

France and the Berlin Olympics

William J. Murray

Latrobe University

Despite its association with the world's biggest international sporting events, the World Cup in soccer (run by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, founded in France and called the Jules Rimet Cup after its French founder) and the Olympic Games (we hardly need reminding of the role of the French Baron de Coubertin here), the study of sports history in France has been comparatively neglected. This is true in particular of France's involvement in that much studied sporting/political event often referred to as the Nazi Olympics. Apart from important works by Jean-Marie Brohm and Bruce Kidd there has been little written on France's involvement in these Games, despite France's vital interest in the affairs of the nation with whom it was soon to be at war,

This paper was an introduction to some of the issues raised by France's participation in the 1936 Olympics, but particularly the response in France after the Games and the debate raised when the leading French sporting newspaper *L'Auto*, before the Games an ardent advocate of France's participation, declared that the Nazis had completely "disfigured" the Games (Its editorial headline ran: "Les Jeux défigurées"), and in response to this Coubertin declared that the Games in Berlin had lived up to his highest expectations.

The issues of racism, commercialism and the intrusion of politics in sport were discussed from the perspective of the "bourgeois" press and the more outspoken organs of Left and Right opinions in France, against the background of a newly elected Popular Front government faced by the crisis of the Spanish Civil War and its own impending World Exhibition, due to open the year after the Berlin extravaganza.