

OLYMPIC ISSUES

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Verve and Conscience: The Formation of the First United States Olympic Basketball Team

Like most decisions surrounding American participation in the 1936 Olympic Games, commitment of the initial United States basketball team was ceremonial. Little attention was paid to the protracted debate in the United States on the merit of committing an American team to Nazi Germany. Seemingly, composition of this basketball team was isolated from the substantive dialogue of the day, and devoid of rising concerns. The accession of basketball to a medal sport was constructed by men in a political and social vacuum, and clearly ignored the larger moral questions of the time. Those in the United States, who pushed basketball as a medal sport, were driven by four concerns. The issue of a uniform set of rules, resolving differences between the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) the quest for international approval from significant countries to assure a full roster of teams for the Games, and the actual construction of the United States team itself represented the major issues. The greater moral concerns of sending the 1936 American team to a rapidly developing totalitarian state were subordinated to accommodate athletic and national expediency.

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Female Olympians in the Red, White, and Blue: The Emergence of a National Media Hero in the Games of Los Angeles and Seoul

On the opening day of the 1896 Olympic Games, the Baron Pierre de Coubertin's dream of a modern revival was fulfilled. Athletes and spectators alike watched in anticipation as the streets of Athens lay quiet and vacant. The Baron created these Modern Games as a tribute to the ancient Greeks and as a way to bring nations together in the name of amateur sport and peace. Perhaps these immediate goals were the only concern of the organizers and

future International Olympic Committee, however changes were obviously eminent. The first would be the inclusion of women, eleven of whom competed in the Paris Games of 1900. Athletes then questioned the necessity in being amateurs since it allowed for an almost unbearably poor lifestyle. Recently, the use of performance enhancing drugs and commercialism has caused many nations and viewers to question the purpose of the Olympics. Perhaps the most dramatic change can be seen in the use of the Olympic Games as a nationalistic tool. The Baron's original Games are now morphed into quite a different event.

The 1980s are the perfect example of the effects of these changes. It was the last decade of the Cold War. President Jimmy Carter decided to boycott the 1980 Games held in Moscow to the dismay of many of the athletes. This provoked a refusal by both the Soviet Union and East Germany to take part in the 1984 Los Angeles Games. This left the East and West not only with feelings of animosity, but also fostered an atmosphere ripe for nationalistic pride. What good could possibly come from this?

The answer lies in the smiles and faces of American female Olympians. This was their time to become national heroes in the face of "the other," the foreign female athlete. In 1984 and 1988, there is an emergence in the American media of female Olympians as athletic icons and national heroes. From Mary Lou Retton to Flo Jo, these female Olympians could be seen covered in the red, white and blue. From headlines to photographs, the Olympics became a stage to rally around the flag as well as welcome women into a large part of the sporting world. This is not to say that before 1984, female Olympians were ignored, but with the onset of commercialism, sponsorship, and in the face of the cold War, the American female athlete became as recognizable as her male counterparts thanks to the media.

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Adding New Sports to the Olympic Games: Is More Better?

With a burgeoning number of International Sports Federations awaiting entrance to a future Olympic Games, what are the potential problems facing the International Olympic Committee (IOC) members and future organizers of Olympic