



# BOOK REVIEWS

**SELLING THE FIVE RINGS: The International Olympic Committee and the Rise of Olympic Commercialism.** By Robert K. Barney, Stephen R. Wenn, and Scott G. Martyn. Published in 2002 by The University of Utah Press, 1795 E. South Campus Dr., # 101, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112-9402, U.S.A. Cloth US\$35.00; 384 pages. ISBN 0-87480-713-1. Reviewed by Bill Mallon.

My background in Olympic history guarantees that I usually have a fairly good grasp of the material before I read any new book on the topic. At this stage it is rare that I read a book on Olympic history in which I seem to learn something as I turn every page. In fact, over the last 20 years, I would name three books fitting this description – the first edition of David Wallechinsky's *The Complete Book of the Olympics*, which came out in 1984; David C. Young's book *The Modern Olympics: A Struggle for Revival*; and now this superb tome on Olympic Commercialism, written by three Canadian pillars of the academic world of Olympic History.

The encomial tributes on the back cover come from, among others, ISOH members John Lucas and Allen Guttmann, and describe the book well, "The authors Barney, Wenn, and Martyn have written one of the most important Olympic Games books in the past quarter century (Lucas)," and "Documenting the complicated (and frequently stormy) negotiations between the networks and the IOC, *Selling the Five Rings* is unsurpassed in the scope of its research and the astuteness of its analysis (Guttmann)."

The book has two main sections. Part I is entitled "The Evolution of Olympic Commercialism" and covers the period from 1896 through 1980. There are six chapters in this section and much of the material discusses struggles and negotiations that saw Avery Brundage intimately involved. Chapter Two discussed "Avery Brundage and the Great Bread War" and I knew upon reading this chapter that this was no ordinary Olympic History book, nor was it a book that was only

cursorily researched. The story involves Paul Helms of the Helms Bakery Company in Los Angeles, who marketed his bread as the Official Olympic Bread, after an association with the 1932 Olympic Games. Further, he actually trademarked the Olympic Symbols in the United States, leading Brundage to protest this trademark and work to return the rights to the symbols to the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) (and its precursors). I must confess this was entirely new information to me. I knew nothing about this problem with Helms and the trademark battles. The next three chapters discussed early negotiations for Olympic television rights, beginning with Melbourne in 1956. While these are still good chapters, the author trio has published some of this material before, notably in *Olympika*.

Part II of the book, "The IOC Becomes a Corporate Entity," deals with the period from 1980-2000, and encompasses seven chapters. All of them are excellent, although again, some of the material has been published previously in various forms. Chapter Eight is a nice work on the contributions of Monique Berlioux to the Olympic Movement and the marketing side of it. Although ISOH Member Dick Pound's contributions are woven throughout the book, Chapter Nine describes his seminal efforts to negotiate television rights contracts for the IOC. The final few chapters deal with the struggles with the USOC, the TOP sponsorship program, and Chapter 12 discusses the Olympic Bribery Scandal.

The research is exhaustive and the authors seem to have always sought out primary sources. Each chapter but the first two has over 100 footnotes, and most of these came from definitive sources such as the IOC Archives, Executive Board Minutes, Dick Pound's private collection, and the Avery Brundage Collection. In looking through the notes, I could think of few primary sources left unexamined.

Of course, there are some errors, but precious few. They did not detract from the

book, and not many readers would ever spot them. On page 95, I noted three on a first read. They mention the International Weightlifting Federation and call it FILA, when FILA is the wrestling federation. The weightlifting group is the IWF, although it has had other names, but never an acronym that could be FILA. They also discuss Ockham's Razor, and I think incorrectly. It is the postulate that the simplest explanation for any theory is usually best, and I am not certain it applies in the context they used it. I also thought that Ockham's was wrong – it was Occam's, I was sure. But on checking, the man was variably known as William Ockham or Occam.

I had two main complaints. The book seems a bit top-heavy on television and deals less with The Olympic Programme (TOP), the current IOC Marketing Program, in place since 1985. Although TOP receives some treatment, I was

looking for more. But perhaps there is no more than the authors gave it – they have certainly examined the sources. And I thought they could have spent more time on the Olympic Bribery Scandal. It is my thesis, published in my article two years ago in the Journal of Olympic History, that the scandal occurred because of the huge amounts of money that have come into the Olympic Movement. I wish they had spent a bit more time on this topic.

But I am only quibbling here. This is a superb book and one that should be read by all students of Olympic History. Barney, Wenn, and Martyn have distinguished themselves and their scholarly profession as Olympic Historians. Paraphrasing Bob Barney, who has used this phrase several times, "Honor to their names."

**TA-RAX-RUM – A History of University Athletics in Cork, by Colm Murphy. Published by Colm Murphy. 182 pages, A5 paperback, with illustrations in black & white. Foreword by former ISOH member, the late David Guiney. Price £25 sterling or €40.00. To be ordered direct from the author at the address: 92 Rochester Avenue, Rochester, Kent ME1 2DR, ENGLAND. Reviewed by Ian Buchanan.**

This entertaining book by ISOH member Colm Murphy does more than tell the story of athletics at the University of Cork, it also provides a well researched picture of the development of organised student athletics in Ireland. For the uninitiated it should be explained that the unusual title: "TA-RAX-RUM" originated in 1931 as a University "War Chant" for a rugby match and was soon adopted by all other College Clubs.

Although not having a special focus on the Olympic Games, there are some interesting

references. The outstanding athletic graduate of the University of Cork was undoubtedly Dr. Pat O'Callaghan, the double Olympic hammer champion [1928 & 1932] and he is, of course, accorded due credit although I had not previously known that O'Callaghan was yet another who was considered for the leading role in a Tarzan movie.

Another Olympian who deserves mention is J.P. Roche and I have now amended my records of his career. My researches had shown that Roche, an Irish sprinter who represented Great Britain at the 1908 Olympic Games in London, had been killed in action during World War I, but Murphy reveals that he actually met a less heroic death, succumbing to dysentery in Persia in August 1917.

This book contains much of interest, the facts are well marshalled and it is a valuable contribution to Irish athletics literature.