

## Book Reviews

*Books are the legacies that a great genius  
leaves to mankind.  
Joseph Addison*

Kanin, David B. *A Political History of the Olympic Games*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1981. Pp. vii, 161. Notes, index. \$17.00.

Raised arms and clenched fists, riots, boycotts, even murder—events which sound like the ingredients of a Robert Ludlum novel—are actual episodes from the history of the Olympic Games. Despite quadrennial reaffirmation by Olympic officials that politics and sport should not be mixed, the use of the Olympic arena as a political forum has persisted, the most recent transgression, of course, being the U.S. government's boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

David Kanin, whose previous works include an interesting and scholarly article, "The Olympic System: Transnational Sport Organization and the Politics of Cultural Exchange," has again applied his political science background to the problem of the politicization of the Olympic Games. His new work, *A Political History of the Olympic Games*, draws heavily on his previous work as well as from ideas expressed in the anthology, *Sport and International Relations*, of which he was one of the editors and contributors.

The premise on which Kanin bases his analysis is that "Political content is not an intrusion in sport from the outside," but that, "it is a fundamental underpinning of the Olympic system" (unnumbered page). While the author dedicates his first chapter to this, his point being that membership in the Olympic Movement is structured along national lines, the major portion of the text revolves around two other points which Kanin hopes to make. The first is to show "that the politics of sport comes from the natural political content of the modern sport system" (p. ix). For Kanin, these 'political roots' come from the "historical development of modern Europe" (p. 9). In support of this, the author identifies four factors which he feels "led to the creation of the Olympic system as a part of international politics" (p. 9). These four causes are (1) "the tradition of the ancient games and the interest aroused in them by nineteenth century archaeologists, (2) the European exercise movement and its national implications, (3) English sport and the English public school system under the influence of Thomas Arnold, and (4) the personal will and determination of Baron Pierre de Coubertin" (p. 9-10). Although Kanin histori-

cally describes each of these situations, he does not synthesize his material. He leaves it to the reader, who must decipher how these four factors lie at the root of the international political role the Olympic system has come to play. A detailed discussion of the interrelationship of these "causes" is needed.

Kanin's second objective, to show "that each Olympic Games is an inherently political event," (p. xi) is supported by an analysis of the political and diplomatic context in which each of the Olympic Games occurred. The author's treatment of the 1980 boycott movement best supports this objective. Drawing on his experience as political analyst for the C.I.A. during this period (although we're told quite passionately that the idea of the boycott was not his and that he has not used classified information), Kanin quite capably describes the diplomatic and political maneuvering of the United States government. To offer a world perspective, he discusses the reaction of Europe, U.S. Allies, and the Third World to the U.S. call for boycott. There is little doubt that the 1980 Olympics were "inherently political" (p. xi).

Unfortunately, not all of the Olympiads received the same in-depth consideration. Herein lies the weakness of the study. Often, there is not enough information concerning government involvements to ascertain what the political atmosphere actually was. For example, Kanin's discussion of the 1936 Olympics leaves little doubt that the Third Reich intended to exploit sport for political aggrandisement of the fatherland, but he does not tell us how other governments viewed this. Instead, he dwells at length with Avery Brundage and his part in stopping the boycott movement of the 1936 Olympics. A boycott which we're told originated with the American Jewish Committee. Do either of these equal U.S. government policy? A more detailed discussion here of the international political atmosphere would have been interesting as well as helpful.

Other problems effect Kanin's analysis, specifically and importantly, his use of the word "political." He makes blanket statements such as "Political problems bridged the gap between 1914 and 1919" (p. 43). Does he mean World War I? He follows that sentence with a statement on sport: "The British resented U.S. domination of Games preparations..." (p. 43). Is he speaking of the British government, the British people or the British sports organizers? Another example is the well known 1908 flag debacle at the London Olympics. Kanin uses the American reaction to their flag's not being flown as an example of a political incident. The American team did react strongly to this, but their reaction seems more patriotic than political. If the two governments became involved, it was not so indicated in this text. Kanin needs to clarify his definitions.

The study of sport in international political relations deserves consideration, but this work, which is often difficult to comprehend because of its style

and lack of detail, actually offers little that is new. The discussion of the 1980 Olympics is the one bright spot, perhaps alone making it worth reading.

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