

# *Making Dough* The Helms Bakery Company vs. the United States Olympic Committee on the Issue of Commercializing Olympic Symbols, 1932 to 1953

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In the modern world of Olympic commercialism, the exploitation of Olympic symbols is an important matter. By the same token, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and Olympic Games Organizing Committees pursue initiatives that seek to protect such insignia from the unlawful use by those who have not paid for the privilege. The origin and evolution of insignia protection are an area of historical research that has been given little attention to date. Given what is at stake in today's world, that is, literally millions of dollars generated by the Olympic five ring symbol alone, it is appropriate to revisit the precedent-setting cases that challenged the IOC's and NOCs' collective authority over use of Olympic words, emblems and rings.

With regard to Olympic matters in the United States, the 1932 Games in Los Angeles produced one of the earliest cases on record. In 1932, Helms Bakeries of Los Angeles won the bid to supply the Olympic Village with bread. Subsequently, it advertised and marketed its product on the public market by capitalizing on its "Olympic affiliation." Further, Helms continued to use Olympic words, emblems and rings on its products for years after the Games had been concluded. While Olympic officials generally ignored this, it did not escape the Olympic watchdog, Avery Brundage, President of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC). In a long, often vitriolic struggle, Brundage attempted to sever Helms from its Olympic exploitation. Further, Brundage attempted to sue the Helms case as a warning to all future symbol exploiters. Precedent-setting in nature, the Helms case outcome provided several parameters by which future USOC commercial relationships would be guided.

As the Centennial Olympic Games in Atlanta approach the cycle begins again, but this time its leader is the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG). According to the ACOG the very survival of the Olympic Movement in the United States hinges on its ability to protect the Olympic words, emblems and rings. More than a year before the Games were set to begin, the ACOG was "cracking down hard on companies or individuals who might be infringing on Olympic trademarks." To those "skeptics" who ask whether the commercialization of the Olympic Games has gone too far, Andrew Young, Chair of the Atlanta Olympic Games Organizing Committee, has adopted the view that "the commercialization of sport is the democratization of sport."

This study relies on sources from the Avery Brundage Collection of private papers, letters found in the William G. Garland papers in the Helms Library in Los Angeles, as well as sources found at IOC Archives in Lausanne, Switzerland.