

by Herb Weinberg

Unfortunately Olympic scholars, as are many scholars, similar to opium addicts. That is, they build philosophic castles in the air, then move in and live within those Ivory Towers.

Scholars tend to be thinkers, not doers. However, it is the doers that get things done, even those who think very little. "Doing" often requires elements of courage, intellectual courage, a characteristic for which scholars are not particularly known.

Mere thinking cannot be left behind as a legacy. Legacies are left only by the doers. Too often those who merely think lack the intellectual courage to act, too paralyzed to bring to fruition their theories and thoughts.

By such means they accomplish (do) nothing.

Olympic philosophers must somehow gather the courage to bring together that world of ideas and the world of doing.

Even as they see Olympic principles and philosophies being eroded they will not or cannot react for fear jeopardizing their Olympic connection, even as they see the principles of Pierre de COUBERTIN being replaced by the Great God Mammon. Olympic scholars tend to live in fear; by no means will they put their names or reputations on the line. If they express themselves and the IOC rejects their ideas or criticisms they fear they may no longer be allowed to bear the mantle or title "Olympic scholars"... a title that for the most part exists only within their minds.

Currently so-called Olympic scholars contribute nothing or very little to Olympic dialogue in the midst of scandal and Olympism's consistent withdrawal from any sense of philosophy.

For example, both the *International Olympic Committee* and the *United States Olympic Committee* have recently been engaged in the process of reorganization, in part because of the scandals out of Salt Lake City prior to the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. The IOC had to create the "IOC 2000 Commission," a group consisting primarily of well-known outsiders, to create a plan to reorganize themselves into a more efficient, honest and transparent organization. Those same scandals also exposed the incompetence and lack of administrative talent within the USOC, to a point wherein the United States Senate Commerce Committee gave themselves responsibility for reorganizing the USOC although they themselves were the primary sinners who allowed the USOC to disintegrate into a shambles by ignoring its oversight responsibilities as implied within their "1978 Sports Act."

Sadly, however, within the midst of both reorganization plans little or nothing has been heard from Olympic scholars or philosophers. Olympic academics have been silent and outside these processes of reorganization. Not a peep. They remain silent, unheard.

That's intellectual cowardice. Above all others scholars are morally required to rise up and to speak. Are we or are we not the guardians of Olympic philosophy? Should we not be the voices that protect and speak for Olympic education and the protection of Olympic principles as these important aspects of Olympism continue to erode?

Who else is there to do so?

Scholars must serve as the Olympic movement's watchdogs. Unfortunately, however, they are Chihuahuas, not rottweilers. Our philosophic tongues are not sharp so much as they are mute. We contribute very little in the way of dialogue and so long as we remain mute we abdicate our implied responsibilities as guardians, as watchdogs.

For example, ten years ago the USOC eliminated (1) the USOC Academy despite the requirements of the *Olympic Charter*, (2) its Education Committee; (3) its Education Director; and (4) its national magazine. American Olympic education be damned, as we recall, ironically, that Pierre de COUBERTIN thought of himself first as an educator.

The *Directory of the International Society of Olympic Historians* lists approximately 350 members, of which approximately 25 percent are American writers and scholars. And not one of them – not one – protested the removal of these USOC educational instruments. They stood by while the monies for almost all educational programs were siphoned off to increase funding for the development of elite athletes. That is, the USOC wanted every penny available to go into their extreme efforts to improve and increase American Olympic medal counts, including those few funds originally assigned to Olympic education, as though those higher medal counts would justify all sins, the end justifying the means, including eliminating Olympic education within the United States.

Well, the American medal count at the Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City reached 34 medals (10 gold, 13 silver and 11 bronze), an all-time USA winter record, about which the American public seemed totally unimpressed so much as that population seemed more impressed

with the scandals involving the SLC Olympic organizers and related issues including drug allegations involving American athletes.

Therefore, the definition of United States Olympism has reduced itself to money and medals while scholars stand by seeming to have neither the courage nor the energy to respond. Within the reorganization plans of both the Senate Commerce Committee and the USOC itself there is nothing that suggests or restores Olympic philosophy or education as both groups continue to rearrange deck chairs on the *Titanic*.

Where are the scholars?

As USOC waters continue to roil, having had three presidents and three Executive Directors within the past five years in the midst of the scandals, we note that lately the Committee's salaried executive "talent" has been drawn from the corporate world. That is, "money men," not administrators with sporting or Olympic experience or backgrounds, much less having any sense of Olympic philosophy.

In fact once appointed they quickly came to behave as corporate executives by giving themselves all sorts of bonuses for all sorts of reasons within this cash-strapped organization (including staff bonuses because our athletes achieved so many medals in Salt Lake City). They came with the misunderstood philosophy that this complex, multi-layered, non-profit, altruistic organization, based on a philosophy called Olympism, could be managed like General Motors: this "flagship" NOC whose sponsors supply more than 90 percent of Olympic funding worldwide. Those executives came from a universe in which money is the bottom-line, the ruler of all things, whose spur is the profit motive as opposed to the altruism that Olympism implies.

Of course to run an NOC money is important; however finances are neither everything nor the only thing. There are also those aesthetic qualities at least as important as money within a non-profit, philosophically-oriented organization. However, due to this influx of corporate types the Committee came to be administered by paid executives with little understanding of the aims, goals and objectives of Olympism, not to mention the Olympic Charter which requires such things as an Olympic Academy. Corporate terms such as bottom-line and brand recognition and profit margin came to supersede the alphabet soup of NOCs, NGBs and Ifs within the USOC's in-house newsletter.

These New Age chief executives came with a business philosophy in which money solves all problems. However, USOC chief executives such

as Norm BLAKE and Lloyd WARD, each left office within one year, each under a cloud, each having come to the USOC with the misbelief that the complexities of the USOC could be managed like a corporation.

There are no academic rottweilers: those scholars or philosophers daring to provide commentary and guidance as to the state of affairs that have taken place over the past decade. Instead we edge toward the rear for fear of making waves; in fear of rocking the boat; in fear of the penalties of demonstrated courage; in fear of losing our free subscriptions to the *Olympic Review*.

Which brings us to the recent revamping of the Review, the IOC's primary publication, which serves to illustrate our point.

There was a time when the Review served as a source of Olympic commentary including philosophy and constructive criticism; including liberal and conservative points of view toward Olympic issues and policies. However, today there is no place within all of Olympism's publications for such commentary on an international level. Instead, the Review has recently and drastically been changed under the administration of IOC President Jacques ROGGE in that it has become what we Americans would call a teeny-bopper publication. That is, the editors seem to assume its readership has an attention-span of no more than ten seconds within a publication that has become overloaded with photography at off angles with very brief captions. This: for possibly the most intelligent readership in the universe, within 200 nations. Its articles are soft, very brief and pleasant, not particularly informative, usually no longer than one or two pages.

There is little of substance, much less of criticism. In brief, ROGGE has shut down this source of extended and substantive commentary or criticism. During his last few editions of The Review its former editor, Fekrou KIDANE, made some effort to publish intelligent criticism within his "*Opinion*" column. However, he was soon gone, replaced by Giselle DAVIES who seems not so much an editor as she seems to be a designer. Ms. DAVIES asked for commentary relative to the magazine's new format, but when I did so she did not reply.

How does this lack of a critical outlet jibe with the IOC 2000 Commission's recommendation that there must be more "transparency" within the IOC? It seems, however, the Committee has become more opaque than transparent. For example the Commission recommended the IOC

open its sessions as do the United Nations, the United States Congress, the British Parliament, the Japanese Diet and the Russian Duma. However, the IOC refuses to do so, limiting journalistic observation of its sessions to the strictures of closed-circuit, talking-heads only, television pictures, which fortifies then impression the Committee has something to hide.

It seems, therefore, that our only critical outlet is by means of the various lectures we are invited to present to various organizations related and unrelated to the Olympic movement. However, individuals such as myself are very rarely asked to comment within Olympism's halls. Better not to invite wave-makers, boat-rockers.

Therefore, there is no other choice but to create a website as a form of publication on the Internet, as a place for the submission of Olympic commentary and constructive criticism on the part of our scholars. (I would appreciate your input relative to this possibility.) We have nowhere else to go as those of us with an academic interest in the movement wish to comment about issues such as Olympic eligibility, the drug problem, over-commercialization, the lack of grassroots programs, the disappearance of educational instruments within NOCs, and the effect and influence of Olympic television contracts, among so many other related issues. There is more to the Olympic movement than the Olympic Games.

Both the concept of democracy and the concept of the Olympic Games come from the common root of the Greek city-states and those roots imply that openness, free expression and transparency are among the principles guiding both of them. However and to the contrary, the IOC has taken a bunker, circle-the-wagons mentality. It has maintained itself as an organization of insiders although in theory the movement belongs to the world. Outsiders need not apply. And scholars have most certainly become outsiders.

This, compared to the IOC Press Commission which in great part consists of members of major press organizations, a direct conflict-of-interest as to their journalistic responsibilities. They should not be members of an organization they cover as supposedly unbiased reporters. However, by making them insiders the IOC has muffled a major portion of the press. (Another conflict-of-interest example involves the American publication, *Sports Illustrated*, which is an IOC and USOC sponsor, while at the same time having responsibilities as a supposedly unbiased press watchdog of the Olympic movement. On making an inquiry to their editors I was told the magazine had

effectively separated its business and news divisions. Wanna bet?)

Scholars too are watchdogs; however the supposed outsiders, the press, are inside; while we the supposed insiders are outsiders. What are we going to do about this state of affairs...if anything? Or shall we merely remain virtually hidden?

There are other illustrations of the seeming disrespect in which scholars are held within the IOC.

For example, why has no one complained about the lack of accreditations to each Olympic Games and for IOC sessions for scholars and researchers? Currently only print and broadcast journalists have access to Olympic accreditation: those who report on a daily basis as opposed to those writers who must do long-term research. Those of us who are researchers must "know someone" of influence whom we can beseech, hat in hand, for such accreditations in order to do and complete our work. All of which is another sign of disrespect as to who we are and what we represent. We have become beggars.

(With the help of the then IOC Director, Madame Monique BERLIOUX, five "academic" accreditations were introduced into the 1983 *Olympic Charter*. At the time we thought this only a beginning. However, when the Charter was revised after the 1984 Olympic Games those accreditations were eliminated, another indication of the low regard in which we are held within the IOC. Since that time we have been told our applications would be considered on a case-by-case basis, a concept that quickly disappeared.)

Then, more than a decade ago, there seemed to be some hope. At that time the IOC created a group of 25 Olympic scholars which came to be called the "Working Group." We were invited to such events such as the 1994 Twelfth Olympic Congress in Paris, and later to sessions at the *International Olympic Academy* in Olympia to create curricula and courses-of-study to be presented by educational institutions at all levels. We assumed we were helping establish the place of academia within the Olympic movement.

And then nothing – absolutely nothing. We weren't even dismissed so much as we were never again called into session; merely forgotten as though we had never existed in the first place; tossed away with the wave of an unknown hand.

Why? What happened? My inquiries have disclosed nothing. Possibly we came to represent a new base of power, something to be nipped in the bud. That is only a surmise, but not too far-fetched within a movement that is becoming more

politically and economically-minded every day. After all, philosophy can sometimes get in the way of contracts, for example.

However, we never sought such power or influence so much as we merely sought to have a voice. We might have acted as a Greek Chorus of sorts, possibly a conscience relative to matters of Olympic philosophy. Possibly we could have advised against several of the Faustian bargains that currently erode Olympic ethics as we see the principles of Adam Smith gradually replacing those of the Baron de COUBERTIN.

Instead we are easily forgotten as not one of those 25 academics rose in protest when that vestige of respect for Olympic scholarship was snuffed out.

All of which raises the question as to whether Olympism really has within it even the implication of scholarship. Does any philosophy imply a concomitant scholarship? Or within the movement are we merely nuisances: a group of egg-heads who are not really an integral part of the process so much as we are merely tolerated, so that scholarship and a sense of philosophy can at least be mentioned within Olympic brochures?

Olympic scholarship is dead or dying as our views go unsolicited and unheard? We contribute little or nothing to the lifeblood of Olympism, to its dialogue. All of which we seem to have passively accepted.

On the other hand, do we have a responsibility to adopt an attitude of becoming active, more meaningful, a significant part of the movement by attempting to inject philosophic principal back into the mix? For example, are we the ones to investigate whether the principles of Adam Smith have come to replace those of the Baron de COUBERTIN? If currently we are not a significant part of the Olympic movement do we have a responsibility to struggle to become significant? Do we have an intellectual right, an obligation as scholars, to make certain demands – courageous demands? Or has Olympism of late come to be defined only by the extravaganza that is the Olympic Games?

Of course we do have the *Olympic Museum* in Lausanne and the IOA in Olympia; but are they institutions that preach only to the choir? They preach to elite handfuls, not to the masses of the IOC's 200 nations.

Is Olympic scholarship dead or dying? Shall we forever remain paper tigers?

All of which raises a primal question:

Is there a time when timid scholars must convert themselves from being passive, impotent

observers into becoming activists? Is NOW the time to act; before we become even more of an afterthought?

However, such action, such conversion, requires courage. That is, intellectual courage. Neither the Museum nor the IOA are particularly vibrant places so much as they seem to be Aristotelian or Socratic resting places. However, they can and should become overwhelmingly vibrant, an electric part of Olympism that creates a renewed and clear voice and philosophic conscience within that movement. These institutions must become more of a magnet attracting the world's best minds to restore and revive what has become a fossilized branch of the Olympic movement. The Museum, for example, is basically a show place attached to a library more than it is a vigorous center of research.

Why hasn't the movement through either the IOA or the Museum significantly attached itself to a major university? Nor has it created its own university nor any institution of higher learning with accreditation of courses that qualify a host of candidates for baccalaureate degrees within all the major Olympic specialties, from law and fundraising to sports medicine and linguistics. Of course they do have a few current university liaisons primarily for graduate work, but represents little as to substantive content or numbers.

How many of us were aware that the year 2003 was "The Year of Olympic Culture and Education," as if anyone gave a damn. So too was 1994 "The Year of Sport and the International Ideal," with the accompanying slogan "Olympism as a philosophy, blending sport with cultural education." Bullfeathers!

How many of us were even aware of those designations, much less having been invited to take part within their activities, assuming there were such activities?

In April of 1997, IOC President Juan Antonio SAMARANCH came to the *United States Olympic Training Center* in Colorado Springs. For the several months preceding his visit several of us with academic interests beseeched him by letter and fax to take up with USOC officials the matter of restoring the USOC Academy which had been eliminated years earlier despite the requirements of the Olympic Charter.

Upon his arrival Mr. SAMARANCH took up our cause and at his departing breakfast he assured me he'd received USOC promises about the Academy's revival. I also received such assurances from: President William HYBL and Executive



Director Richard SCHULTZ. And the Academy was restored in the form of a farce wherein a few students with sponsors were shipped into the Training Center for a few days, then sent home, all of which was somewhat humorously called "The Academy." This went on for a brief two years, after which the institution once again disappeared, probably in light of the fact that Mr. SAMARANCH was a lame duck as IOC President and his wishes could therefore be ignored.

All of which is typical of current USOC and IOC attitudes, stressing window dressing over substance.

All of which means – if we have the resolve and the courage to do so – we must become activists, or the important Olympic specialty that we love will continue to expire.