

The Successful Sydney Olympic Bid: A Debate

Swimming with the Big Boys? The Politics of Sydney's 2000 Olympic Bid

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The Olympics have, indeed, been what their founders wanted them to be: political.

- Allen Guttman¹

On 23 September 1993 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) met in Monte Carlo to decide which of five competing cities would host the 2000 Olympic Games. In the final round of voting, with three cities already eliminated and against the predictions of almost every observer and commentator, IOC members chose Sydney ahead of Beijing by forty-five votes to forty-three.² The decision raises two questions: how did Sydney win the vote and what opportunities will the Games offer black and white Australians?

The IOC's Sporting Politics

When Frenchman Baron Pierre de Coubertin revived the Olympic Games he said his aim was to create international respect and goodwill and help build a better and more peaceful world through a quadrennial festival of sport. The idea of Olympism as a peace movement has become a shibboleth. Even events in recent host countries and cities have failed to debunk de Coubertin's idea: disintegration of the Soviet Union, an attempted coup in Russia, insurrection in Moscow, race riots in Los Angeles, war in Sarajevo, bloody student demonstrations in Seoul, and secessionist politics in Spain. IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch regularly cites the 1988 Games in Seoul as a success for Olympism and South Korea. While the Games were a catalyst for Soviet and Chinese reappraisal of South Korea, one could reasonably assume that this

diplomatic thaw would have occurred the following year with the end of the Cold War. Certainly Seoul did not ease tensions between North and South Korea. In fact, North Korea, Cuba and Albania boycotted the Games.

Why does this myth survive? It endures because international sport contains an inherent political utility and because the IOC propagates sport as a *suprapolitical* project. Organised sport is a competitive relationship which emphasises prestige and superiority. Victors in sport – whether individual participants or collectives such as teams, supporters, communities, regions, nations – invariably make claims about their status in any number of areas. Countries seize victory in international sport to display national accomplishments in ideology, economics, politics, science, diplomacy, religion and race.³ Indeed, this emerged amid the jubilation in Australia on 24 September. Prime Minister Keating said the victory put Australia ‘in the swim with the big boys’: ‘I think a lot of hard-nosed international representatives made a judgement about that question tonight and decided in the affirmative’.⁴ Even ordinary Australians saw the decision in these terms: Sydney ‘is a victory for the right and just. Our beautiful city on the harbour, cosmopolitan, multiracial and free, will show the world what freedom really means at the dawn of the 21st century.’⁵ Such political utility has enabled the Olympic Games to become the premier international pageant.

Samaranch admits that the IOC practises politics which he says is necessary to protect the humanist ideals of sport. But the great sophistry of the IOC is that its sporting politics are the antithesis of Olympism. Yugoslavia’s participation at Barcelona is a prime example.⁶ Despite a United Nation’s resolution banning it from Barcelona, and contrary to tradition, the IOC welcomed the Yugoslavs as ‘independent Olympic participants’. It also chartered a plane to fly seventeen athletes from war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina to Barcelona. Lest anyone needs reminding, civil war racks Bosnia-Herzegovina despite the IOC’s carrot of Olympic participation.

By politics Samaranch means personal business, money, power, prestige, status. His own opportunism and ambition have been exposed.' Active lobbying for IOC observer status at the United Nations and for the Nobel Peace Prize reveal Samaranch's ambitions. He first publicly mooted the Nobel Prize in 1988 after Seoul, which he described as a major contribution to world peace. The North Korean boycott, however, remained a blemish and he resolved that every country would participate at Barcelona – hence Yugoslavia's presence in defiance of the United Nations. Still unrewarded, Samaranch hired a British-based public relations company to lobby on his behalf. privately he told colleagues that 'success will be measured on whether or not we win the Nobel Prize'. After the Norwegian press exposed the plan and revived the IOC President's political background as an MP in General Franco's fascist regime, Samaranch conceded he was 'not qualified'. But, he said, 'the IOC might be considered because it has fought for 100 years for youth, peace, sport and solidarity. It should not be for me but the IOC.'⁸ Of course, only Samaranch, as President, could accept the Nobel Prize.

Samaranch has overseen the commercialisation of the Olympic movement. Multinational companies now buy rights to the five-ring Olympic symbol and television rights give producers power to reschedule events and modify rules in the interests of advertisers. Samaranch's view is that 'any sport that does not get television interested has no future'.⁹ Drugs, professionalism and bidding frenzies between cities vying to host the Games are further manifestations of commercialism which undermine the IOC's credibility.

The Host City Game: The Politics of (Stretched) Credibility

The IOC's political credibility depends upon host cities conveying the humanist ideals of sport. This is the ultimate criterion by which the IOC *publicly* awards Games. (While technical competence and financial viability are obvious selection criteria, neither is the determinant. For example, the IOC's Inquiry Commission, which assesses the suitability of bidding cities, ranked Beijing fourth).¹⁰ Seizing the moment of

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Sydney's victory, Samaranch explained: 'we have given the Games to a young country with young people and maybe they will set an example for the future'.¹¹

Beijing posed a dilemma: would it confirm or stretch IOC credibility? Samaranch argued that Beijing would open China to democratic values and rejected criticism of its human rights' record. The IOC employed Peter Knight, prominent Washington lawyer and former Vice-Presidential aide, to lobby against US Congress opposition to Beijing. It ignored the text of Congress resolutions which identified Chen Xitong, the Chairman of the Beijing Bid Committee, as the Mayor who had signed the martial law decree before the violent suppression of the Chinese democracy movement in Tiananmen Square.¹² Samaranch repeated the hackneyed position that politics should not influence IOC decisions, although he admitted some members would reject Beijing on human rights' grounds. But he stressed his personal view: the Games 'could help to open up a country and change many things the way it did in Seoul'.¹³

Two conditions constrained the Sydney Olympic Bid Committee (SOBC) from officially criticising China's human rights' record. Firstly, SOBC's own campaign was built around the premise that sport brings people together and unites them above all other considerations. Secondly, Australia's human rights' record introduced the problem of logical consistency.¹⁴ Fearing that black groups would campaign against Sydney, SOBC employed prominent Aborigines, including Charles Perkins, David Clark, Cleonie Quayle, Justine Saunders and Ricky Walford. The media, of course, felt no qualms about disparaging and reproaching China while at the same time reporting the views of sympathetic Aborigines such as Bill Naird, former Chairman of the National Aboriginal Conference. He said that 'the 2000 Olympics would provide a perfect focal point for reconciliation' and offer 'a showcase' for Aboriginal culture.¹⁵ Sadly, no correlation exists between cultural displays and racial harmony. In the week before the vote, SOBC flooded Monaco

with black dancers and performers, but as Aboriginal Commissioner Sol Bellear reminded us, they were 'tourist curios – like koalas and kangaroos'.¹⁶

Mired in the government's intended legislative response to the High Court's Mabo decision, Aborigines took little interest in Sydney's Olympic bid. Only the Aboriginal Legal Service in Redfern intervened. In a letter to the IOC it said that 'mistreatment' of Aborigines – including police harassment, drug and alcohol dependency, high rates of imprisonment, unemployment and infant mortality, and racism in sporting institutions – 'disqualified' Sydney.¹⁷ The IOC never replied. Aboriginal leaders made a tactical error. Australian sports officials and the New South Wales (NSW) Government desperately wanted the Games: when NSW Premier John Fahey suspended the NSW Treasury's financial risk analysis until after the IOC's decision,¹⁸ he signalled that literally no cost was too high. Such desperation afforded Aborigines space in which they could have wrung social justice packages from the Fahey Government; the Premier may have even repaired the acknowledged disgrace of Toomelah township.¹⁹ Australians took fright when Aborigines threatened to mount a black nation boycott of the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane. Under the force of public pressure, including intense foreign media investigations, even Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen was moved to allow two hitherto banned street marches.

Commercialisation has complicated the IOC's political objectives in choosing the host city and has undermined its credibility. Firstly, it gives major IOC sponsors – who pay \$US40m each for worldwide rights to the Olympic symbol – vast influence. Many of the IOC's sponsors supported Beijing in the belief that it would assist their profiles and marketing efforts in China.²⁰ Secondly, commercialisation has given cities new incentives to bid for the Games. After Montreal incurred a \$US1bn debt (largely for an accompanying urban infrastructure program), other cities began baulking at the Games for fear of the financial consequences. But Los Angeles, which made a \$US215m profit, showed

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that the Games offered cities potentially massive economic rewards and it launched bidding frenzies.²¹

Profit transformed the lobbying landscape. New, non-sporting, interests were suddenly attracted to the Games and manoeuvred themselves on to bid committees. The vanguard of SOBC comprised leaders of the transport, construction, hotel and tourism industries, the financial sector and the commercial media. Members of SOBC included Peter Abeles (TNT), Kevan Gosper (Shell), John Ward (Qantas), Eric Neal (Westpac), Kerry Packer (Consolidated Press), John Alexander (Fairfax) and Kenneth Cowley (News Limited).

Bid committees traditionally shy from public scrutiny and the only constraints on their lobbying appear to be the consciences and mores of IOC members. But they are answerable and responsible only to the IOC President who appoints them. Samaranch personally selected more than half the current ninety-three members who will hold their positions until retirement at seventy-two. The IOC Resident is accountable to no one and wields total power. He appoints members to the organisation's all important working committees and has the authority to settle all procedural questions at IOC sessions. In its quest for the 2000 Games, China presented the IOC museum with a 2200-year-old terracotta soldier from the Ch'in tomb.²² Explaining the donation of priceless Chinese heritage, Chen Xitong, Chairman of the Beijing Bid Committee, said 'we look upon the IOC as God – their wish is our command'.²³ In their desire to satisfy the 'Gods', bid committees laud, indulge, coddle and pamper IOC members. Dossiers identifying IOC members' personal wants and tastes are mandatory bid committee tools. Bob Scott, Chief Executive of Manchester's Bid Committees for the 1996 and 2000 Games, once boasted: 'I even know the shoe size of the second daughter of one particular IOC member'!²⁴ Early in its campaign for the 2000 Games, Berlin's committee apologised for investigating IOC members' sexual preferences.²⁵

While the style and intensity of lobbying is antithetical to the noble sporting ideal of fair competition, some IOC members happily exploit

this deferential treatment. They fashion opulent lifestyles from all-expenses paid 'investigations' of cities bidding for (summer and winter) Games, and from the pilgrimages of gift and favour bearing delegations who arrive at IOC meetings and even members' homes. An official of the Barcelona Organising Committee summed up the behaviour of IOC members: 'They're used to getting what they want, to having their demands met – their motto is "we all want more"'.²⁶

After its meeting in Birmingham in 1991, the IOC introduced strict rules to curtail the obvious and acknowledged corruption and to repair its image as a rapacious family. It introduced a \$US200 limit on gifts to IOC members; IOC headquarters must issue air tickets (non-refundable to the individual) to members visiting bid cities which then reimburse the IOC; bidding cities cannot hold receptions or cocktail parties for IOC members or arrange exhibitions or demonstrations; meetings between bid city committees and IOC members can only take place in a single room or suite; and delegations from bidding cities which visit IOC sessions are limited to six members.²⁷ But no structures exist to enforce the rules. Just two months after they were introduced, the Berlin committee invited the IOC executive to 'a soirée at the beautiful Witshaus Schildhom [Berlin]'.²⁸

IOC members oppose changes to the way they choose host cities. Samaranch recommended that the eleven-member executive select host cities, but this would remove the only power ordinary IOC members possess. Nor would it guarantee a fairer selection process. The only way to cleanse this sordid game is to dispense with lobbying and compel members to publicly rank cities according to strict, unambiguous criteria.

Buying the 2000 Games: Inside the Sydney Bid

Failed bids by Brisbane and Melbourne, both of which received favourable Inquiry Commission assessments, point to the biggest obstacle that faced SOBC: systematic cajoling and flattering IOC members.²⁹ (Of course, there were also other factors including southern hemisphere seasons and distances, and the fact that Melbourne hosted the 1956

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Games). Notwithstanding the dangers of 'packaging and labelling national character', cultural historian John Rickard has identified and described an Australian psyche characterised by 'irreverence and at times an almost surreal mordancy'.³⁰ In short, obsequiousness is not an Australian trait.

Yet, contrary to the 'national character', SOBC consciously fawned upon IOC members to acquire their votes. Its lobbying program, modelled on the successful Atlanta 1996 bid and euphemistically referred to as the 'let's be friends' campaign, consisted of bestowing royal treatment on visiting IOC members and particularly in the case of Third World members, building their profile and status in their own countries. Visitors flew first class to Australia, were cleared through customs before the plane 'docked', and were driven by limousine to a five star hotel. According to Perry Crosswhite, Secretary General of the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC), they were given free rein to structure their itinerary and 'nominate anything special that they, or their wives, wanted to see or do. We encouraged them to do what they were interested in; some were interested in art, some were interested in jewellery, particularly opals.' IOC visitors dined at the best restaurants and were entertained at the Opera House. Every effort was made 'to get as many IOC people [to Sydney] as often as possible'. For example, SOBC paid \$A300 000 towards the cost of staging the 1993 World Youth Soccer Cup in Australia, Thirteen IOC members visited Sydney for that tournament. SOBC also introduced scores of members of the extended Olympic family to Sydney by hosting the General Assembly of International Sporting Federations in 1991.

SOBC lobbied IOC members around the world. It divided the earth into five regions and assigned a senior official to each. For example, Phil Coles, a member of SOBC, Director General of the AOC and an IOC member, lived in Paris for several months in 1993. A SOBC team, which co-opted former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, also trekked through sub-Saharan Africa in July and August 1993. Africans revere Whitlam:

he ordered an Australian boycott of South African sport in 1972 and thirteen years later, as Ambassador to UNESCO, he chaired a world conference on apartheid sport. His mere presence in their countries conferred prestige on IOC delegates.³¹

Several cases of vote-buying surfaced during and in the aftermath of the bid, although precisely how deep into the murky water individual officials dived will probably remain unknown. The AOC and the NSW government offered each African IOC member one-year scholarships to the Australian Institute of Sport for two of their country's athletes. They were promised that these would be extended to seven years if Sydney won.³² John Coates a Vice-President of SOBC and President of the AOC, arranged a place at the International Catering Institute (Sydney) for Nomsa Sibandze, daughter of Swazi IOC member David Sibandze.³³ SOBC also invited another, unnamed, IOC member and his family to spend Christmas 1992 in Australia According to Coles:

it was quite an experience for [the IOC member]. When he went back home we got feedback from the people he mixes with and he hasn't stopped talking about Sydney. He said 'my decision's very easy for me, I know where I'm going with my vote for the city to host the 2000 Games'.³⁴

The most underhand example of vote-buying was the employment of Nick Voinov, son-in-law of Romanian IOC member Alexandru Siperco, at the NSW State Rail Authority. The most extravagant case was the inclusion in the Games' staging budget of travelling costs for 10 000 athletes (and their equipment) and 5000 officials at a cost of \$35 million.

Justifying the favoured treatment given Sibandze, Coates said that he had known her father for 10 years':

He is president of Swaziland's National Olympic Committee as well as being the country's IOC member. I am the father of six children and I hope that one day my contribution to the Olympic movement can be acknowledged by one of my kids studying overseas.

Coates concluded with a rhetorical rejoinder: 'Isn't this what the Olympic family is all about'?'³⁵ No. Such behaviour breaches the spirit of Olympism which espouses meritocratic 'principles based on fair and equal competition. It also contravenes the IOC's own rules which, somewhat ironically, Coates applauded.³⁶ The notion that assisting African countries to field competitive teams at Olympic Games constitutes development aid trivialises the socio-economic plight of hundreds of millions of people and misconstrues what amounts to preferential exchange between social elites.

Consistent with the 'Australian character', some SOBC delegates confessed that they found the lobbying process offensive and demeaning. Vice-President of SOBC and Sydney Lord Mayor Frank Sartor said that during the week before the decision, we 'prostituted ourselves to try to get one more vote for Sydney'. Sartor described the Hotel de Paris in Monaco, where IOC members stayed, as the 'Brothel de Paris'.³⁵ But the rewards assuaged the act. As one official put it: 'you shut your eyes and think of Sydney in 2000. We decided that as we had to do it, we would be the best whores you could find between Rome and Marseilles'.³⁸

In Monte Carlo the contest to host the 2000 Games was between Beijing and Sydney. Tactically, SOBC focused on surviving the first ballot and then drawing the preferences of eliminated cities. As Chief Executive of Atlanta's bid committee, Billy Payne, advised, 'if you are everyone's second choice [after the first ballot] you will win'.³⁹ Survival in the first round depended upon support from Third World members, some of whom viewed Beijing as their ideological representative while others were under government instruction to repay China for longstanding military and economic aid. Jean-Claude Ganga, an IOC member, President of the Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa and a former Congo ambassador to China, was an important Chinese ally in Africa along with the French Government and French IOC member Maurice Herzog. Chinese-French relations had cooled after France sold fighter planes to Taiwan. As part of the process of restoring relations, and to induce China to buy a consignment of its trains, France lobbied

Africa for Beijing.⁴⁰ The Whitlam safari appears to have negated China's influence in Africa although the exact number of African votes is not known. However, according to one Chinese official, 'Beijing lost the bid in Africa'.⁴¹ SOBC also successfully countered Beijing's lobbying in Latin America, despite IOC power broker and President of the Federation of International Football Associations João Havelange's support for China.⁴² Elizabeth Fox, a former Colombian emigre and honorary consul, and now naturalised Australian, lobbied for Sydney in Central and South America and observers credit her with five votes.⁴³

Sydney trailed Beijing by just two votes after the first ballot (see note 2). But in the second round, China received five of the seven votes from Istanbul supporters and Australia fell seven votes behind. Sydney thus required maximum support from members whose first preference was Berlin and Manchester. SOBC lobbied European members intensely and more similarities in cultural values presumably favoured Sydney. But Sydney also benefited from its twin themes: environmental responsibility and the 'athletes' Games'. The former resonated well in Europe, particularly environmentally conscious Scandinavia, and lobbying by the Chief Executive Officer of Greenpeace International, Australian Paul Gilding, helped.⁴⁴ Beijing led by three votes in the third ballot which saw Manchester eliminated. In the deciding round, eight of Manchester's eleven votes flowed to Sydney; both bid committees had employed the 'athletes' Games' theme.⁴⁵

'Our crawlers were even more effective than Beijing's bribes', political journalist Alan Ramsey wrote in his satirical letter from 'Prime Minister Keating' to Sydney.⁴⁶ Ramsey's words capture the essence of the lobbying game. Yet Sydney's win may ultimately have been due more to Beijing's strategic blunder. Chinese officials believed they would win on the first or second ballot. Perhaps they confused pledges with actual votes, but irrespective they paid insufficient attention to second preferences. Lastly, if IOC members cared little about human rights' issues,⁴⁷ or even about China's threat to boycott Atlanta,⁴⁸ the medium term stability of the Deng Xiaoping regime posed concern.

Mobilising Support and Silencing Criticism: The Politics of Deception

Throughout its campaign SOBC claimed that virtually all Sydneysiders supported the bid. It feared any dissension, which is anathema to the IOC. The experiences of the 1996 Games competitors, Toronto and Atlanta, are illustrative here. When Toronto launched its bid in the mid-1980s, it too claimed overwhelming public support and by 1989 believed that it had already secured most IOC votes. But from that point on it was 'thrust into a bitter public consultation process, fuelled by mounting media criticism'.⁴⁹ Atlanta, led by African-American Mayor Andrew Young, campaigned as a racially harmonious and progressive city and defused potential dissent.

According to Rod McGeoch, Chief Executive of SOBC, '90 per cent of people want the Games and this is backed up by support from government, business, ethnic groups, unions and Aborigines'.⁵⁰ Indeed, there was genuine support but support was also engineered. Much 'grassroots community support' came from school children. SOBC enlisted the NSW Department of Education and they devised some twenty tactics, the most important of which were the 'Sign for Sydney' petitions and the 'twinning' project. A total of 160 000 pupils signed petitions supporting Sydney and the Department collated and presented them to IOC members. Under the twinning project, schools applied through the Department of Education to lobby individual IOC members. The Department selected 120 schools from about 450 applications on the basis of the ethnic background of pupils, academic and sporting programs, and pupils and teachers' cultural interests. IOC members who visited Sydney were taken to 'their' school and presented with scrapbooks containing pupils' messages supporting Sydney.⁵¹

As an exercise in teaching cultural diversity and understanding, the twinning project may have had merits; it may also have given some pupils insights into political lobbying, although we suspect that was not an objective. But the Olympics embody a tension between practice and ideal, between international political rivalry and goodwill. The Curriculum

Directorate studiously avoided this contradiction in its lists of suggested Olympic teaching activities.⁵² Similarly, did principals give their pupils all the facts and allow them to make their own decision about the petition?

Given that it may reap the kudos of hosting the Games and given high levels of support in opinion polls, the Opposition not surprisingly endorsed the NSW government's sponsorship of the bid. Nonetheless, one could have expected more critical support. For example, Bob Carr, the leader of the Opposition, refused to pursue Voinov's State Rail appointment.⁵³ The union movement, motivated by prospects of jobs for its members, also rallied behind the bid. The NSW Labor Council secretary, Michael Easson; guaranteed total support when he addressed the IOC's Inquiry Commission. But how many jobs will the Games create? According to a report produced by KPMG Peat Marwick for SOBC, the Games will generate 156 000 jobs over fourteen years between 1991 and 2004 and only 34 000 jobs in 2000. Most will be temporary, low paid, unskilled jobs in construction and hospitality.

The commercial media was an integral element of Sydney's bid. In addition to the high profile media representatives on SOBC and the communications subcommittee, a number of outlets, including 2UE, 2GB, AAP, Australian Television International, Media Monitors, News Limited, *Sun-Herald and Time Magazine*, sponsored the bid. As expected, few journalists bothered to question either the politics of the bidding process or the social impact and the economic costs of hosting the Games. Whenever journalists or commentators ventured to explore the issues, SOBC quickly responded. Just before a *Four Corners* investigation into the bidding process went to air in July 1993, Bruce Baird, the NSW Minister for Transport and the Olympic Bid bellowed his now famous warning, 'if anybody gets in the way of the bid, then all I can say is watch out'.⁵⁴ Baird attempted to stop the *Sydney Morning Herald* from publishing details about Voinov's appointment⁵⁵ and McGeoch successfully blocked a request by *Four Corners* under freedom of information legislation to obtain NSW Treasury cost analyses. He

argued the information would breach the confidentiality of a registered private company – SOBC!⁵⁶ SOBC angrily denounced economics commentator Max Walsh who challenged revenue estimates and expenditure on infrastructure. Compared with Atlanta, Walsh said, Sydney's revenue targets were 'outrageously optimistic' and that 'there are potential shortfalls of hundreds of millions of dollars'.⁵⁷ SOBC estimates \$US813m revenue from television rights, but Atlanta received only \$US706m for American (\$US456m) and European (\$US250m) rights. Although the American rights increased by \$US55m over that paid for Barcelona, it was still \$US100m less than expected. (It should be noted that 40 per cent of television revenue goes directly to the IOC.) The time difference between Australia and North America, which will make it difficult to broadcast premier events in the latter's prime viewing time, is just one reason why Walsh is correct.

The NSW Government learned well the lesson from Toronto; taxpayers oppose governments which spend money on circuses. Indeed, while 86 per cent of Australians are happy that Sydney is hosting the Games, 64 per cent oppose new taxes to meet the costs.⁵⁸ Throughout the bid, the government maintained that the cost of *staging* the Games was \$1.697bn. Yet, after Sydney won it admitted that the total cost, including essential infrastructure (principally at the main site of Homebush Bay), was \$3.232bn.⁵⁹ Fahey initially said that redevelopment of Homebush Bay was part of a capital works program 'independent' of the 2000 Games decision. But he misled taxpayers because Sydney's victory condensed and converted a twenty-year *discretionary* project into a seven-year *essential* project. Redevelopment of Homebush Bay will not provide an economic return and it will compete with other capital works programs associated with health, education, housing and roads. Coincidentally, the same day that Sydney won the hosting rights, the NSW Government announced the closure of the Prince Henry, Royal South Sydney and Royal Women's hospitals at a cost of 225 beds and 800 jobs.

In the end, there was no organised criticism of Sydney's bid. Two factors defused potential criticism: scepticism and hope. On the one hand, many people dismissed Sydney's chances: failed bids by Brisbane and Melbourne, Australia's geographic isolation, limited domestic markets for sponsors, and active lobbying for Beijing by prominent IOC members, all seemed to conspire against Sydney. On the other hand, deceived about the full costs of the Games, SOBC's seductive promise of a Games-led economic recovery engendered hope.

An Australian Victory?

The IOC awarded Sydney the 2000 Games because of politics – not despite them. This is more than a simple axiom; the IOC's politics, played so successfully by SOBC, expose the contradictory nature of Olympism, the sectional interests it represents, and the opportunities it affords. The IOC's politics are the very antithesis of de Coubertin's Olympic philosophy which it purports to represent. The IOC represents business, money, power, prestige and status; it employs deceit, hype, threat, surreptitiousness and manipulation in their service. SOBC, too, adopted these tactics. It wanted Australians to suspend their critical faculties. We anticipate that the grand coalition of Games' interests will maintain this tradition over the next six years – for, they want us to believe, the betterment of sport.

A few days after the IOC's announcement, the *Age* publicly endorsed Prime Minister Keating's strategy of using the Games 'as an impetus to Australia becoming a republic'. Sydney's success, the paper said, focused attention on the 'sort of country Australia will be at the turn of the century'.⁶⁰ But there are definite limits. The same day, Aboriginal leaders, including Social Justice Commissioner Mick Dodson and lawyer Michael Mansell, said they would organise a boycott of the Games to force the government to rewrite its draft Mabo response legislation.⁶¹ Howls of outrage greeted the threat. The tabloid television current affairs program *Real Life* described Mansell as 'the man who will destroy

Australia's *dream*'; the *Sydney Morning Herald* called it a 'stunt'.⁶² Later, Mansell said 'his group' would support the Games and make no moves towards a boycott, provided Aborigines were allowed to enter a separate team in the Games. No one replied. Obviously the lack of rights which Australians afford Aborigines are not criteria by which they care to judge themselves as a nation.

As 2000 approaches, Aborigines should consider highlighting social inequalities, especially in sport. In terms of politics and sport, Aboriginal leaders lost an ideal opportunity prior to Monaco. Olympic history is replete with precedents, including the Catalans at Barcelona in 1992.⁶³ Similarly, the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane was a good example of sport being used for political advantage. Aborigines should reject the inane view that making noises at international sporting festivals 'isn't cricket' – the 206 year history of the Aboriginal experience has been anything but cricket. However, their strategy will need careful and considerate thought: it will have to be more sensible than the suggestions to date. The Olympics are not holy or sacrosanct; nor are they immune from the political or social issues of the day.

The NSW Government will invoke harsh measures if Aborigines use the Games for 'extraneous' objectives. SOBC has assured the IOC that there will be 'no disruptions'.⁶⁴ The NSW Government has numerous precedents. Russia cleared Moscow of its Jews in 1980, and in 1982 the Queensland government passed the *Commonwealth Games Act* to keep Brisbane 'clean' of Aboriginal 'dissidents' during the Commonwealth Games. The Act empowered police (rather than government) to declare a 'situation of emergency', to seize persons and property, and to take toe-, foot-, palm-, finger-, and voiceprints of suspected persons. It designated notified areas in which only accredited persons could assemble, and it imposed fines of \$2000, or sentences of two years' jail, or both, for offences under the Act. The purported objective was 'good conduct and order'. But the Act was not about law. Rather, it was about Bjelke-Petersen's sense of political order.

Will the Games be an economic boon? No. KPMG Peat Marwick's 'most likely' economic scenario predicts a total injection of \$A7.3bn into the national economy over fourteen years. This represents a minuscule average annual increase in national output of \$A500m – one-eighth of 1 per cent of an Australian economy worth \$A400bn per annum. Max Walsh put this figure in perspective by noting that the fall in the value of the dollar in the second and third quarters of 1993 and the consequent rise in foreign debt had wiped out the projected benefits of the Games.⁶⁵ Barcelona had a minimal effect on Spain's economy. Despite an intense advertising campaign in Europe, Japan and the US, foreign visitors increased by only 7 per cent over the depressed levels of 1991. After the Games, unemployment soared to 21 per cent and in 1992 the economy grew by just 1.5 percent. Twice that year the government devalued the peseta.⁶⁶

NSW Treasury officials estimate that local taxpayers will face a \$1bn debt for Games' related infrastructure.⁶⁷ Fahey dismissed all criticism of costing: he denigrated Treasury officials as 'bean counters' and labelled a belatedly more critical NSW Labor Party 'anti-Games'. His admonishing tones insinuate that critical analysis of the Sydney Games is un-Australian and that those who don't want to be 'on the team' must be anti-Australian.

Hype-masters and flag wavers are already building expectations. The Games may foster a sense of pride and initiate voluntary efforts that are construed as 'common purpose' in the lead up to, and during, the Games. But what happens after the ceremonies? In the mid-1970s Prime Minister Whitlam urged Australians to forge an independent national identity. He successfully encouraged the development of Australian art, music, dance, literature, even a new civic culture. These constitute the substance of culture. Two decades later our politicians, backed by outstandingly unqualified sports spruikers in the profit motivated media, contend that the 2000 Games will launch, in the words of SOBC's theme song, 'a golden age'. It is prattle: sport is an 'expressive form' which

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‘survives only in its own present – the one it itself creates’.⁶⁸ Whatever shadows or shudders of memories individuals retain from the Games, of the dramatic, beautiful, tearful dastardly, mean or disdainful, or whatever the Olympics add to social history, they cannot change fundamental Australian economics, politics, sociology or anthropology; they are not a foundation on which a nation can build. Fading memories, vacant hotel rooms, underutilised stadia and a \$1bn debt are a high price for seventeen million people to try and ‘swim with the big boys’.

NOTES

1. *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1992, p. 4.
2. While many commentators considered Sydney second favourite, Beijing was the clear front runner.

IOC VOTING FOR THE YEAR 2000 OLYMPIC GAMES

ROUND	VOTES	CITY				
		1st	Ber	Man	Bei	Syd
1	89a	7(0b)	9	11	32	30
2	89		9(7)	13	37	30
3	88c			11(8)	40	37
4	88				43	45

- a. There are currently ninety-one members of the IOC. The President votes only in the event of a tie and Bulgarian Ivan Slavkov was under house arrest, charged with misappropriating sports funds during the Zhivkov regime.
 - b. Numbers in brackets redirected to Sydney in the following round.
 - c. David Sibandze (Swaziland) left midway during the vote to return in time for his country’s general election two days later.
Sources: ‘Voting’ and ‘Good at games’, *Australian*, 25 Sept. 1993; ‘Green scarf clue in the two-city voting race’, *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, 25 Sept. 1993.
3. Robert Paddick, ‘Sport and Politics: The (Gross) Anatomy of Their Relationships’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1984, pp. 51-67.
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