

Reich, Kenneth. *Making It Happen: Peter Ueberroth and the 1984 Olympics*. Santa Barbara, CA.: Capra Press, 1986. Pp. 274. Illustrations, Index.

Kenneth Reich is not a social or political historian, nor is he a sport historian. After twenty years as a political analyst for the *Los Angeles Times*, he asked for and received a seven year full-time assignment covering the summer Olympic Games of 1984. No other journalist in America, sporting or otherwise, had ever

taken on such a lengthy Olympic challenge. The Olympic Games and the entire international Olympic movement, in the end, he said, “breached this newspaper reporter’s cynicism and reawakened my idealism, and I thought that was no small achievement.” How right he was, for Reich’s skepticism about the pacificatory component of international sport, especially the Olympic Games, was of long duration. He did not change completely, of course, but the trail of this transformation is found in *Making It Happen*, the story of the remarkable Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde character Peter Ueberroth. The Jekyll-Hyde analogy is a good one for no one in the book that knew Ueberroth, least of all Ken Reich, could ever decide or predict the wholly ambivalent Ueberroth personality. All parties agreed, however, that Peter Ueberroth was the main architect of possibly the most successful Olympic Games in the ninety year history of the Coubertin-inspired quadrennial festival.

Reich was there from the beginning—a journalist who became an intimate insider into the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC). He knew all the “shakers and movers” inside the LAOOC, moved easily in their midst, talked with all of them, and yet (and this is one of the great ironies of the book) as Reich said in the “Forward,” “Almost all the secrets of the Committee that I am able to divulge in this book have been gleaned in an exhaustive series of interviews conducted in the winter and spring of 1985,” i.e., *after* the Olympic Games and *after* the disbandment of the huge LAOOC staff. Mundane minutiae, even gossip vie with extremely important international issues in the book. Sam the Eagle, Walt Disney and Looney Tunes “festival federalism” compete for space in the book with the Afghanistan invasion, the KGB, the FBI and David Balsiger’s grotesque “Ban the Soviet Coalition.” Reich is an able political scientist and writes knowingly about Soviet leaders Andrianov, Andropov, Brezhnev, Gromyko, Chernenko, Sergei Pavlov, Smirnov, Marat Gramov and Oleg Yermishkin. The book’s index reveals the small and large Olympic Games roles played by John B. Connally, Michael Deaver, Edmund G. Brown, Jr., Jimmie Carter, Tom Bradley, George Deukmejian, Alexander Haig, Lee Iacocca, Jesse Jackson and Ronald Reagan. What the author is implying is that this book is as definitive a history of the 1984 summer Olympic Games preparations as it is possible to write by someone not a member of Peter Ueberroth’s “inner sanctum.” Interestingly, Peter Ueberroth’s autobiography *Made In America* (1985), which emphasizes the life of the LAOOC, is less detailed and less attentive to small and large facts than is Reich’s effort. And therein lies a tale, a possible weakness in *Making It Happen*, amidst its many strengths.

Reich plunged forward with his story, alternately prattling, tattle-tale-like along side some of the most serious political, social, economic, and sporting matters. We are treated to two paragraphs on Ueberroth’s parsimonious policy about who should get “free lunches” and in the next breath are given a detailed report on the important and sometimes unsettling multi-million dollar security machinations between the FBI and the Los Angeles Police Department. Fascinating stuff! One learns more than is necessary about the fear (and even

loathing) in which secretaries and lower echelon people sometimes held Ueberroth and yet the 180 degrees change in their thinking when the great Peter placed a double bouquet of roses on someone's desk for a job extremely well done. And throughout the book there was always the implication that such vacillating outbursts were always part of the Ueberroth administrative philosophy that efficiency in business is the result of always keeping one's help slightly uneasy and off-balance. Peter was apparently an unrivaled master of such techniques.

The shortest chapter in the book is on Harry Usher, Ueberroth's "Right-Hand Man" and Olympic committee administrator "par excellence." In fact there are fascinating characters in this book that one yearns to know more about, but then the 267 page narrative might have doubled in size. Anita de Frantz, John C. Argue, Daniel Greenwood, Ed Keen, Mike O'Hara, Paul Ziffren, David Wolper, Edwin Steidle, David Simon and others are important people in this story. Their obvious talent and expertise cries for more detail from the author and at the same time is clear proof that the charismatic, hard-nosed Ueberroth literally surrounded himself with brilliant and talented colleagues. Yet Reich's tantalizing vignettes leaves us a little wanting. Several Olympic Games specialists considered chapter 12, "The Boycott" the most revealing segment of the book. Despite a reduction in athletic talent, and from the "standpoint of spirit, the boycott may actually have helped make the Games a success," concluded Reich, and we are treated to a detailed explanation. President Ronald Reagan was no friend of the Ueberroth efforts to bring the Soviets to Los Angeles, neither was the IOC leadership in love with White House coolness toward them and the LAOOC. Reich elaborates. In this vein, revealed Ken Reich (pronounced "Rich"):

the U.S. State Department-almost never alert to the value of international sport in American diplomacy-explicitly stated that it would not become involved in any world wide campaign to support the Los Angeles Games.

There's more, much more "stuff" like this in the book.

I tried my very best to find factual and/or historical inaccuracies in Reich's text but I came up empty. It is testimony to the intelligence of the man and the seriousness with which he entered into this commitment. One can easily forgive his occasional lapse into gossipy escapades. In fact, talking so intimately about the small and large actors on this Los Angeles stage form a kind of Yin and Yang contrast and symbiosis that in the last analysis makes Reich's book not only complementary to the Ueberroth autobiography but for the historian more valuable. Ueberroth, like all of us, is a complex figure and it may be unfair to end with a single anecdote about the man, but I cannot resist ending this review with a quote from Loyola University's vice president, Henry Durand, who said that one of Ueberroth's favorite pieces of advice to the staff was "Authority is 80% take and 20% given."

Penn State University

John Lucas