

Shaikin, Bill. *Sport and Politics. The Olympics and the Los Angeles Games*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988. Pp. 98. \$32.95.

During the Summer Olympic Games in 1984, Mr. Shaikin was an undergraduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, and an employee of a San Francisco Bay area newspaper. This thin volume is the result of personal Games observation and a busy preoccupation with California newspaper research and is divided into four short chapters: "Sport and Politics"; "Politics and the Olympics"; "Politics and the Los Angeles Games"; and "Whither the Olympics?" The author's constant theme, repeated scores of times and in a dozen different ways, is that the Olympic movement and politics are not "independent" entities but rather "inseparable" in some kind of unholy marriage. It is a concept well accepted by modern day Olympic scholars but a vision that seems to be new and nearly overwhelming to the author.

A second message of the book is a reiteration of an old accusation: the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is old, aristocratic, too wealthy, sexist, and unchanging. "The world has changed," he says correctly, "but [incorrectly, he concluded] the IOC has not" (p. 91). After unrelenting criticism of almost all aspects of the Olympic Games and the Olympic movement, supported by quotes from Harry Edwards, Richard Espy, Richard Mandell, and David Kanin, the author concludes that the festivals should be allowed to continue because they are hugely profitable and because they serve as "valuable political forums" (p. 93).

Sport and Politics is an unsophisticated work and not a valuable text for Olympic scholars. There is an audience for it out there but it is not among those who are seriously endeavoring to untangle the complex machinations (past and present) of the IOC, the national Olympic committees, the international sport federations, and the other tens of thousands of "players" on the Olympic stage. Mr. Shaikin is most earnest and tries hard, too hard (by pointing out only the negative) to portray a wounded giant-the Olympic movement-lumbering precariously through one Olympiad and into the next. Incidentally, the author incorrectly uses the word "Olympiad" (a chronological time period) in eight different places.

I guess that my biggest criticism of the book is that of the 432 references, 201 of them are from California newspapers and an additional 25 are found in *Sports Illustrated*. These are not necessarily poor sources but they are indications of a line of least resistance research-wise. Certainly, Harry Edwards, Richard Espy and David Kanin are recognized scholars but Shaikin's preoccupation with their research is a not-too-veiled indication of where he wanted to go, right from the beginning of his book. Just as disconcerting is the fact that, despite a 1988 copyright date, the overwhelming percentage of references, as high as 90 percent, have a summer 1984 date attached to them. Only narrative, descriptive, chronological history can result from such a razor-thin selection of research documents. Whatever happened to an analysis of the four-volume, three-thousand-page *Official Report* of these Los Angeles Games? Where is Peter Ueberroth's autobiography (*Made in America*); his biography (*Making It Happen*) by Ken Reich; and Richard B. Perelman's compact *Olympic Retrospective*? Obviously, Mr. Shaikin hurried through his small book long before these important books were published. Any kind of real analysis and synthesis of these Los Angeles Olympic Games, any degree of historical perspective, was thus rendered impossible.

Shaikin is definitely unsure which political system he prefers in the realm of government support for Olympic athletes-the full support enterprise of the Soviet bloc nations or the wholly governmental non-support American system. One can sympathize with his dilemma, but he is unhelpful in offering any suggestions for his own country's problem. In a different direction, one might become peevish at Shaikin's repeated and uncritical admiration of Dr. Harry Edwards, a man "who understands the relationship between sport and society perfectly" (p. 4). The author, crystal clear in his acceptance of Edwards' views on the Olympic Games, is less clear with some of his sentence structure. On page 28 one reads:

IOC recognition of a certain committee or acknowledgment of a certain name is tantamount to conferring diplomatic recognition for-given the Olympic media spectacle-all the world to see.

It is not a sentence taken out of context and few, if any, might fathom its meaning. On page 20 the reader is informed that "football, known to Americans as soccer, is immensely popular virtually everywhere outside the United

States.” This is not a sentence for the ages. On the same page the author-gourmet is of the opinion that “one might well call the Olympic Games a buffet of sport, as there is truly something tasty for everyone.”

In chapter 2 the narrative skips wildly from Jesse Owens to Luz Long, back to Olympia and the ancient Games and on to the modern day Soviet Union; back again to Baron Pierre de Coubertin and the France-Prussian War, ending the chapter with one-sentence vignettes on Olympic Games boycotts of 1956 through 1980. He concludes most unhelpfully (p. 32): “Olympic politics would not be possible without Olympic athletes.” Shaikin takes a rather pejorative tone, a kind of indictment of Berlin, Tokyo, Moscow and Los Angeles-cities that used the Olympic Games “as a world showcase” (p. 42). He forgot to mention Paris, London, Stockholm, Amsterdam, Rome, Mexico City . . . and all the rest, that did the same thing.

There’s more that I find unsatisfactory about this book—more that one might say about its unsuccessful efforts to be profound, to make big statements without scientific substantiation. If I say more I will over-step my personal boundaries of civility (if I have not already done so).

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