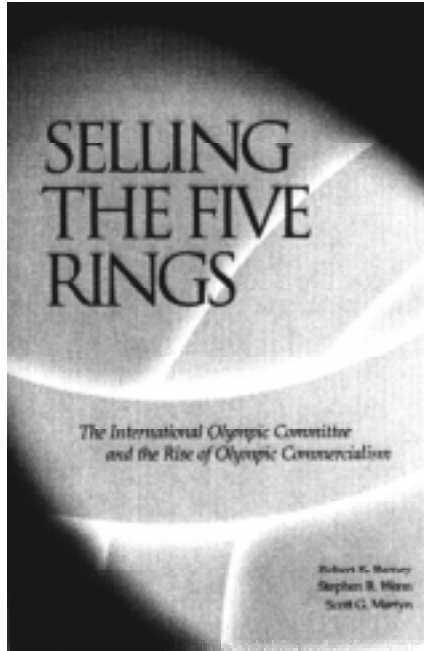


Selling the Five Rings: The International Olympic Committee and the Rise of Olympic Commercialism by Robert K. Barney, Stephen R. Wenn, and Scott G. Martyn (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2002), pp. 384 + xvi pp., 20 ill. Reviewed by Alfred Erich Senn, University of Wisconsin, U.S.A.



This book takes up a previously underdeveloped part of Olympic history: the stages of the development of the International Olympic Committee's budget. How did the IOC grow from an institution that was almost begging for money into a wealthy organization that now uses the word "billions" in its planning? Is this good or bad? I found this book so thought-provoking, that before entering into a discussion of it, I want first to present my judgment. This book will be required reading for all serious students of Olympic history, and it will undoubtedly be the launching pad for many new research projects.

This is a story about money. Pushing the traditional subject of the politics of the Olympic Games aside, the authors have surveyed the development of the Games' commercial significance. Financing the Games has involved establishing control of the Five Rings as a symbol (first in a struggle with a Los Angeles bakery), a mutually profitable marriage of the Games with television, struggles between the IOC and the US Olympic Committee for control of American funding sources, and the IOC's concerns with getting the most out of American television networks while at the same time finding new sources of income. In painting this complicated picture the authors

have drawn on an enormous treasure of archival materials, and the reader will surely finish the book with new understanding of the roles of such key figures in Olympic financial history as Avery Brundage, Monique Berlioux, Juan Antonio Samaranch, and Richard Pound.

Blending this economic picture into the rather well-known political images, for example, the reader can come up with a stunning image of the IOC's work in the years immediately before the Seoul Games of 1988. Richard Pound wrote a fascinating book on Samaranch's struggle to avoid a boycott of the Korean Games, but this book illustrates Pound's own concerns in this period with improving the IOC's financial picture.

On the other hand, the IOC's financial struggles with the US Olympic Committee graphically supplement the stories we know of other conflicts and disputes between these two organizations. The IOC has always been heavily influenced by its European members; the United States sports representatives are frequently depicted as aggressive and even uncultured. But since the United States provides so much of the financial support of the Games, does the USOC deserve a share of what the IOC can collect? If so, what size? Just how should one measure the USOC's contribution to the Games? Or for that matter, what are the obligations of the USOC to the other NOCs of the world who provide the competition in the Games? Can anyone draw up a profit and loss sheet on the support of foreign Olympic athletes who train in the United States?

Readers with special interests may, of course, wish there had been more on one subject or another - for example, the distribution of the money within the Olympic family (ISFs and NOCs). There might have been more on the problems of sharing with the OCOGs. If the reader thinks that the accumulation of money automatically increases expenditures, s/he might want more information on how the IOC defined its needs. (Or did it just want more and more money and then find it easy to spend?) What role do basic principles of "show business" play in all of this? Is bigger better or should the Games really be reduced - thereby cutting off some sports, athletes, and sports bureaucrats from the money in this business? Readers who want lists and descriptions of triumphant athletes may be outright disappointed -- perhaps someone will yet produce a study of the ways in which triumphant athletes have profited financially from their victories.

Underlying this enormous fiscal success of the Games is the question of their real essence - just why do they produce such large quantities of money? Just what is "the mission" of the IOC, a powerful private international organization? This would, of course, have to go beyond the "mystical" conceptions of the Games, which constitute the largest regularly scheduled international gathering with its enormous visibility. Lord Killanin noted that some might consider the Games the altar of post-modern society and want to use it for their own purposes. A side issue here would be how to interpret the admission of professional athletes into the Games. If one considers the historic requirements of "amateurism" confusing, if not hypocritical, the admission of professional athletes can in fact be considered a considerable improvement of the Games' realistic image, rather than the abdication of a noble ideal, although the establishment of huge financial rewards for victors must also be considered a factor in the motivation of some athletes to resort to performance-enhancing drugs.

The book has raised a number of other such questions in my mind, but for just

that reason I believe that it will stimulate a significant new research into the history of the Olympic Games.

