

BOOK REVIEWS

Pierre de Coubertin: the Olympic Humanist. by Conrado Durantez Corral. Lausanne: International Olympic Committee and International Pierre de Coubertin Committee, 1994. Reviewed by Christopher Hill.

This is a splendid collection of photographs with a short accompanying text by Durantez. Many of the photographs are magnificent, and some extremely interesting, especially those relating to the early days. Not all of them are closely related to the text: the most striking example of an apparent lack of coordination by the production team is an excellent picture of a group of miners, only one of them young, which bears the caption "Sport must be accessible to working class youth (Coubertin)."

The scholarly text has 101 footnotes, 67 referring to Coubertin's writings, and a further 21 to Durantez' own. Most of the quotations from Coubertin's works are straightforward and demonstrate his far-sightedness and the historical sections of the book will be sufficient for the reader whose primary interest is in the photographs. On the other hand the serious student, at whom Durantez may be aiming, will come away disappointed.

In a work of this length - it is a little longer than an article - it is not possible to be exhaustive, but Durantez does commit himself to assertions which would be strengthened by explanation and evidence. There is no criticism of the claim that Olympism is "the most important sociological force of the end of this century" (p. 10; on p. 20 it becomes "the most important sociological force of the 20th century"); no hint that the "universal fundamental ethical principles" which are part of the Olympic way of life (p. 35) may be difficult to define; nor any real attempt to make sense of "Olympism" and its claim to "universalism." Nor does the author attempt any assessment of the success of Coubertin's ideals, but simply makes such statements as "Modern Olympism, in its lifetime of a century, has made a decisive contribution to international peace through the four-yearly Games" (p. 80) [Why not the Winter Games?]

The references to Coubertin's vision of sport as a kind of religion will perhaps cause the most discomfort. Coubertin, Durantez says, "created a whole series of emblems and ceremonies which have shaped the Olympic Movement within a terminological paradox, resulting in the formal creation of a secular religion." (p. 51). His further point that there is no theological addressee of this religion, but only man himself, is readily comprehensible, but what is the terminological paradox, and could he not tell us whether there is any sense in the notion of a religion of sport, and if so, whether he thinks such a religion desirable? Finally, Durantez says that "a crisis is affecting the philosophical ideology of the Olympic Movement" (p. 107), but is not at all clear about the nature of the crisis.

There is, of course, no harm in the two sponsoring bodies' seeking to make Coubertin's work and ideals known to a wider public, but this volume shows that they need to think out what audience they are hoping to reach, beyond the delegates to the 1994 Centenary Congress, to whom they generously distributed it free of charge.

The Bid: How Australia Won the 2000 Olympics. by Rod McGeoch with Glenda Korporaal. Australia: William Heinemann, 1994. Reviewed by Christopher Hill.

Rod McGeoch was chief executive of the company that won the bid for the Games of 2000 for Sydney. The book is in the same genre as Ueberroth's famous account of Los Angeles 1984, except that McGeoch is writing well before the Games, so that a number of punches necessarily remain pulled. Occasionally, he does let show a certain mistrust of the Olympic Movement's leaders, and he is pleased that Atlanta's skillful lobby beat off Athens, which he is convinced was the candidate of the Olympic power brokers. One early lesson he learned from Atlanta was that the comfort of the Olympic Family is of paramount importance.

The account is fascinating and full of lessons for other bidding cities. Governmental support was crucial. Ultimately, McGeoch's appointment was made by the Government of New South Wales, and a Minister was soon appointed to be in charge of the bid. There were many advantages; for example a visa office was sent to the IOC's Birmingham Session to issue visas to members who might visit Sydney, and the team was also able to tap into Australia's diplomatic network. The down - side was that McGeoch got into terrible trouble when he criticised his Minister, and suffered severe culture shock from the civil servants who at first manned his team.

Many bidding cities have difficult relations with their National Olympic Committees, and there was tension with the Australian Olympic Committee, although its offices were in the same building, over sponsors and fund - raising. The bidding process, which cost \$25,000,000 (Aus), really started when the GAISF (General Association of International Sports Federations) held its annual meeting at Sydney in October 1991 and twenty IOC members were present. The State Government had helped to lobby for it and agreed to underwrite "additional logistical support and entertainment" (p. 52) and the New South Wales Labor Council even deferred a planned general strike. McGeoch was stunned by the formality of these big IOC meetings, but he notes that "Volunteer drivers and hired - car drivers never seemed to be properly trained" (p.58) and that at Albertville the registration was chaotic [as it was for some guests at the Paris Congress]. Similarly, at Barcelona, where 56 members of the Sydney team went armed with 500 Akubra hats and plenty of other presents, he notes how easy it was to evade security, with the aid of bluff and a loyal driver.

Sydney's campaign involved testing the limits of some of the IOC's rules, and being ready to try anything. The most striking example, was McGeoch's secret plan (fortunately abandoned!) for revelations about human rights in China to be disseminated as unattributed from London. It must be said that Sydney, like all bidding cities, also had to humiliate itself in the search for votes, sending birthday cards to individuals who might become friends, but at the start were strangers, and sitting about in hotel lobbies waiting for the "great people" to come down from their rooms. McGeoch's enthusiasm over having gotten to know Samaranch's lawyer (who may well have been briefed to get to know him) shows naïveté verging on the pathetic. At least Sydney got over the extraordinary shyness that some cities have about straightforwardly asking members for their votes, but they did seek to please them in elaborate ways, like arranging with the government for rare horses to be sent to Mongolia, and with the police that drivers of IOC members' cars would be able to shift traffic lights to green as they approached.

Sydney made some good friends abroad, including Sam Ramsamy and Jean - Claude Ganga from Africa. When Sydney had political trouble with groups of aborigines, Ganga was called in to examine their grievances. He quickly dismissed them, once he had established that Australia did not discriminate in sport, whatever else it might do. This was a very different line from the one he had always taken over South Africa.

The bid offered almost unbeatable incentives, and chose with great skill the flora in which to announce them to best effect. An ANOC (Association of National Olympic

Committees) meeting at Acapulco was chosen for the announcement that NOCs' expenses would be funded in full (not partially, as Melbourne had offered) at an estimated cost of \$24,000,000 (US); the decision to provide free transport for all equipment was made public at an ASOIF (Association of Summer Olympic International Federations) meeting, and the provision of free bed and breakfast for athletes' relations on day one of the Session at Monte Carlo where the fateful decision was made.

McGeoch decided early on that the principal threat would come from Beijing, although he could find no evidence that it was the candidate supported by the movement's biggest sponsors. On the other hand, the Department of Foreign Affairs gave a very strong signal that the campaign must not spoil Australia's close relationship with China, which was worth more than any Olympic games.

Sydney tried to take over Monte Carlo, which prompts the unkind thought that perhaps Sydney won despite its supporters. The unremitting cultivation of IOC members continued: Drizabone supplied 90 of its distinctive raincoats; baskets of Australian produce were delivered to every member's hotel room; three performing groups patrolled the town, as well as a kangaroo and a koala; "A group of Aboriginal musicians with a didgeridoo, played outside the Hotel de Paris, the haunting sound attracting members to our hospitality suite," (p. 285) and the last bedtime message to members came from the schools with which they had been twinned, "Please give Sydney the Games."

McGeoch shows that he had his ear to the ground by saying that the 2000 Games do not have to be a Rolls Royce model (though the bid was), "Just because it's Olympic doesn't mean everything has to be gold plated." (p. 306) One of the few faults that I can find with his intriguing book is that he does not fully explain why the battle with Beijing was so very nearly lost.