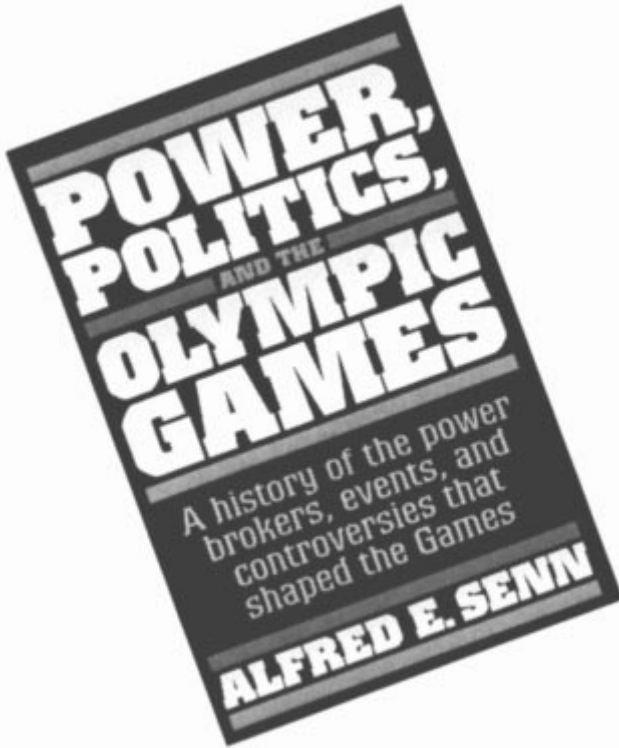


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## Book Reviews

*Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games* by Alfred E. Senn (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999), pp. 315. Reviewed by Robert K. Barney, The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada.



It is somewhat unfathomable that a subject of so much global attention, the Modern Olympic Movement, is so limited in terms of the body of serious scholarship that has been written about its history. This is particularly true with regard to survey history treatments of its now slightly more than 100 years of existence. College and university professors who offer courses treating the Olympic Games in modern context have long complained about the lack of reliable, seriously-researched survey histories on the subject. With few exceptions, what many are left to contemplate for their use is an assembly of statistical summaries that dutifully record who won what Olympic event, when, where, and in what fashion. Also left for the teacher's consideration, are a limited number of anthologies, as well as a sizeable corpus of trade book-coffee table publications, the latter of which are most often produced by journalists and avocational Olympic historians. A few of these generic items are modestly useful for the teacher. Most fall far short of what is needed.

In the beginning of the 1990s, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games* (University of Illinois Press, 1992) was published. Well researched and written, Guttmann's book received proper acclaim in a number of reviews published in scholarly journals. Now, here at the end of the 1990s, we are fortunate in having another Olympic survey history for our contemplation, Alfred Erich Senn's, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games*. Senn's work, in my opinion, extends beyond Guttmann's. I will enlarge on those reasons later. But first, something about Senn and his new book.

Alfred Senn, of Lithuanian descent, is presently professor-emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, an institution with which he has enjoyed a faculty affiliation for almost forty years. In the history department at Wisconsin he taught Eastern European history, and, for the last fifteen years, a course on the Olympic Games. His chief interest in the Games is focussed on political perspectives. It was partially the result of failing to find a creditable survey history of the Olympics for his students that he turned towards the task of producing one himself. The overall result is quite admirable.

Students will find this book easy to comprehend; it is well written. It is also well organized. There are three main sections of text, each section containing several chapters. Part I presents an excellent, albeit brief, description of the Olympic Family (IOC, NOCs, IFs, and OCOGs), including how each is organized and for what purpose. Additionally, Senn relates how each organizational entity articulates with the other. This is an important and fundamental quality for the understanding of the subject. Subsequent chapters in Part I treat the traditional aspects of early Olympic history, the IOC's creation and early growing pains, "starting anew" after World War I, and the first half century's most storied Olympic event--the 1936 Berlin Games.

In Part II, six chapters focus on the vexing problems of the era under the troubled and controversial IOC presidency of Avery Brundage. Included here are discussions of the impact on the Games from such crisis events as the evolution of Cold War politics, particularly as they concerned the world's two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the USA. The disintegration of colonial empires and rapid expansion in the number of NOCs, race discrimination, threatening boycotts, early incidence of doping, the amateur-professional question, and Brundage's personal character and philosophy in confrontation with what he might well have viewed as "a world gone mad" also find their place.

Part III contains nine chapters. Collectively, they embrace examination of issues, political and otherwise, which arose following Brundage's retirement from Olympic matters (1972). Featured in the treatment of this era, are the issues of women as members of IOC, along with greater parity for female athletes in the sports programs of the Games. Participation in the Games by professional athletes, devastating boycotts by Western-aligned nations and Eastern European-bloc countries, rising commercialism, and disappearance of the superpower rivalry, are other themes given their due.

Senn's book showcases a comprehensive index, a necessary tool for the student. It also features an effective use of illustrations. Here he has chosen his material wisely. Cryptic photographs, some familiar to us and some refreshingly new, are arranged on the first page of each of the 19 chapters. The well known cliché, "a picture is worth a thousand words," is seldom more apparent than in this new Senn work. Another obvious strength of the book is the author's use of sidebar information

to clarify, embellish, and highlight various points. Sidebar material is presented in two forms: (1) graphs or tables, and (2) quotation of primary source documents. In the former case, to cite only a few examples: the USSR/US/GDR Competition, 1964-1976 (p. 169) Growth of Japan as an Olympic power (p. 70) the USA-Soviet Olympic basketball confrontations (p. 231), Atlanta construction projects (p. 251), voting for the host of the Centennial Games (p. 247) and many, many more. All are well-thought out, carefully constructed, and effectively presented. The second characteristic of sidebar information aims at presenting primary source material that explains in graphic and specific form more general discussions in the text. For instance, with regard to the volatile relationship existing between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan in the 1950s and the quest by each party to be represented in the Modern Olympic Games as the "real" China, Senn inserts a copy of Brundage's circular letter written to all IOC members in 1959 reminding each of them that the IOC's rules must state more clearly "that Olympic Committees (NOCs) represent the geographical areas in which they operate . . . and not governments" (p. 117). And, an editorial from the *New York Times* of August 26, 1954 proclaiming that if another boycott was allowed to happen regarding the 1988 Games in Seoul, then surely at risk would be "the survival of the Modern Olympics" (p. 205). And, what surely must have been a favorite of Senn's, a passage from a speech by Kazimieras Motieka, Vice President of the Lithuanian National Olympic Committee, to IOC officials assessing Lithuania's request for independent nation status in 1991 (p. 236). The reader cannot help but be captivated by all of this, an impressive display of the use of primary source material. I cannot say enough in admiration of how effective this sidebar material was in helping to present the book's general political theme. In fact, it stands as a model for authors of future works of this nature.

I come now to the sources on which Senn's survey history rests. In this regard, more of Senn's background is important to consider in order to appreciate the arduous journey he undertook in order to produce "his" history. There is little doubt that Senn is at home in reading various Slavic languages, of which his expertise in Lithuanian forms a base. Senn first became interested in the Olympics in the middle 1970s when he acted as an interpreter for "Badger" Bob Johnson's Wisconsin hockey teams in games against touring Soviet squads. Later, when Senn seriously began to envision making the study of the Modern Olympic Movement an academic enterprise, he was on leave from Wisconsin living in Moscow and working in the library of the Academy of Sciences. This Moscow sojourn, as well as other trips to Eastern European archives, armed him with documents that told the story of the Modern Olympic Games from an Eastern European source perspective, rather than a Western European and North American source base on which most of us rely. Having said that, Senn did make good use of materials in one of the fundamental Olympic-related archives in North America, the Avery Brundage Collection at the University of Illinois. Senn's material is arranged in a format where he correlates direct citations expressed in APA style with a lengthy list of bibliographical references found near the end of the volume. Utilizing this type of citation style in a history book has considerable merit. Most of Senn's material is unusually grand in both qualitative and quantitative substance, and, in fact, it makes an indelible contribution to the book's credibility. But, in my opinion, the material's richness is diminished by this short cut, sterile method.

Even though I found Senn's knowledge and attention to detail quite extraordi-

nary, there are some very minor errors. First, Theodore Roosevelt (p. 25, 48) played no role in resolving the dispute whether Chicago or St. Louis should celebrate the 1904 Olympic Games, despite the argument to the contrary made by Bill Henry in 1948, upon which Senn relied. Second, did not the first concept of an Olympic Village appear at the Paris games in 1924, rather than what Senn states (p. 47), as a product of the Los Angeles Games of 1932? Finally, when America's basketball "Dream Team" won the gold medal in Atlanta in 1996, were they not Dream Team II, as opposed to III (p. 25)?

In the end, there is one apparent theme in Senn's history. He does not underscore it as such, but it is there, nevertheless, a painful reminder of the United States Olympic Committee's power and influence in global sport matters. In decade after decade of Olympic history, an aggressive, nationalistic, often belligerent USOC seeks ways in which to dominate international sport. Much of Senn's message, though tacit in its delivery, focusses on myriad squabbles between a paternal IOC and an often rebellious Olympic family member, the USOC. There is a long list of confrontations underscoring "family" differences over the years. They run the gamut, from American amateur sport czar Jim Sullivan's jousts with Pierre de Coubertin during the Olympic period prior to World War I, to USOC power plays for larger shares of Olympic television and corporate sponsorship monies in the 1990s. This "anxious" relationship, of course, will be played out on yet another stage as this issue of *Olympika* goes to press, that is, when President Samaranch appears before a United States Congressional Committee during pre-Christmas deliberations in Washington, D.C. At stake, may well be the "good times" financial life of the Modern Olympic Movement.

Finally, as promised, some comparisons between Senn's book and Guttman's earlier work. The two volumes are somewhat alike in theme in that they both focus mainly on political moments rather than other considerations. Though each used the Avery Brundage Collection extensively, Guttman is stronger on Brundage's role in Olympic political matters. Guttman, of course, had an advantage of having earlier written a biography of Avery Brundage. However, because Senn is informed by Eastern European sources, many of them primary to Olympic superpower politics, his work is better balanced and his arguments stronger. Then, too, I find Senn's work benefits from what I perceive to be a passionate infatuation with the Olympic Games, a factor which becomes apparent in reading his prose. I have, in the past, congratulated Allen Guttman (by way of review) for his notable contributions to Olympic literature. Until now, I have not done that on behalf of Alfred Senn. At this time, I would like to do just that. Senn, like many of us who currently labor in Olympic scholarship, finds himself facing retirement. But, still he labors on, not for the meager recompense it may afford, but rather "for the love of the game," so to speak. I am grateful to him for "his efforts," and producing this remarkable book in his now twilight career years.