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***Three Scorpions in a Bottle:* Soviet Management of the Sale of U.S. Television Rights to the 1980 Moscow Olympics**

[The Soviets] want us to be like three scorpions in a bottle-when it's over.
two will be dead and the winner will be exhausted.

Roone Arledge, President, ABC Sports,
February, 1977

Roone Arledge (President, ABC Sports) was aghast at the negotiating tactics employed by the Moscow Organizing Committee (MOC) with respect to the sale of U.S. television rights to the 1980 Summer Olympics. Having concluded that the 'big three' U.S. networks-ABC, NBC, CBS-regarded the television rights to the 1980 Moscow Olympics as a prized commodity, Ignati Novikov, President of the Moscow Organizing Committee, determined to exploit the interest of the U.S. networks by pitting them against each other. The Soviets, with the personal approval of IOC President Lord Killianin, adopted a bidding procedure guaranteed to maximize the sale price of the U.S. television rights.

Through an analysis of IOC archival material, newspaper coverage, and secondary sources, this paper examines the management tactics employed by Novikov and the impact of his actions on the U.S. television networks and the International Olympic Committee. Novikov's hard-line approach prompted the 'big three' networks to stage a walkout from an auction of the U.S. television rights and while the U.S. Justice Department considered the networks' request for an opinion on the legality of a 'pooled' bid, CBS shied away from any involvement in televising the Moscow Games. Novikov, who had seen treasured U.S. dollars slipping through his fingers in the wake of the Moscow walkout, capitalized subsequently on the competitiveness of television executives representing ABC and NBC. Although the IOC was satisfied with Novikov's approach to selling the rights for a maximum sale price, Killianin was not in favour of his desire to limit the portion of the contract available for distribution to the IOC, National Olympic Committees, and the International Sport Federations.

Despite Novikov's pledge to abide by the IOC's policy for the distribution of television revenue, he recognized that he could gain concessions from the IOC similar to those granted to the Munich, Innsbruck, and Montreal Organizing Committees. This encouraged the IOC to adopt a policy of joint negotiation of future television contracts with representatives of Olympic Organizing Committees. No longer satisfied with keeping

a discreet distance in order to protect the IOC's image. Killanin determined that reserving a seat for the IOC at negotiation sessions provided the necessary means for safe-guarding its financial interests. Throughout Killanin's presidency the IOC's effort to seek technical knowledge of the television industry had prepared the ground for this. During the 1980s, the IOC teams discovered that joint negotiations did not eliminate the possibility of conflict with representatives of the Organizing Committees. By the end of the decade, the IOC abandoned this joint negotiation in favour of exerting sole authority over the negotiation of television contracts. In this regard, the Moscow negotiations represented an important stage in the evolution of the IOC's relationship with the U.S. and other television networks throughout the world.

