

***The Olympics at the Millennium: Power, Politics and the Games*** edited by Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2000). Reviewed by John Bale, Aarhus University, Denmark, and Keele University, United Kingdom.

A few days after I had received this book for review, I came across *The Olympic Games and National Socialism*, a remarkable record of the 1936 Olympics, brilliantly edited by Reinhard Rürup. His book, of which I had been totally unaware, contained numerous stunning visual images. For example, there was Phil Edwards, the African-Canadian bronze medalist in the 800 meters, together with the Italian second placer, Mario Lanzi, seemingly giving the Nazi salute from the winner's podium; there were reproductions of press cuttings that told of the exhibition 'German Art in the Olympic Year 1936' being closed immediately after the Games because it was felt to include 'artistic anarchy' which the *Frankfurter Zeitung* claimed was "the order of the day in the (former) Jewish salons;" there was a photograph of a 'gypsy' family, most of whom were never seen again, having been moved out of Berlin because the Olympics were to be held there; and there was the blonde 'half-Jew' Helene Mayer, photographed with a statue of herself and her statement that her acceptance as a member of the German Olympic team would be conditional on her retaining German citizenship.

Given the kind of images projected in Rürup's masterly collection I wondered how the Olympics of 1936 could have ever taken place and how the institution of Olympism could have possibly survived. It was with this mind-set that I began to read the collection of original essays edited by Schaffer and Smith. I must say that my reading of it was accompanied by a certain amount of trepidation. How would it stand up in comparison with the Rürup book - and several others such as those by Richard Mandell and John MacAloon - which have robustly provided scholarly insights into the Olympic movement? Is there academic space for more critical studies in what may be an emergent post-Olympic age?

By the time I had got to page 3 my image of *The Olympics at the Millennium* was negative, the result of three typographic or factual glitches on a single page (Paavo Nurmi was not a 'flying Fin,' Riefenstahl's Olympic film was not *Triumph of the Will*, and the two-time Olympic marathon winner was not Abebe Kikila). A few pages later I had to ask myself whether the editors had selected the best example of the globalization of sport by alluding to African athletes training to compete in winter sports in Northern Europe (page 7). To cap all of this, two pages later there appears, yes, *Jessie Owens!*

Despite these early misgivings, however, the book has, I think, a number of positive qualities, even if it sometimes seems to be written by authors who only thinly disguise 'fannish' tendencies. *The Olympics at the Millennium* contains some well-known scholars and some relative newcomers. It is organized into four sections, each section containing between three and five chapters. Following an editorial introduction, there follows sections on "Cultural difference and 'Elite' sports," "Masculinities/Femininities/Sexualities," "The Olympics: Drama, spectacle, media" and "Politics at the Games." Because these themes have been studied extensively and in greater detail than is possible in chapter-length essays, the book essentially serves as an introductory text in Olympic studies. It will alert undergraduate students to go

beyond the common sense and taken for granted views of the Olympics, all too frequently presented in the mass media. Given the constraints of space, it is impossible to review each chapter. I have therefore chosen to select one or two chapters from each section in order to show the variety of approaches.

In the first section of the book I found the chapter on "Jewish Athletes at the 'Nazi Olympics'" by Guttman, Kestner, and Eisen to be of great interest and value - partly, I suspect, the result of my awareness of Rürup's book and Mandell's *The Nazi Olympics*. Guttman and his colleagues raise the question of dilemmas facing Jewish (and Jew-ish) athletes who had to make the choice of supporting the Olympics or not. On several occasions, the ideology of sport prevailed over that of religion. Keith Harrison's chapter reveals how the ideology of racism continues to characterize sport. In "Racing with race" he notes that Harry Edwards needs to say the same things today as he was 30 years ago, something both familiar and depressing. However, anyone reading Harrison's perspective on Muhammad Ali's presence at the Atlanta Games should immediately proceed to Allan Tomlinson's more incisive readings in Section 3 (see below).

The second section of *The Olympics at the Millennium* - perhaps the strongest section in the book - examines sexualities and includes fascinating insights from Toby Miller who notes that in televising men's Olympic swimming (with its almost naked male bodies posing perils to conventional masculinity) it is masculinity that has to be emphasized on camera - 'straight lines' as opposed to 'curves' and 'grace.' Miller's chapter, focusing as it does on ambiguous images of swimmers and the necessary image construction of masculinity, contrasts with an equally fascinating chapter by Cheryl Cole on "One chromosome too many." This is a remarkable insight into the banning of Olympic champion Ewa Klobukowska because of her 'sex.' Cole's chapter is accompanied by some stunning photographs of both Klobukowska (the 'innocent victim') and the more cyborg-like Jarmila Kratochvilova who remains the world record holder for 800 metres (pages 132-133). A chapter on the Gay Games exemplifies not only the colonizing tendencies of the Olympic idea but also more than a hint of subversive playfulness in these games. But where can such subversion be found in the model upon which the Gay Games are based? And while the Gay Games and Paralympics may 'challenge prejudice' and 'promote inclusiveness' (page 14). do they not also display an excessive desire for victory and associated corruption and cheating as evidenced in the 'real thing,' upon which they are modeled?

The next section of the book contains an excellent chapter by Tomlinson who sees much of the symbolism of the opening spectacle of the Games as typifying the rottenness and hypocrisy of the Olympic movement. Tomlinson's two readings of Ali's tortuous journey with the Olympic torch should be obligatory reading for all students who grapple with 'ways of seeing' sporting images and representations. Yet in another chapter in the same section the (seemingly post-feminist) editors, in a chapter on the Olympics of the everyday, can write, apparently without irony, that "Olympians and their audiences universally applaud the virtue of fair play" (p. 213). Oddly, it follows a chapter on drug taking by women Olympic swimmers.

The final section is, in my view, the least satisfactory. Though ostensibly concerned with politics at the Olympics, Helen Lenskyj's well known work is not mentioned in an essay on siting the Sydney Games and the final essay, while raising the important question of the medal table as a basis for comparing national success at the

Olympics, fails to sufficiently critique the medal table as a basis for international comparisons. Any study concerned with using such a crude indicator should at least allude to its methodological weaknesses and consider the superior approach used by Ernst Jokl and his associates into the 1952 Games at Helsinki.

So much has been written on the Olympics that it is difficult for any author or editor to claim a novel contribution. In my view this book contains some strong essays. On the other hand, some of the entries would not manage to make their way beyond the editorial eye of most academic journals. The book fails to live up to the cover blurb that it is a “thoroughly brilliant anthology.” On the other hand it is a useful introduction to ‘Olympic Studies.’ For something approaching ‘brilliant’ we still have MacAloon, Mandell, and Rürup.

