
HILL, CHRISTOPHER R. *Olympic Politics: Athens to Atlanta, 1896-1996*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996, Second edition. Pp. 283. Notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 pb.

Whenever people seek recognition, status and privilege, whenever people try to coerce, influence or dominate others, and wherever there is competition for resources, glory and honour, there are politics. It is hardly surprising then, that sports have always been, and always will be, political. Yet, many athletes, administrators, fans, and even sports scholars still struggle to accept the sports-politics nexus. *Olympic Politics* is a welcome contribution as one of the few texts which treats politics as a matter of sporting fact.

Christopher Hill explores the international, national, and “domestic” politics of the Olympic movement. International sports, Hill says, cannot “distance itself from the political questions which beset the world” (p. 1) and case studies of East and West Germany, China and Taiwan, North and South Korea, and apartheid South Africa prove his point.

Once, national governments hosted international exhibitions to “project a national image abroad” and “to achieve social and political objectives at home”

(p. 2). Today, they host Olympic Games. South Korea's rulers, for example, believed that the Seoul Games in 1988 marked "a new phase in Korea's existence as a nation" by symbolizing the nation's freedom from the shackles of Japanese imperialism (p. 177). Seoul and Barcelona used their Olympic Games to fast-track urban redevelopment and even Manchester's bid for the 2000 Games "gave impetus to projects of modernisation and improvement" and helped transform it "from a run-down post-industrial city" (p. 104).

By "domestic" politics Hill means the power politics of the Olympic movement's leaders, in particular the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Juan Antonio Samaranch. Hill analyzes Samaranch and other IOC leaders from a "realities of political life" perspective (p. 74, note 5). These realities include corruption, interest groups "competing for spoils," and "web[s] of patronage and influence" which "require constant maintenance and the judicious choice of friends" to maintain Samaranch "as a virtually unchallenged monarch" (p. 68).

Hill, however, excludes moral evaluation from his analysis. Moral evaluation is the essence of politics; it is the method by which we discover those principles, virtues, and attitudes which evince fairness and justice in social life. What are the principles and values of the Olympic movement and its president? What, precisely, do the IOC and Samaranch stand for? What are they against? Readers of *Olympic Politics* can only wonder. Interestingly, Hill criticizes Vyv Simpson and Andrew Jennings for their "shrill, ungenerous and disapproving" treatment of Samaranch (p. 74, note 5). But at least the authors of *The Lords of the Rings* question the morality and ethics of the Olympic movement and challenge Samaranch's politics.

Hill not only fails to draw moral conclusions, he contradicts and undermines his own arguments. For example, he dismisses the notion of a Samaranch led "Latin mafia" in the IOC: "until 1991. . . only [João] Havelange [president of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association and IOC member since 1963] was a member of the IOC" and, moreover, Havelange, Primo Nebiolo (president of the International Amateur Athletics Federation and IOC member since 1992), and Mario Vazquez-Raña (president of the Association of National Olympic Committees and IOC member since 1991) "take their positions extremely seriously" (p. 69). But strangely, Hill cites examples of Nebiolo, Raña, and Samaranch attending to pre-1991 "crises" including the Moscow boycott of Los Angeles in 1984 and condemnation of the IOC after it awarded the 1988 Games to Seoul. As evidence of commitment, Hill quotes a banal 1990 IOC press release which recorded that Samaranch and Havelange met to discuss "'subjects concerning their two organizations in an atmosphere of total cooperation an friendship'" (p. 69).

Hill's own evidence also belies his claim that "the IOC has not sought political involvement, but has had it thrust upon it" (p. 36). As he points out, the Olympic movement has never refrained from "congratulating itself when it does bring about change in a country's political system" (p. 119). Samaranch has tried to turn the IOC into a serious political actor in the international arena. The fact

that the 1997 meeting of the G7 discussed the threat of terrorism disrupting Olympic Games demonstrates just how successful he has been.

The strength of *Olympic Politics* rests on Hill's analysis of the changing nature of national politics and, in particular, the bidding campaigns to host the Olympic Games. When Los Angeles, the only city to bid for the 1984 Games, returned a profit of \$215 million, it launched what has become bidding frenzies. Six cities initially signaled their intent to bid for the 1992 and 1996 Games, eight for 2000, and 11 for 2004. But, as Hill points out, it is not the frequently overestimated "potential [economic] profit" of hosting the games which encourages cities. Rather, it is a recognition that "bidding is an effective and cheap way" to promote cities or, in the case of the Winter Olympics, ski resorts (p. 95). Manchester, for example, placed itself on the world map "for the relatively small sum of not more than £3m" (p. 104).

Bidding is an extremely serious affair as Hill's example of "extraordinary manipulation" by Barcelona officials illustrates. In the race for the 1992 Winter Olympics, they persuaded several IOC members to switch their vote from Falun, Sweden, to Albertville, France. Given the IOC's aversion to letting one country organize the Winter and Summer Games in the same year, Albertville's victory effectively eliminated Paris, Barcelona's main competitor, from the competition for the 1992 Summer Games.

In conclusion, Hill notes that "the forces making for conflict and division are immense, but it is probable that self-interest, diplomatic skill, wealth and ideals will continue to hold the [Olympic] movement together" (p. 264). No doubt. However, the absence of moral evaluation ignores two critical questions: who should determine the obligations and responsibilities of the IOC, and how should those obligations and responsibilities be met?

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