

Freedom for Catalonia?: Catalan Nationalism, Spanish Identity and the Barcelona Olympic Games by John Hargreaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 178 pp., and 11 preface pages. Reviewed by Russell Field, The University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

The 2000 Sydney Olympics gave Australia an international stage on which to promote an image of itself to the world. During these Games, sprinter Cathy Freeman's victory in the 400 metres was a focal point for expressions of Australian nationalism. Her success also brought attention to both the rich history and grievances of Australia's Aboriginal culture. However, this was not the first time that such a confluence of events -- two cultures, an ethnic nation contained within a political one, competing for international attention -- had been played out during the staging of a large mega-sporting event or Olympics Games. The recent publication of John Hargreaves' *Freedom For Catalonia?* helps bring this issue into focus as it explores the expression of Catalan nationalism within the Spanish nation during the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

Following the work he started in "Olympism and Nationalism," Hargreaves establishes a theoretical model for exploring the tensions between sport, globalization, and nationalism.¹ *Freedom For Catalonia?* evaluates the nationalist symbols and messages transmitted during the 1992 Olympic Summer Games in Barcelona. Hargreaves uses the Barcelona Games as a case study for examining the contribution that the Olympic movement, "a quintessentially global phenomenon," makes to the promotion of local, regional, and national identities.² The conjuncture of time and place was especially relevant in 1992 when the host city was both a major centre within Spain and the Catalan capital. These Games also marked the first appearance of teams from post-apartheid South Africa and the newly independent former Soviet republics.

Hargreaves, author of *Sport, Power and Culture*, argues that sport is connected to expressions of nationalism through its use of common cultural symbols.³ These cultural symbols -- both global and local -- play a large part in the rites and ceremonies surrounding an Olympic Games. Moreover, Hargreaves views the Games as an ideal opportunity for the expression of these symbols:

Olympism, as an aspect of a cosmopolitan. global culture. co-exists and interacts with local. national cultures. Rather than helping to reduce their significance it is perfectly compatible with the existence of strong senses of national identity in participant countries and with the presence of nationalism as a major political force. Indeed, far from being eroded, nationalism can be stimulated by global developments such as Olympism.⁴

In explaining the potentially paradoxical nature of the Catalan national struggle-the absence of a violent separatist movement despite an historically strong nationalist sentiment among the populace -- Hargreaves points to two factors. The first, "pactism," is one of the characteristics. along with distinct language and national "virtues," by which Catalans distinguish themselves and their "nation" from the

Castilian majority. Pactism is a notion, deeply ingrained in Catalan political culture, "that social life is based upon bargaining and negotiation."⁵ The other key element is the notion of dual identity: Catalans understand themselves as members of a distinct culture that exists within a larger political entity. The Catalan nationalist project, then, is aimed at promoting and strengthening Catalan language and culture within the Spanish state, but not directed towards political separation.

Freedom For Catalonia? examines the ways in which this nationalist sentiment, as well as Spanish, Olympic, and international symbols, were expressed during the Barcelona Olympics. Hargreaves' study involves three elements: an examination, primarily of newspaper sources, of the struggle between Catalan and Spanish groups in the months leading up to the Games over how each nationality's flags would be displayed; personal observations of the Games' opening and closing ceremonies focusing on the symbols displayed and the crowd's reaction to the incorporation of the Catalan language and flag; and a comparison of the impact of the Olympics in Catalonia and the rest of Spain through a review of public opinion survey data gathered shortly after the Games.

Hargreaves frames *Freedom For Catalonia?* as a battle between national and regional interests and as a struggle between competing ethnicities. The national state wanted to use the Games to promote an image of Spain internationally as a modern, efficient, post-Franco nation. However Catalan interests were more concerned with emphasizing Catalan language and culture. Even within the local levels of government there were tensions. The nationalist regional government of Jordi Pujol was pressured by ultra-nationalists; and the Barcelona city government, led by socialist mayor Pasqual Maragall, attempted to satisfy ethnic Catalan demands for recognition within the Games' ceremonies while at the same time trying to maintain its political alliance with the socialist Spanish central government. In addition to political parties and organizations, Hargreaves explores the institutions through which much of this debate took place, including the Spanish Olympic Committee (COE), the Organising Committee of the Barcelona Olympic Games (COOB), and the nationalist Catalan Olympic Committee (COC). At all times, concerns over security and disruptions at the Games, especially threats of terrorist violence, dominated this dialogue.

Hargreaves focuses his analysis on what he calls the "war of the flags," the largely political battle over which symbols and flag -- Catalan, Spanish, and Olympic -- would be displayed during the Games. A resolution to these political and diplomatic wranglings, the *paz olímpica* (Olympic peace), was not reached until six weeks before the opening of the Olympics, a mere 11 days before the Olympic flame was due to arrive on Catalan soil. In attempting to capture the tenor of this peaceful but highly charged debate, Hargreaves notes that his: "analysis focuses, in particular, on the way Catalan ethno-national symbols were deployed in this power struggle, and how they coexisted and interacted in tension with symbols of the Spanish state-nation."⁶

In many ways, Hargreaves concludes at the same point where he starts: "Olympism had reached its apogee as a global cultural phenomenon and Catalan nationalism was flexing its muscles as part of a contemporary resurgence of ethnic nationalism."⁷ The battle to have Catalan symbols included in the Olympic ceremonies was won by the forces that represented the essential Catalan values of pluralism, pactism, and inclusive nationalism. In accordance with these precepts, a negotiated settlement was

reached that included the Catalan flag and language in the Games. Ultra-nationalist terrorist threats went unrealized and the “conflict was fought out in largely symbolic terms.”⁸

Hargreaves outlines a process of resistance and negotiation that takes place almost entirely in an institutional context, with little examination of broader public concerns. Ultra-nationalist Catalan groups, from both the right and left, may have used the threat of protest and violence to have their opinions heard within this process, but it is unclear whether their views were representative of a pan-Catalan sentiment. The bulk of the evidence Hargreaves uses to establish the boundaries of the battle for symbolic representation within Olympic ceremonies, and the positions taken by the competing interests, was gleaned primarily from two newspapers, examined between February and July 1992, that were supportive of the position -- a peaceful promotion of Catalan interests -- Hargreaves observes. *El País* is a liberal, Spanish national newspaper with a Barcelona edition geared towards a local readership, while *La Vanguardia* is a conservative, Barcelona-based newspaper that Hargreaves calls a “leading organ of the Catalan press.”⁹

Furthermore, while his observations about the flags and symbols displayed by citizens on their homes and balconies are instructive in adding a dimension to the debate that was beyond the control of the competing organizations, it is unclear whether Hargreaves’ travels were part of a comprehensive survey or a series of random observations of the city that took place over the course of the Games.

In noting the importance to the competing interests of having their national symbols displayed during the Games’ ceremonies, Hargreaves highlights the importance these groups placed on television exposure. He hints at an analysis of the impact these symbols had on television viewers but never fully enters into it. If he wants to examine how the display of Catalan and Spanish national symbols during the Games was received, it remains to be seen whether international spectators in Barcelona and television viewers around the world could differentiate between the two. Indeed the two national flags use the same colours and are remarkably similar, calling into question the effectiveness of their competing national projects.

Like Kidd’s work on the 1976 Montreal Olympics, *Freedom For Catalonia?* is important for its exploration of the Olympic Games as a means to express symbols of two host “nations.”¹⁰ It has tremendous value as a case study of the confluence of sport, the Olympics, globalization, and nationalism, establishing a theoretical framework for understanding the complex interplay of these notions. Yet the selective nature of the data Hargreaves uses, and the way in which it was collected, leave some doubt as to whether *Freedom For Catalonia?* stands as a model for evaluating nationalist symbols at other international events. Hargreaves establishes the “battle of the flags” primarily using newspaper sources and explains its resolution by interviewing six senior officials during the Games. However, more importantly, as Hargreaves analyzes the symbols that were transmitted during the Barcelona Games, there remain unanswered (and unasked) questions, For whom were these symbols intended and how were they received?

Endnotes

1. John Hargreaves, "Olympism and Nationalism: Some Preliminary Considerations," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1992, pp. 119-134.
2. John Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia?: Catalan Nationalism, Spanish Identity and the Barcelona Olympic Games* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 1.
3. John Hargreaves, *Sport, power and culture: a social and historical analysis of popular sports in Britain*, (Cambridge: Polity in association with Basil Blackwell, 1986).
4. Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia?*, p. 56.
5. *Ibid*, p. 20.
6. *Ibid*, p. 58.
7. *Ibid*, p. 2.
8. *Ibid*, p. 161.
9. *Ibid*, p. 166.
10. Bruce Kidd, "The Culture Wars of the Montreal Olympics," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 27 No. 2, 1992, pp. 151-161.