THE OLYMPIC GAMES

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THE OLYMPIC GAMES: A CRITICAL APPROACH

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
AC	Athletes' Commission
AIBA	Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur
AIS	Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome
AOC	Australian Olympic Committee
ASOIF	Association of Olympic International Federations
BJSM	British Journal of Sports Medicine
BNC	Bread Not Circuses Coalition
BWINT	Builders and Woodworkers International
CAS	Court of Arbitration for Sport
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CGF	Commonwealth Games Federation
CMS	Culture, Media and Sport
COHRE	Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions
CSHR	Centre for Sport and Human Rights
DSD	Difference of sexual development
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association

FINA	Fédération Internationale de Natation
FIS	Fédération Internationale de Ski
GANEFO	Games of the New Emerging Forces
HCC	Host City Contract
HDI	Human Development Index
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IAAF	International Association of Athletics Federations
ICOS	International Centre for Olympic Studies
IF	International federation
IOC	International Olympic Committee
ISJL	International Sports Law Journal
ISL	International Swimming League
ISU	International Skating Union
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
LA	Los Angeles
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer
NBA	National Basketball Association
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NOC	National Olympic Committee
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PGA	Professional Golfers' Association
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers

RSF	Reporters sans frontières
RUSADA	Russian Anti-doping Agency
SDP	Sport for Development and Peace
SLC	Salt Lake City
SRA	Sport and Rights Alliance
UAB	Autonomous University of Barcelona
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
USAG	USA Gymnastics
USOC	US Olympic Committee
WADA	World Anti-doping Agency
WMA	World Medical Association
WPA	World Players' Association

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My first venture into sport studies came about in 1980 when I wrote a term paper on Canadian women's sport history. My Ph.D. supervisor and friend (and baseball fan), Professor Mary O'Brien, encouraged me to extend my analysis to contemporary sport issues. I followed her advice. Now, in 2020, this book marks the culmination of four decades of research and activism on sport-related topics.

It is not possible to acknowledge all the women and men who have challenged my thinking and my analysis, including family, friends, activists, and colleagues in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, US, UK, and Europe. As well, there are countless individuals whom I've never met in person, but to whom I feel connected through email and social media. And, as always, I want to thank my children and my partner, Liz, for their love and support, and Liz for her usual excellent proofreading.

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1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 1992, I was standing on a street corner in Sydney's central business district at the height of Australia's Olympic bid fever. A bus covered in Sydney 2000 advertising went by while I ate a chocolate bar wrapped in the bid logo. A visit to the bid office produced a folder of glossy brochures, and a nearby department store offered a wide range of Sydney 2000 souvenirs and sportswear.

Ten years later, when Vancouver/Whistler was preparing a bid for the 2010 Winter Olympics, I was looking at the bid committee's display at Whistler Village: an imitation Olympic flame emitting clouds of smelly black smoke into the clean mountain air. My complaint to the person in charge that this was unlikely to meet the environmental standards touted in the bid was received with the equivalent of an eye roll.

These examples capture some of the many contradictions within the Olympic industry: surface vs substance, rhetoric vs reality.

BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

In 1990, I was contracted to write a report on the status of women in the summer Olympics for the City of Toronto Olympic Task Force, a group of politicians, city staff, business people, and others who were preparing a bid for the 1996 Olympics. Like many 'sports feminists' of that era, and like many in the twenty-first century, I leaned towards a liberal analysis, aptly characterised by more radical critics as the 'add women and stir' approach. In short, I focussed on the imbalance between men's and women's Olympic programmes and the underrepresentation of female athletes. I did not critique sport as a social practice or the Olympics as a sport mega-event, with all the negative impacts that these events have on host cities and countries.

It was also in the early 1990s that I connected with members of the Bread Not Circuses (BNC) coalition that opposed Toronto's 1996 and 2008 Olympic bids. BNC's analysis of the social impacts of the Olympics, summarised on a series of hand-folded photocopied flyers, as well as their 1990 *Anti-Bid Book* and 2001 *People's Anti-Bid Book*, opened my eyes to the power of Olympic ideology and the largely hidden damage that hosting the games inflicts on disadvantaged peoples and communities. My subsequent participation in BNC as well as in other Canadian and Australian anti-Olympic and Olympic watchdog groups changed both my analysis and my worldview.

Since 1993, I have conducted extensive research in Sydney, Vancouver, and Toronto. In addition to my involvement as an active participant in Olympic resistance groups in these cities, I interviewed activists, researchers, retired Olympic athletes, and journalists in US, UK, Canada, and Australia, either in person or through video chats. The anonymous retired athlete whom I cite in Chapter 6 will be referred to as RA.

As well as collecting materials produced by bid and organising committees, I monitored mainstream social media coverage and commentary. The cutoff point for data collection and writing was 1 November 2019. I have not formally interviewed any Olympic industry officials, who have ample means at their disposal for publicising their policies and practices.

This book is concerned as much with the impacts of Olympic bids and preparations, and local and global anti-Olympic movements, as with the actual sporting competition. Since the 1980s, a significant body of research has documented the extent of negative political, social, economic, and environmental impacts experienced by citizens in host cities and countries, particularly those whose lives were already precarious. The last few decades have witnessed unprecedented levels of resistance, including individual athletes' protests, global campaigns for athletes' rights, international networks of anti-Olympic groups, coalitions of anti-racist, environmental and human rights activists, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to name a few. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and sports governing bodies under its control are rightly targeted for their leaders' continued refusal to engage with human rights advocates and other critics. From an Olympic industry perspective, 'Defending the cornerstone principles of the specificity and autonomy of sport' is a top priority (ASOIF, 2019). In other words, sport is, and must continue to be self-regulating, exempt from national and international laws, and firewalled from 'politics', including the governments of host cities, states, and countries that spend public money on this sport mega-event.

What happens on the field of play deserves equal attention, and this book, like much of my earlier work (Lenskyj, 2003, 2013, 2018), examines questions of athletes' rights and discrimination based on genders, sexualities, and ethnicities. The longstanding problems of sexual harassment and abuse in sport,

together with the issues of doping and female eligibility, are key concerns. Not only does the Olympic industry have the power to control athletes' lives and livelihoods, but also what happens at the elite level has significant impacts on all participants in a wide range of sport and physical activities, particularly in relation to government policy and funding priorities. Furthermore, societal attitudes and practices relating to genders and sexualities are both embodied and reinforced through media representations of sporting masculinities and femininities, with implications for all participants in all forms of physical recreation.

On the issue of athletes' rights as workers and as world citizens, the IOC's 2018 document titled 'Declaration of Athletes' Rights and Responsibilities' captures the arrogance and hypocrisy of the myriad organisations that comprise the 'Olympic movement' (The Athletes' Declaration, 2018). As the following chapters will demonstrate, these so-called rights, including 'Leverage opportunities to generate income', 'Elected athlete representatives', 'Privacy', and 'Freedom of expression' are largely illusory. The Olympic industry's embrace of sport exceptionalism and the IOC's self-appointed status as 'supreme authority for world sport' have for more than a century shaped global sporting practices in ways that damage human bodies and minds. The following discussion focusses on global developments in these areas in the twenty-first century, providing historical context and chronology. In examining a number of important themes and controversies, I present analyses of the Olympic industry's official documents and statements, critiques developed by activists, academic researchers and athlete advocacy groups, and mainstream and independent media coverage.

Insights developed by transnational feminist scholars on the related issue of women's health are relevant to sport. As Davis (2007) argued, imposing a western cultural product – for example, the American 'women's health movement'– on

women of the Global South becomes another act of American imperialism. A similar critique can be applied to the UN/Olympic model of sport, most notably the campaign called Sport for Development and Peace, which prioritises competitive sport – a western cultural product – over every other expression of human movement. Taking a similar critical approach, an intersectional analysis emphasises the importance of recognising the overlapping identities and resultant oppressions flowing from a person's gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic status, and geopolitical location, all of which are relevant to those impacted by the Olympic industry, including residents of host cities/regions/countries, workers on Olympic-related construction projects, and, of course, athletes.

OLYMPIC INDUSTRY, OLYMPIC MYTHOLOGY

The IOC and the modern Olympic Games were products of their time, and their nineteenth century colonialist, racist, and sexist origins have not been erased. In the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the IOC and all its subsidiaries, which I collectively term the *Olympic industry*, have made limited efforts to respond to broader social and cultural change in order to deal with external challenges and to maintain their 'supreme authority'. Whether these changes constitute genuine reform or superficial window dressing is open to debate, as are the recent innovative attempts to attract more bids in the face of dramatically waning interest in hosting this money-draining spectacle. In fact, if there had not been compelling external pressure to join the twenty-first century, there is little evidence to suggest that the IOC would have initiated any kind of reform.

The concept of *Olympic industry* is one that I developed 20 years ago as a result of my ongoing research and activism,

in order to move the focus to those aspects of the Olympic Games that are routinely obscured from public view. As I have documented and analysed in earlier publications, sport is merely the tip of the Olympic industry iceberg (e.g. Lenskyj, 2000, 2002, 2008). Under the surface are the sponsors, corporations, media rights holders, developers, property holders, hotel and resort owners, and others, all poised to benefit financially from hosting the Olympic Games. Since 1960, this sport mega-event has been called the 'Olympic and Paralympic Games', although the full title is rarely used. 'Para' refers to 'parallel' Olympics. In the following discussion, the sport-related focus is primarily on the Olympic Games, but, on key issues such as bidding, host city preparations, legacies, and doping, the analysis is equally relevant to the Paralympics.

In many ways, it is remarkable that a narrowly defined set of sporting events, rewarding only faster/higher/stronger performances, has accumulated so much social and cultural capital, as well as enduring, with a few glitches, for almost 125 years. The pseudo-religious language of the Olympic Charter and the Olympic industry propaganda machine contribute to its relatively untouchable status. The Olympics are framed not only as the pinnacle of world sporting competition, but also as a global social *movement* and a catalyst for world peace and harmony. Terms such as Olympism, Olympic spirit, Olympic family, and Olympic values effectively elevate human physical achievement to a higher, almost spiritual realm, and transform Olympic athletes into moral exemplars, regardless of merit. In one notable exception, Olympic 'role models' accused of doping experience a speedy public shaming, often without regard for their innocence or guilt. 'Clean sport' rhetoric and mandatory interviews with indignant 'clean athletes' invariably accompany media reports of doping. In a 2017 example, when two Beijing 2008 Olympic medallists were subsequently disqualified for doping and UK

runner Kelly Sotherton was retroactively awarded bronze, she told reporters that she would reject the actual 'dirty and tainted' medal because it had touched the body of a doping athlete (Kelly Sotherton, 2017).

Beyond the lure of elite sporting competition, Olympic mythology is a powerful force in the public imagination. The symbolism and rituals surrounding the torch relay, lighting of the cauldron, medal awards, and opening and closing ceremonies add to the mystique. In July 2019, a *Guardian* sports writer celebrated three spectacular sporting events held in the UK the preceding weekend: the Cricket World Cup, Wimbledon tennis, and the British Grand Prix. Calling July 14 'a glorious day', he pointed to the London Olympics as 'the comparison that came to mind while observing the joy of the crowds'. The opening ceremony in July 2012, he explained, 'brilliantly reacquainted us with our history, our diversity and our moral assets … we had recognized our better selves, despite the austerity imposed on British lives …' (Williams, 2019). On the same theme, UK MP Chuka Umunna invoked the opening ceremony as a vision of 'a country at ease with itself, not only proud of our history but proud of what we have become – open, humorous, decent, confident and modern' (Umunna, 2019). Perhaps one cannot blame Williams and Umunna for grasping at sports straws at that chaotic moment in UK politics.

One saner voice identified the 'misplaced nostalgia' around London 2012's opening ceremony that was surfacing in media commentary and politicians' rhetoric in 2019. Paddy Bettington, who had helped produce the event, argued that 'the spirit of 2012 is no antidote to Brexit Britain' (Bettington, 2019). He pointed out the hypocrisy of the opening ceremony segment celebrating the Windrush generation when, two months earlier, Home Secretary Theresa May had announced her 'hostile environment' immigration policy,

promoted by warnings displayed on the Home Office's infamous 'go home' vans: 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest'. Bettington also noted the duplicity that saw £9.3bn spent on the games in the face of austerity measures that the chancellor, George Osborne, presented as 'a necessity'– austerity for some, it seems, but not others.

Over two decades of research (e.g. Lenskyj, 2000, 2002, 2008) reveals that, of the countless promises and rationales that the Olympic industry promotes to bid and host city residents, four key points routinely make an appearance:

1. The 'ticking clock' requires construction to be completed on time. Development applications, social and environmental impact studies, and community consultation must be fast-tracked or ignored in order to meet the Olympic timetable.
2. 'The eyes of the world' will be on the Olympic city/state/country, and the image circulated through global media must be flawless. Street sweeps and draconian bylaws that criminalise poverty are necessary to ensure that image by rendering poor and homeless people invisible.
3. Politicians will be able to leverage the system to fund infrastructure, housing and sporting facilities, that is, an Olympic legacy that all residents will enjoy for decades to come.
4. Intangible benefits will flow from the Olympics: patriotic fervour, civic pride, and once-in-a-lifetime opportunities = 'priceless'.

For their part, politicians who support Olympic bids enjoy promoting their association with and perceived influence over the world's sporting elite, most notably members of the IOC, heads of international federations (IFs) and national Olympic committees (NOCs), as well as world-class athletes. They