

Mandell, Richard D. *The Olympics of 1972: A Munich Diary*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991. Pp. xvi, 207. Index.

Richard D. Mandell needs no introduction, but a few aspects of Mandell's biography should be noted. Several years before the formation of the North America Society for Sport History, Mandell wrote *The Nazi Olympics* (1971), a book that demonstrated some of the possibilities of sport history. Mandell wrote about the intersection of sport and politics, the point where play became deadly serious and bureaucrats and world leaders, not athletes, set the agenda. "The Olympics Games of 1936," Mandell wrote, "were an important episode in the establishment of an evil political regime." In graphic and detailed fashion, Mandell supported his thesis, illustrating how the Nazis used sport and festivals to reinforce their political and racial goals. *The Nazi Olympics* also showed that Mandell was a fine writer who knew how to use foreshadowing, detail, and the other tools of the craft to tell a good story. The American and international reviews of *The Nazi Olympics* indicated that Mandell was on to something, that sport could never again be viewed with innocence. Other books followed. In 1976 came *The First Modern Olympics* and in 1984 *Sport: A Cultural History*. Both books extended the basic themes of *The Nazi Olympics*. Both books

revealed that what happened in Berlin in 1936 was not an anomaly. Sport and politics had had a long marriage.

Success and failure in publishing often is a matter of timing. *The Nazi Olympics* was a beautifully timed book. The hardback appeared one year-and the mass market paperback only a few months-before the Olympics once again returned to Germany. The impact of *The Nazi Olympics* allowed Mandell to attend the 1972 Munich Games as an expert on the Olympic Movement, an authority on the political uses of the Games. As Mandell learned, Willi Daume, the president of the Organizing Committee of the XXth [Munich] Olympics, had made *The Nazi Olympics* required reading for his staff. Daume was determined that Munich would not be another Berlin. He wanted to show the world that Germany had renounced its Nazi past and had emerged from World War II and the post-war reconstruction peaceful, fun-loving, and democratic. In short, like Hitler, Daume wanted to use sport to achieve political goals. That their objectives were very different does not change the fact that both men understood the political power of a world sport festival. Daume was so confident that he could sell the image of the “New German” to the world that he invited Mandell to come to the Games as a journalist to watch, experience, and ultimately to be “seduced” by the “New Germany.”

*The Olympics of 1972* is the result of Daume’s generous invitation. The form of the book is essentially that of a diary (I say essentially because the “Introduction” was written-but not published-soon after the Munich Games as an article and the “Epilogue” was written long after the Munich Games). Unlike most diaries, however, Mandell intended his observations of and musing about the Munich Games to be made public in published form. During the Munich Games, Mandell wondered about the various Olympic sites in search of stories. At times he freely invented a fresh past for himself to obtain his story. He moved about the Olympic Village disguised as an athlete. He talked with athletes as well as bureaucrats and reporters. Except for the tragic events that disrupted the Games, Mandell experienced what Daume wanted him to experience. In several ways he was seduced by the full range of Olympic emotions. Mandell never denies the seduction. At all times, however, he is aware of the process of the seduction. The strength of Mandell’s diary is that it recounts exactly how the Olympics—its drama, color, excitement, and atmosphere—seduces.

For Mandell, the seduction begins with color. Color is political. For the 1936 Games, Berlin was washed in red and black, the colors of dictatorship and totalitarianism. Red, black, and brown, the harsh colors of “Old Germany,” were verboten in Munich. The colors of “New Germany” were soft, cool, and peaceful. As Daume explained, “We are using the colors of a May morning in Bavaria. Friendly colors: grass green, sky blue, cloudlike silver and touches of flowerly orange” (p. 3). Otl Aicher co-ordinated the visual presentation of the Munich Olympics. Using color and symbols—“Waldi,” the Bavarian dachshund, was the mascot of the Games—Aicher was determined to present Germany as light and airy. The Munich Games would be *die heiteren Spiele* (the merry Games), and Nazi red and German police dogs would be forgotten.

The seduction continued with the treatment of the journalists, who were pampered even more than the athletes. They were better fed and housed than the athletes. To be sure, they were not treated as well as the VIPs, but the Munich planners did do their best to insure that journalists enjoyed their stay in Munich. Mandell compares the entire experience to a potlatch. The act of giving becomes part of the political equation.

As in *The Nazi Olympics*, Mandell is at his best when describing the festival/political nature of the Olympics. He is not interested in the sports themselves. Nowhere is this more evident than in one episode when Mandell went to watch a wrestling contest. The central match pitted a Russian clothed in authoritarian red against an American wearing democratic blue. Although both men were superheavyweights, the American was much smaller and purer looking than his Cro-Magnon-browed Soviet opponent. Mandell muses on the injustice of the match, seeing in the physiognomy of the wrestlers the political and social characters of their countries. Only toward the middle of the contest does he realize that he has made a mistake; that the American is in red and the Soviet in blue. Shocked by his "patriotic presumptions," he leaves the wrestling arena. It is of no interest to Mandell that the match he left was the classic first round contest between Aleksandr Medved and Chris Taylor. His beat is politics and aesthetics, not sports.

Interestingly, Mandell judges the Munich Games a political success (just as he judged the Berlin Games a success in *The Nazi Olympics*). Although the terrorist attack on the Israeli athletes disrupted and scarred the Games, Mandell believes that the Games showcased the "New Germany." In fact, sport politics are so flexible that there can be many victors. Mandell argues, for example, that both the terrorists and Israel scored victories in the greatest tragedy of the Modern Olympics. The terrorists, who played by different political rules, captured the attention of the world. As for Israel, Mandell writes, "In a deep and unguessable sense, since [the martyred athletes] more deeply institutionalized the guilt on the part of outsiders that has been the basis for founding and maintaining the Jewish nation, they stabilized a little more the always-threatened country" (p. 184). Although I disagree with some of Mandell's conclusions, I certainly admire his brutal recognition of the politics of the Olympic Movement.

*The Olympics of 1972* successfully captures the political and aesthetic mood of the Munich Olympics. It is a mood comprised of patriotism, competition, eroticism, and fear, with, perhaps, a dash of idealism. Mandell experiences and analyzes the different aspects of that Olympic mood, and he records the results in unblinking prose. His diary is not the history of a particular Games but rather his very personal and thoughtful reactions to a world festival, reactions that reinforce his other writings about the Olympics.