build-up to the Opening Ceremony, as well as extra mileage for sponsors of the Olympic Games to advertise the forthcoming event. Furthermore, it offers a longer time frame for a larger community involvement in the relay.

The community involvement in the Olympic flame and torch ceremonies has increased with each Olympic Games. From its inception at the 1928 Games, the lighting of the Olympic flame appears to have symbolised a moment of truth for spectators and athletes, where they can join in unity and recognise and understand the ideals that the Olympic Games can offer. The flame ceremony at the opening of the 1932 Olympic Games, being the second time the flame was displayed at the Games, has been described by the British Olympic Association with some reverence: ‘This [Los Angeles] stadium has become synonymous in the minds of people with the pure spirit of amateurism. At one end of the ellipse the Olympic torch towered aloft on a massive peristyle, bearing upon the facade a message of idealism for the inspiration of spectator and contestant alike. It was in this Stadium that the Olympic torch was kindled during the Opening Ceremony . . . to burn continuously for sixteen days and nights’ (British Olympic Association, 1932:22). Forty-four years later, at the flame lighting ceremony in Ottawa en route to Montreal, the flame was transmitted by satellite from Athens. The Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau said: “In this Flame we can see a reflection of the courage and ardour employed by the champion athletes in reaching their goals. Runners will soon relay this Flame to Montreal so that, for two weeks, that city may become the universally acknowledged centre of excellence” (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976:286). The Prime Minister’s description of seeing courage and ardour in the flame’s reflection is indicative of the reverence that the flame holds for those who behold it and of the importance of the principles for which it stands. In addition to the Olympic flame and torch being revered symbols amongst those taking part in the Olympic Games, they also offer religious significance to those seeking to identify the ideals of Olympism with the divine.

The irony of this significance is that when Christianity became the official religion in ancient Greece, it was in part responsible for the demise of the Ancient Games (Mouratidis, 1992:49). However, today, Christian organisations associate themselves with the Olympic Games and many groups take the association very seriously. For example, the (Greek Orthodox) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios made an official visit to the IOC headquarters in Switzerland where he spoke of the flame and the significance of encouraging “noble-minded competition and exercise of the body and spirit” (International Olympic Committee, 1996:58). He associated this with the theological tradition of the Orthodox Church, of taking part in the exercise of “seeking the divine uncreated light” (International Olympic Committee, 1996:59). It would appear that he was trying to build some association between the Olympics, the revered flame, and the ideals of the Orthodox Church.

Further, upon receiving the Olympic flame from the Hellenic Olympic Committee in Greece, Father de la Sablonniere of the Canadian Olympic Association declared, “We thank our Greek friends, who protect the Olympic ideals with resolute faith and maintain inviolable the holiness of this Flame. May it [the flame] unite the athletes and youth of the world in fraternity, loyalty, joy and peace” (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976:285). Monseigneur Lafontaine, a Canadian representative of the Catholic Church, spoke to the crowd gathered before the 1976 Olympic flame on its spiritual meaning: “The Flame burns before the illuminated cross that dominates the City of Montreal. Surely it could not have found a more fitting resting-place” (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976:288). He was associating the flame with the church, and illustrating the growing significance of the flame and torch as symbols associated with honesty and purity.

In addition to religious significance, research shows that the Olympic torch and flame have significance for the community, in terms of social and cultural benefits such as instigating pride and building unity; promoting celebrations and memories for the community; influencing national pride in support of the Olympic Games; and promoting sports at the community level. A famous example is how the local community rejoiced when the couple who jointly carried the flame to light the 1976 Olympic cauldron later married. Perhaps the community identified with this couple, whose lives had been enriched by their association with the Olympic flame.

The Olympic torch relay can also have a significant economic impact on the host community. For example, the 1984 Los Angeles Games’ Youth Legacy Kilometre (YLK) program raised funds for youth programs by obtaining sponsorship for each kilometre of the relay. Community youth programs were to benefit from this program and the exposure that the torch relay and the YLK program offered.

In general, the Olympic Games (including as they do, the torch relay) provide both short and long term economic impacts on host destinations as they showcase the attractions that the destination has to offer. Humphreys & Plummer (1995:16) undertook an economic impact study on the State of Georgia hosting the 1996 Summer Olympic Games and stated:

The long-term beneficial effects on decisions regarding investment, trade, corporate relocation, government spending, convention sites, the location of sporting events, and vacation plans will likely be among the most enduring, yet statistically untraceable, legacies of the Games (Humphreys & Plummer, 1995:16).

However, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin was perhaps more concerned with the flame being a symbolic gesture for world peace and harmony as part of the aesthetic ideals of Olympism. De Coubertin once said of the Olympic flame, "And you, athletes, remember the sun-kindled Fire which has come to you from Olympia to light and warm our lifetime. Keep the sacred flame alive..." and "Athletes who will carry the symbolic torch in your eager hands... let your race be a happy one" (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976:282-283).

The actor responsible for lighting the Olympic flame at Olympia for the Games of the XXII Olympiad concurred with de Coubertin after being emotionally moved by the lighting ceremony: "The flame which is kindled in ancient Olympia carries a message of peace, confidence and hope to all people on this planet" (Olympic Games Moscow, 1980:260). Today, the kindling of the flame at Olympia can be perceived as a "ceremonial prologue" to the Games and the torch relay to the Olympic Stadium has become a wonderful and popular tradition of the Games themselves (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976). In symbolic terms, the Olympic torch relay is not about the passing of the Olympic torch, but that of transferring the sacred flame from one torch to the next and the ritual transfer of the symbolic fire from generation to generation ("History of the Olympic Torch Relays: 1936-1992", 1996).

With each passing Olympiad, the flame and torch symbols have attained further honour to become more significant, respected symbols in society by association with the Games. These symbols have also received a higher level of exposure through their association with sponsorship. This association and the ensuing media coverage and advertising has led to what can be termed as the commercialisation of these symbols. Sponsors have realised the importance of using the Olympic flame and torch symbols in their advertising, presumably because of the perceived respect and goodwill that these symbols promote, therefore they welcome opportunities to be associated with the Olympic torch relay.

Borgers (1996) finds that the torch relay is really illustrating "in a simple and obvious way, the power of communications" and offers sponsors "a unique opportunity for image advertising" (Borgers, 1996:176).

Reporting coverage relating to the sponsorship of major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games (including the Olympic flame and torch) is becoming prevalent in the media. Dwyer (1997) argues that the "globalization that is becoming increasingly evident in sport is balanced by a renewed interest in local community life. Many sponsors have responded by sponsoring community events for branding, goodwill and more intimate marketing contact" (1997: n.p.). This is one of the benefits Coca Cola obtained in being a title sponsor of the 1996 Summer Olympic Torch Relay in the United States and the 1998 Winter Olympic Torch Relay in Japan. In Japan, Georgia Coffee also benefited through its torch relay runner recruitment campaign. Daily ceremonies were staged to mark the arrival and departure of the Olympic flame and sponsors of the events will no doubt have been prominently marketed at those events.

However, it may be debated that the essence of what the sponsor is "buying" in its sponsorship is being eroded by misuse. The culmination of this is the 1996 Olympic torch relay to Atlanta which became nicknamed in the press as the "Coca Cola torch relay." Sydney Organisers have recognised that the dilution of the flame and torch symbols and their direct association with the Olympic Games affects more than the sponsors. Games organisers rely on the torch relay to build good community feeling for the Games and draw the community as a whole into the Olympic Games experience. Therefore in 2000, the torch relay will not be associated with one major sponsor thereby limiting the name-association with the event. The sponsors of the Olympic flame and torch relay will be announced early in 1999. On the other hand, it can be said that through sponsorship, the torch relay associates the community directly with the Olympic Games and arouses interest in, and respect for, the Olympic Games and hopefully promotes the ideals of the Olympic Movement by this association. Furthermore, promotion of the torch relay can raise community awareness for the event, and offer potential benefits to the community from the increase in visitor numbers during the relay.

Each host nation will no doubt have differing attitudes and opinions toward the Olympic Games, its ideals and the torch relay. For example, the torch relay was part of a political message at the 1972 Sapporo winter Olympic Games. The island of Okinawa invited the torch relay to run through the island, "to underline the wish of the island to return to full Japanese sovereignty" (Borgers, 1996:165). Furthermore, the Games in Montreal, 1976 offers an example of the 'politically correct' attitude toward the Olympic flame and torch. The Olympic Games Organising Committee for 1976 described public reaction to the torch relay as "Everywhere, there is unparalleled enthusiasm for the Olympic Flame" (1976:286). The Canadian Prime Minister referred to the flame of the Olympic torch as an "ideal of perfection which athletes of all races pass on from generation to generation" (1976:286). This is an impassioned view of the flame and torch, but the official report does not offer comment on any other agendas for which the torch relay may have been used, for example, promoting national support of the Olympic Games, as in the Los Angeles Games of 1984 (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1985).

Another approach to the symbolism of the flame is evidenced by the Vice President of the Seoul Olympic Organising Committee (SOOC) who in his speech at the flame lighting ceremony in Olympia, 1988 said:

The Korean people ... will respect all that this sacred flame stands for....For Koreans, this flame is especially meaningful for we have a long tradition of reverence for fire and what it represents. Fire symbolizes purity and prosperity - and the Olympic Games are pure in their ideals and clear in their aims of building a better world for all people (Seoul Olympic Organising Committee, 1989:344-345).

The ambiguity of these symbols and ideals becomes evident when one considers that at the same time the government was in conflict with neighbouring North Korea, which ultimately boycotted those Games. The Korean government's ideals were therefore not in accordance with those of SOOC and the Olympic Charter. The Charter clearly states that "The goal of Olympism is to place everywhere sport at the service of harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity" (IOC, 1994:10). Whilst pleasing in theory, this goal, and the ideals of peace and harmony are not achieved so readily in practice.

Therefore, perhaps the Olympic flame and torch have a unique meaning to each host nation and local community through which they pass, each with their separate agendas, not always related to the ideals of the Olympic movement on a macro level. For example, the SOOC may have focussed on the Korean cultural reverence toward fire to give meaning to the flame in the hope that this message would rally community support for the Games, similar to that achieved by the torch relay in the Los Angeles Games of 1984.

That community support be procured was an important issue as the Koreans were using the Olympic Games to change "their image from one of devastation brought on by World War II to one of an economically developed country" and, to "foster tourism growth and showcase recent economic achievements" (Jeong, et al, 1990: 26, 31-32). It was believed that the Olympic Games would assist Koreans in building a new identity for their country and activities surrounding the Olympic torch may have been used to achieve the new international identity for Korea as evidenced by the following statement: "Through this flame, we can all look forward to a better future" (Seoul Olympic Organising Committee, 1989:344).

For example, to commemorate the Olympic torch, Korea erected memorial structures and planted olive and cypress trees, not only for the community to enjoy and remember, but to "serve as a tourist attraction" (Seoul Olympic Organising Committee, 1989:350). The staging of cultural festivals along the torch relay route was used "for the purpose of laying the foundation for the development of provincial culture, promoting a festive mood, and introducing Korea's traditional culture broadly at home and abroad" (Seoul Olympic Organising Committee, 1989:352).

In addition to the Korean festivals of 1988, celebrations by each host community are noted in most official reports on the Olympic Games. That the community becomes involved in such celebrations demonstrates support for the Olympic Games, and specifically, as shown below, for the Olympic flame and torch. These also provide memories of the event that can be passed from generation to generation. Celebrations and memories can be important factors in building pride in one's community, particularly during times of economic hardship and the resulting negative social impacts, such as crime, violence, and low esteem amongst the community. Thus the preparation and momentum leading up to the torch relay passing through a community can serve as a catalyst to benefit the community by fostering pride and goodwill.

In addition to providing pleasant memories and feelings of goodwill in the community, the 1980 Olympic torch relay left a greater legacy to the people by way of promotion of sports in the community. Preparations for the 1980 Olympic torch relay were accompanied by publicity about physical culture and sport. This led to an "influx of people into sports clubs and groups" (Olympic Games Moscow, 1980:262). Furthermore, new athletic competitions catering to the masses emerged, such as: "The Olympic Kilometre", "The Olympic Torch", "All the Family at the Start" and "Olympians among us" (Olympic Games Moscow, 1980:262).

These competitions were held in regional areas of the USSR along the torch relay route in addition to regions along the route in Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece. The OCOG noted that "the [torch] relay has stimulated the popular movement for physical culture in our republic" (Olympic Games Moscow, 1980:272). Many of these events, staged in preparation for the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, have become regular events.

Another legacy of the Olympic torch relay can be seen in the example of the United States' 1984 YLK program, previously mentioned. This program offered organisations that were devoted to youth and sport an opportunity not only to promote sport, but to raise funds to ensure facilities were made available or maintained for their programs (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1985).

The publicity received when the Hellenic Olympic Committee (HOC) opposed the program and threatened to withhold the Olympic flame because they believed the program too commercialised, had a positive effect on the YLK program. Aided by this additional publicity, and possibly in response to the suggestion that the United States might be denied the flame, Americans contributed more than US\$10 million in funds to the YLK program which were used for charitable purposes.

This example demonstrates the strong association that the public has with the flame and torch symbols, and not wanting to be denied their presence at an Olympic Games. In Rome, 1960, during the closing ceremony a spontaneous and very moving event occurred when as the Olympic Hymn was sung the symbolic dying of the flame resulted in “thousands of flaring newspaper torches, lit and waved in the darkness as the Olympic flag was hauled down and the Flame died its death” (British Olympic Association, 1960: 16). In this gesture the spectators were celebrating the end of the association they had enjoyed with the Olympic Games, and the flame was the symbol that linked them to the Games. By lighting their own flames they held on a little longer to the spirit of goodwill that the Games evokes and “all that night, Rome was *en fête*, and it seemed a million candles were lighting the shadows around the Piazza del Popolo” (British Olympic Association, 1960:16). The Piazza being a place was locals gather for all important occasions and celebrations.

A strong public alliance was seen again in 1976 when local Canadian communities lined the streets to share in the joy of seeing the flame pass, or to participate in the town or village ceremonies. In the Canadian village of Montebello, local families were drawn together in the regional festivities to celebrate the passing of the torch and they joined in the singing and dancing as scouts stood guard over the urn containing the Olympic Flame. The community, together with the guards, kept an all-night vigil that “they will long remember” (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976:287).

The Canadian communities, caught up in the excitement of the Olympic flame, proudly celebrated the visit of the Olympic torch to their village or town. This is demonstrated by their involvement in the festivities along the torch relay route and in “expressing their joy and pride at seeing the Olympic Flame in their own town or village” (Olympic Games Organising Committee, 1976:287). The Committee’s report further describes various community activities in Canada as “celebrations in honour of the Olympic Flame [as a means of expressing their] excitement and emotion ... at this long-awaited moment” (1976:287).

The community excitement experienced in 1976 resurfaced in 1984 where the torch relay had an immense effect on the public in promoting the ideals of Olympism and brought a small portion of the Olympic Games into the lives of many American citizens. By promoting the torch relay, the Organising Committee was able to maximise national support for the Olympic Games, and build up excitement for the Opening Ceremony and the Games themselves.

The [1984] Olympic torch relay through the heartland of America was a feel- good patriotic celebration. It helped lift the country out of the lingering malaise of the hostage crisis in Iran and the deadly terrorist bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon (Martz, 1996).

The Olympic torch was promoting nationalism, and fostering government propaganda by lifting the spirits of the American people, uniting them and helping them focus on the Olympic Games. The events surrounding the 1984 Olympic torch relay helped to provide happier memories for those who had the opportunity to witness this event and was a welcome change of conversation and media coverage compared to the troubled times that America had previously faced.

These memories strengthen the connection between the community and the Olympic Games. These memories are developed and maintained with the assistance of media exposure and advertising associated with the Games. Memories of torchbearers who may be looked upon as ‘heroes’ in the community for their participation in the Games can also serve to build community pride. For example, the 1996 Olympic torch relay included a torchbearer recruitment program called “Community Heroes”, in which people were nominated by their community as outstanding citizens. This was a way of acknowledging their contribution to society.

Harry Gordon has documented the essence of community participation and pride in his account of the Melbourne Olympics “When the magic came to Melbourne”. He wrote of the 1956 Opening Ceremony:

A spectacle that would endure in the mind were simple images, filled with colour; a stadium that positively throbbed with people and goodwill, a lush carpet of green, girdled with a broad ribbon of brick-red cinders, and bathed in sparkling sunshine... (1994:204).

He describes the final torchbearer, “Ron Clarke, then nineteen, loping bravely around the arena holding aloft a torch that spluttered a fountain of painful sparks” (1994:204). Clarke was left with a burned arm and singed T-shirt after his run with the torch, however his memories were simply to be part of the Opening Ceremony. His only regret was not the burns, but in not being allowed to keep the torch after lighting the flame as he had been promised (Hetherington, 1996:5).

Another torchbearer, Peter Martin, was a 16 year old schoolboy from the small country town of Picton when he carried the Olympic torch in the New South Wales leg of the 1956 torch relay. He remembers the event as a big occasion for the local community even though the torch was carried into the town at 1:00 o’clock in the morning. Some of the other local torchbearers chosen were socially disadvantaged children from The Picton School run by Barnardo’s, a child welfare organisation. These children were usually treated suspiciously and as outcasts by the local community. However,

being chosen as torchbearers changed the community's perception of them considerably. Martin says that being considered important enough to carry the Olympic torch greatly enhanced their self esteem (Martin, 1996. pers. comm., 9 May).

Memories of the 1956 Olympic torch also burn brightly for two of the final torch carriers, Peter Le Get and Jim Thompson. Peter Le Get recalled that Jim Thompson told the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games of his experience: "When the oncoming runner reached me and I ran beside him to take over the flame which had been kindled on Mount Olympia [sic], I felt a great thrill and then it was my turn to set off with the torch held high" (1995:n.p.). As this comment was made in 1995, 39 years after the event, it would appear that he is still emotionally moved by the reverence of his actions in carrying the torch in 1956.

In more recent times, the 1996 torch relay has been described as "much more than the sum of its parts, having woven itself into the fabric of our history" (The Torch's Brightest Moments": 1996). The torch journey was described as a "rich sampler of American history, culture and geography" in its journey via the 10,000 torchbearers through 42 states, including 29 capitals and over 15,000 miles ("The 1996 Olympic Torch":1996). The overwhelming pride associated with carrying an Olympic torch encouraged some of the 1996 torchbearers to reveal their stories as to why they had been chosen by members of their community to carry the Olympic torch. These people instigated pride within their communities, by their words, and their actions as they carried the Olympic torch through their communities. For the first time in history, the 1996 Olympic flame lighting ceremony and torch relay were extensively covered on the Internet. Millions of viewers worldwide tuned in to follow the relay, read the stories and experience a little bit of the 1996 Olympic Games in their own home or office. The influence the media has in terms of keeping the public informed and opinionated has changed dramatically with the popularity of, and increased access to, the Internet. Media coverage of the 1996 Olympic torch relay on the Internet included comments such as "our heroes don't have to be found in movies or legends"; "This worldwide event brought us amazing stories of courage"; and, "Although the American Flag blanketed the torch's path, the Relay transcended our nationalism" ("The 1996 Olympic Torch": 1996).

The Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) has high hopes of transcending nationalism in the Sydney 2000 Olympic torch relay. The SOCOG have pledged to carry the Olympic flame and torch throughout Oceania and will be involving American Samoa, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Guam, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Samoa. A proposed plan for the Olympic flame and torch is to leave Greece in May 2000 after the sacred ceremonies at Olympia, and travel for five months including 100 days in Australia, before reaching the Opening Ceremony at Sydney Olympic Park on September 15.

Whilst the relay route has not been finalised, hints of challenging technological feats and a relay of ingenuity abound. Meanwhile, discussions have been held with the various Australian states and territories, and regions within each, to determine the most suitable route and celebrations for the 2000 Olympic torch relay. The submission made by the Australian Capital Territory to SOCOG describes the torch relay as "The Sharing of a Dream ... We would invite and encourage our entire region, to participate ... Olympians and Torch bearers from the 1956 [Olympic] Games would play a [sic] historic and poignant role" (ACT Government: 1996:n.p.). Di Henry, General Manager, 2000 Torch Relay, SOCOG, has stated that the various communities, and to an extent the organisers, do not fully realise how many people will be emotionally moved to come and experience the torch relay. She believes that the need to personally experience the torch relay is strong as it epitomises the human dedication and endeavour in carrying the Olympic flame all the way from Greece, and preserving this tradition revived in 1936 (Henry, 1997, pers. comm. 15 October).

It has been demonstrated that the Olympic torch is a significant symbol of the Olympic Games, and that this significance has increased since its inception in 1936 with the aid of sponsorship, the media and more recently the Internet. What the torch relay brings to the local community, the Internet will extend to the global community. As the entire world follows the progress of the 2000 torch relay through Oceania, we will truly see how the significance of the torch relay has grown and will continue to grow as it runs towards Sydney 2000 and into the new millennium.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

ACT Government, (1996), Canberra's Torch Relay Submission, written in conjunction with the 'ACT Bureau of Sport, Recreation and Racing' and 'Project 2000', Canberra.

British Olympic Association, (1932), *Official Report of the Olympic Games Xth Olympiad*, Los Angeles 30 July-14 August, 1932, Hillingdon Press, Uxbridge.

(1960), *Official Report of the Olympic Games XVIIth Olympiad*, Rome, August 25-September 11, 1960, Ed. Pilley, P., Worldsports, London.

International Olympic Committee (IOC), (1994), *Olympic Charter*: In force as from 5th September, 1994, IOC, Lausanne, Switzerland.

(1996), *Olympic Review*: Official Publication of the Olympic Movement, Feb-Mar, 1996, XXV-7: pp 58-59. IOC, Lausanne. Switzerland.

(1996), *Olympic Review*: Official Publication of the Olympic Movement, Jun-Jul, 1996, XXV-9: pp 16-20. IOC, Lausanne, Switzerland.

Olympic Games Organising Committee (21st:1976:Montreal:Quebec), (1976), Montreal, 1976: Games of the XXI Olympiad, Volumes I and II, Organising Committee of the 1976 Olympic Games, Montreal.

Olympic Games Moscow, R.S.F.S.R., (1980), Games of the XXII Olympiad, Moscow, 1980: *Official Report of the Organising Committee of the Games*, Volumes 1 and 2, Moscow, R.S.F.S.R., Moscow.

Olympic Games Organising Committee (23rd: 1984:Los Angeles), (1985), *Official Report of the XXIIIrd Olympiad*, Volumes 1 and 2, Los Angeles Organising Committee, California.

Olympic Games Organising Committee (25th:1992:Barcelona:Spain), (1992) *Official Report of the Games of the XXV Olympiad - Barcelona, 1992*, (personal author) Cuyas, R., COOB'92, Barcelona.

Seoul Olympic Organising Committee, (SOOC), (1989) *Official Report*, The Committee, Seoul.

Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, (SOCOG), (1996), Issues Paper: Update, January 1996, SOCOG, Sydney.

(SOCOG), (1995), *The Sydney Spirit*, Issue No. 5, September/ October, SOCOG, Sydney.

Sydney Paralympic Organising Committee, (1996), Fact Sheet, Sydney.

## Internet References

"History of the Olympic Torch Relays: 1936-1992", (1996) available: <http://www.unitedway.org/history.html>.

Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG), (1996) "Welcome to the Games", available: <http://www.atlanta.olympic.org/acog/welcome/d-torch.html>.

Martz, R., (1996), "Police plan to make torch's trek safe", The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, available: <http://www.atlanta-games.com/o20torch.htm>.

Pousner, H., (1996), "Ceremonies always evoke emotions", The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, available: [http://www.atlanagames.com/oly/news/m29\\_cere.htm](http://www.atlanagames.com/oly/news/m29_cere.htm).

"The 1996 Olympic Torch", (1996) available: <http://www.torchrun.com/torchpr.html>

"The Torch's Brightest Moments", (1996), available: <http://www.Olympics.NBC.com/torch/newrelay/wrapup.html>.

### Media Clippings

Brown, M., (1998), "Clergyman gets to the soul of the Olympics, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday, January 17, 1998, p.17, Sydney.

Dwyer, C. (1997), "Choose Your Partners", *The Australian Financial Review Magazine*, n.d., pp20-22, Sydney.

Hetherington, L., (1996), "Ron catches up with an old flame", *The Daily Telegraph*, Monday April 22, p.5, Sydney.

### Discussions

Henry, D., (1997), General Manager, 2000 Torch Relay for SOCOG, during meeting with Janet Cahill on Thursday 15 October.

Martin, P., (1996), 1956 Olympic torchbearer, during meeting with Janet Cahill on Thursday 9 May.

### Secondary Sources

Borgers, W. (1996), *Olympic Torch Relays*, AGON-Sportvertag, Kassel. Translation: Latz, E. and H. (1996).

Buschmann, J., and Lennartz, K. (1996), "From Lake Placid and Los Angeles (1932) to Melbourne (1956). The Olympic Torch's Protagonism in Ceremonies" in *Olympic Ceremonies: Historical Continuity and Cultural Exchange*, International Symposium on Olympic Ceremonies, Barcelona-Lausanne, November 1995: 111-130.

Gordon, H. (1994), *Australia and the Olympic Games*, University of Queensland Press, Queensland.

Greenberg, SC., (1983), *The Guinness Book of Olympics Facts and Feats*, Guinness Superlatives Ltd, Middlesex.

Humphreys, J.M., and Plummer, M.K. (1995), *The Economic Impact on the State of Georgia of Hosting the 1996 Summer Olympic Games*, Selig Center for Economic Growth, Terry College of Business, The University of Georgia.

Jeong, G.H., Jafair, J., Gartner, W.C., (1990), "Expectations of the 1988 Seoul Olympics: A Korean Perspective" in *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol XV, No. 1, 1990: 26-33.

Mouratidis, J., (1992), "The Olympic Games in Antiquity: Legend, Tradition, Institution, Reality". *Proceedings of the 32nd International Olympic Academy*, Olympia, Greece, pp 49-56.

Müller, N., (1994), "From Athens (1896) to Amsterdam (1928) Definition of Ceremonies Protocol in accordance with Pierre de Coubertin's Ideal", in M. de Moragas, J. MacAloon and M. Llinés (eds) *Olympic Ceremonies: Historical and Cultural Exchange*, International Olympic Committee, Lausanne, 93-109.

Slowikowski, S., (1991), "Burning Desire: Nostalgia, Ritual, and the Sport-Festival Flame Ceremony" in *Sociology of Sport Journal*, Vol 8., Issue 3, pp239-257, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois.

Yalouris, N (Ed), (1979) *The Eternal Olympics: The Art and History of Sport*, Caratzas Bros., New York.