

*King of the Olympics: The Lives and Loves of Avery Brundage*. Frank Agrama, Henri Spade, Riccardo Tozzi, Producers; Harmony Gold Productions, Inc. WWOR, New York; September 1988. 150 minutes.

The title could not be more appropriate for a film which dramatically shows that Avery Brundage, President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) from 1952-1972, had many loves and led several lives. In addition to Olympic administration, Brundage was best known as a respectable, self-made millionaire, and husband of socialite Elizabeth Dunlop. Few were aware that from the late 1940s, he also kept a mistress, divorcee Lilian Linnea Dresden, mother of the two sons he never really acknowledged. The tensions and conflicts between his passion for women and for the Olympics make up the heart of the drama.

Flashbacks are used extensively to weave the complicated mosaic. During the first twenty minutes, scenes shift rapidly from Brundage's 1952 election as IOC President, to Dresden in labor, to his childhood, his 1950s California home, his illegitimate children, Washington, D.C., and finally Mexico. Although flashbacks are used thereafter, the changes are not so rapid and frantic in the later parts of the film.

There is considerable attention to Olympic politics, with Brundage's role in averting a cancellation or boycott of the 1936 games, and his 1972 decision that "The games must go on," particularly well developed. Despite the many steamy love scenes, there is also time for a great deal of Olympic coverage, particularly surrounding the games of 1912, 1936, and 1972. Archival footage and reenactments are very skillfully combined in these segments, with the actors seeming to participate in the long ago events, and gradual transitions from black and white to color.

The film carefully develops Brundage's complex character and dramatizes the events which precipitated his lifelong devotion to the doctrine of pure amateurism. It also dramatizes several traumatic events in his early childhood, most notably his father's desertion of the family. However, it fails to explore what emotions Brundage might have felt about abandoning his own sons, something that is never actually depicted, but must be surmised. Also left to the viewer's imagination is the final breakup of his affair with Dresden. On the other hand, this production leaves no doubt that Brundage's first love was neither wife, offspring, nor mistress, but the Olympics.

*King of the Olympics* is mainly accurate, and much of the material including the dialog, can be found in Guttman's *The Games Must Go On*. (Columbia University Press, 1984). Interestingly, that book is not listed in the credits. But,

as Guttman himself noted, much of Brundage's private life has remained secret, with no remaining diaries, letters, or memorabilia. Consequently, the film makers had to create many of the more intimate scenes, and their accuracy cannot be evaluated.

Despite its overall authenticity, this production has some notable flaws. These include perpetuation of the myth that Hitler refused to shake Jesse Owens' hand, and stating that Brundage defeated Jim Thorpe in head-to-head competition during the 1912 Olympic Trials, when the two actually participated in different regional qualifying events. Brundage's poor showing in the 1912 Decathlon is attributed to his falling down during a race, rather than his dropping out entirely and not running the 1500 meters. Also significant, particularly given the theme of the movie, is the complete omission of his last love, and second wife, Princess Mariann Charlotte Katharina Stefanie von Reuss. Although she was with him during his final hours in 1975, the film concludes by stating that Avery Brundage died alone.

Despite minor flaws, *King of the Olympics: the Lives and Loves of Avery Brundage* is a dramatically powerful and generally accurate film. Authenticity is enhanced by the fact that many of the scenes were filmed on location. Although no effort was made to find "look alike" to play the leading roles, the actors did a remarkable job of portraying Avery and Elizabeth Brundage from youth through old age. Unfortunately, their makeup crew was not so gifted, and some of the close-ups are more humorous than dramatic, with Hitler looking ridiculous. While there are far better films of past Olympic competition, this movie is excellent in depicting the politics and workings of the IOC, and the multifarious character of the American who dominated the movement for so long. Originally shown in two, two-hour segments with commercial interruptions, "King of the Olympics" actually lasts about two hours. While this may be too long for classroom use, many of the segments can be shown effectively as vignettes, making it adaptable to a variety of educational uses.

University of Texas at Austin

Mary Lou LeCompte