

*Global Games:  
From The Ancient Games To The Sydney Olympics*  
Richard Cashman

Maarten van Bottenburg, trans by from the Dutch by Beverley Jackson, *Global Games*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2001.

K. Toohey and A.J. Veal, *The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective*, CABI Publishing, Oxford, 1999.

Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, eds, *The Olympics at the Millennium: Power, Politics, and the Games*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2000.

Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, *The Best Olympics Ever? Social Impacts of Sydney 2000*, SUNY Press, Albany NY, 2002.

This review article focuses mainly on books on the Olympic Games and ongoing scholarly debates about the history of the Games and particularly their impact on host communities. It seems that as the Games get bigger and more complex there is even more debate among scholars about their worth.

However, the Olympic Games do not occur in isolation, they are part of the global sports system and compete with other mega events, such as various football World Cups, for a share of the sporting market. So it is appropriate that this review article begins with a work on global games, which provides insight into the changing global sports system. The future of the Olympic Games, like other mega sporting events, is tied to how well and how sensitively its organisers adapt to the rapidly changing global sports system.

Maarten van Bottenburg sets out to identify the reasons for variations in the global sports system and to answer the following questions:

Why is one sport favored in a particular period? Why does one sport fall from grace while another flourishes? How do we explain the differences [in sports preferences] between countries? In more general terms, what are the causes of the differential popularization of sport?  
(p. 11)

Van Bottenburg's work draws on previous research on globalisation and the diffusion of sports, notably Allen Guttman's *Sport and Empires: Modern Sport and Cultural Imperialism* (1994) and Joseph Maguire's *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations* (1999). However, van Bottenburg's suggests that his approach differs from these two scholars:

Although it cannot be denied that Maguire advances empirical data in support of his theory, *Global Sport* is nonetheless first and foremost a theoretical analysis. Conversely, while Guttman advances a

substantial amount of theoretical views into his work, the strength of his analysis lies primarily in his wealth of historical examples. I attempt in this book to achieve a more fluid mix of sociohistorical description and sociological theory. (p. 42)

Van Bottenburg suggests, first of all, that the global sports system is subject to constant change: some sports are gaining in popularity while others are losing ground and yet other new sports are constantly being created. He adds that while a transnational culture of sport has emerged, a 'uniform culture of sport' is far from complete, and nor is it likely to be one in the future. In fact the global sports system is marked by a continuing internal differentiation. This occurs because countries appropriate global sports in various ways. So while soccer is by far the most popular sport in Europe, Africa and Latin America, other sports have more appeal in North America, parts of Asia and some of the countries of Oceania.

Van Bottenburg's interpretative model is based on several hypotheses. The contemporary global sports system, he suggests, has been largely diffused from and 'dominated by sports originating in countries that have occupied positions of international power since the mid-nineteenth century' (p. 197). The global sports system was initially dominated by Britain (track and field, cricket, field hockey, rowing, rugby, tennis and soccer) and Germany (gymnastics and handball). The United States (basketball, baseball and volleyball) and Japan (judo, karate and other martial arts) became more influential after the Second World War.

A second hypothesis is that while dominated countries can do little to change the fact that the cultural balance of exchange is inherently unequal, a different kind of competition operates 'between the lines' in that there is a hidden competition relating to 'people's desire to ... distinguish themselves from others by their choice of sport' (p. 196). So alien elements can be 'adopted selectively and adapted to the indigenous culture' so that in time more and more dominated people come to see a particular sport as their own cultural heritage. Indian cricket is a good example of this process.

Van Bottenburg introduces interesting data to support his arguments. He lists the most popular sports in 24 selected European countries to demonstrate that the Japanese sports of judo and karate have been widely diffused there. In France judo is the third most popular sport, in terms of participants, after soccer and tennis. Judo is now the tenth most popular global sport.

There are a number of conclusions that emerge from these hypotheses. Van Bottenburg states that 'the dissemination of standardized sports is approaching its absolute geographical limit'. I take this to mean that world markets are becoming saturated with competing global sports and sporting events and that

the emergence of new sports and mega events therefore pose threats to the existing sporting status quo.

There is then the implied suggestion that the world sporting culture may be even more diverse in the future. The transition in the twentieth century from a European global sporting system to a European/North American/Japanese one suggests that the future world sports system may be more multicultural. The increasing global power of countries such as China may alter the global diffusion of sports in the future.

Van Bottenburg adds that while 'Anglo-Saxon elements predominate, other cultural traditions are increasingly mingling with them'. This has occurred:

... because media are less exclusively bound to superpowers, and because their reporters and cameramen are standing by in almost every part of the world. And partly it is attributable to increased 'bottom-up' influence: large-scale migration from poor to richer regions means that people in prosperous countries are increasingly encountering new cultural phenomena ... (p. 206)

*Global Games* is an excellent and accessible study, with a convincing interpretative model, that will provide food for thought for the organisers of multi-sport festivals such as the Olympic Games. It would be prudent for those who shape the Olympic program to be sensitive to the rapidly changing global sports system and to selectively incorporate new sports. This will require the deletion of other sports. This book suggests that competition between sports and between rival mega events is likely to increase in the future.

Toohy and Veal state that the purpose of their book, *The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective*, is to provide an overview of the Olympic Games from ancient to contemporary times from a 'social science perspective' because there has been no such publication to provide 'a broad, independent, multi-disciplinary account' of this unique festival. Because the book covers such wide territory it is the aim of the authors to provide a synthesis of the 'various ways in which the Games interact with changing social and cultural environments and to raise issues and to provide pointers for further study' (p. ix). This book is a product of undergraduate and postgraduate courses that were taught in the School of Leisure and Tourism Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney.

*The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective* is quite different from the existing Olympic histories, such as the chronological approaches of Allen Guttmann and John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle. Although this book draws on historical examples, the authors mostly adopt a thematic approach and focus more on the operation of the contemporary post-1984 Olympic Games, when commercialism and professionalism were more readily accepted.

After several historical chapters, Toohey and Veal shift to the 'Modern Olympic Phenomenon': a comprehensive overview of the workings of the contemporary Olympic organisation. Starting with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) the authors move to the IOC's relationship with the International Sporting Federations, National Olympic Committees and then discuss the various IOC Commissions, that have increased in recent years. They then introduce issues such as the *Olympic Charter*, the ideal of Olympism and some of the Olympic symbols, such as the torch and flame, the motto, flag and anthem. There is also a discussion of related bodies such as the International Olympic Academy, the Paralympic Games and regional Games. A useful feature of this chapter and the book in general are the many diagrams, graphs, charts and lists which enable the reader to gain a clear idea of relationships between various institutions or the size of costs and income associated with the staging of an Olympic Games. This is a clear and succinct overview of the modern Olympic phenomenon — an admirable introduction for the beginning student. It is useful that this chapter features at an early stage of the book.

Then follows a series of thematic chapters on politics and nationalism, economics and the financing of the Games, the mass media, drugs, women, followed by some case studies. There is a final chapter on the future of the Olympic Games. These chapters provide a useful synthesis of the variety of issues related to that theme. The chapter on politics and nationalism for instance, elaborates six ways in which there has been political intervention in the Olympic Games: internal politics within a nation; international rivalries; athletes using the Games as a forum for political demonstrations; non-participants using the Games to further their political causes; nations equating Olympic success with their social, economic and political superiority and the politics within the International Olympic Committee. It provides the student with an overview of the variety and complexity of Olympic politics.

The chapter on the media is equally insightful. Toohey and Veal note the irony that while an Olympic Stadium is 'clean', with commercial signage and advertising banned, televised broadcasts make clever use of advertising, so there are ways around commercial restrictions. They also note that while the IOC was initially slow to include female athletes and even slower to admit women to the IOC, the Olympics are now 'driven by female-appeal sports'. The brief discussion of the internet is interesting because this new media represents a potential threat to established television interests. The internet is also a site for alternative and even oppositional views.

This book lives up to its promise that it is written from an independent perspective: there is as much space given to critics as to the apologists for the Olympic Games: the views of Andrew Jennings and Richard Gruneau are given as much space and weight as those of John Lucas and Allen Guttmann. By

presenting the arguments from both sides in an even-handed way the authors invite students to make up their own mind. While this is an effective teaching device, there are occasions when one would have liked the authors to engage more with the protagonists and the critics. They certainly speak out effectively on some occasions, such as the gender limitations of the International Olympic Committee. There is also an interesting chapter on the future of the Olympic Games. At the end of the chapter they declare their confidence in that the 'future of the games, in all their dimensions, is assured'. However, the 'nature of that future remains to be seen' (p. 235) depending on how well Olympic organisers respond to a variety of issues raised by an ever-changing global sporting system.

Since a whole book could be written on any of the individual chapters, the authors acknowledge that 'it is not possible to provide a definitive analysis of a phenomenon as complex as the Olympic Games in a single short book' (p. ix). Because of such constraints and possibly because the book has been authored from Australia, there is greater focus on the Summer Games: there is much less attention given to the Winter or the Paralympic Games. Possibly because the book was designed more for an Australian audience there is the best part of a page on the Empire/Commonwealth Games and a paragraph on the World University Games but only a very brief mention of regional Games such as the Pan-American Games, the Asian Games and the Pan-Pacific Games and no mention of other regional Games, such as the African Games.

The book is clearly written and well presented and is accessible to its target audience. So it comes as a surprise that some editorial gremlins allowed a 14-line paragraph to be duplicated immediately after a table on pages 204 and 205. Nevertheless this robust volume provides a fine synthesis of the many issues and controversies relating to the Olympic Games and a wide range of ongoing scholarly debates. As a text it succeeds at two levels: as an introductory work for undergraduate students and as a research guide for postgraduate students that poses challenges for further research.

*The Olympics at the Millennium* was conceived 'to explore various moments in the history of the Olympic Games to ponder the larger and profoundly complex struggles over the shifting meaning of masculinity, femininity, ethnicity, race, and embodiedness associated with the spectacle of athletic nationalism and the everyday life of the Olympics' (pp.14–15). The idea of what constitutes a 'moment' is interpreted in diverse ways by the various authors. The collection includes a chapter on the Gay Games — though none on the Paralympic Games — the former not being accepted as part of the Olympics unlike the latter. Like many other volumes of its kind this book represents a loosely integrated and mixed set of essays from a variety of perspectives, presumably what arrived on the editor's desk after a 'call for papers'. Some essays have been written by the supporters of the Olympic Games while others have been written by critics. The

editors have attempted to impose some order on the collection by dividing the chapters into five sections: Cultural Difference and 'Elite' Sports; Masculinities/Femininities/Sexualities; The Olympics: Drama, Spectacle, Media and Politics at the Games.

Some authors explore effectively a moment in sporting time. Alan Tomlinson focuses on an 'uncertain and ambling' Mohammed Ali as he ignited the cauldron at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. One reading of this event, advanced by Tomlinson, was that Ali had been 'reduced from a figure of complex oppositional cultural politics' to 'little more than a cultural apologist for the cultural and political powers that be' (p. 169). In a more personal but moving piece, Cynthia Nadalin explores her disappointment and disillusionment when she suffered defeat when she represented Australia in kayaking at the 1960 Rome Olympic Games. Nadalin had to deal not only with sexism and official incompetence but she also had to confront her own racist attitudes towards the Japanese, which were not resolved for decades later. John B. Allen's moment, by contrast, is Norwegian skiing at the Winter Olympics during the decade of the 1920s. His findings suggest some interesting comparisons between Norway and Australia in that both these countries drew wider social and political implications from sporting success. When Norway dominated the skiing at the first Winter Olympic Games at Chamonix in 1924 a Norwegian newspaper declared that 'We showed the World the Nordic Way' (p. 79). Other authors focus more on a theme than a moment. Ian Jobling discusses the background to the 1993 successful Sydney bid and the selection of the Homebush site. Lynn Embrey has a wide-ranging essay on 'The Politics of Funding, Nationalism and the Quest for Gold' in which she floats the interesting, though largely unproven hypothesis, that one can equate the Olympic medal success with social and political stability, economic growth and optimism.

There are a number of articles that relate to changing masculinities and femininities. In her article on female Olympians, Donna A. Lopiano is confident that in the future female athletes will have as many opportunities as male athletes. Leslie Heywood, discussing the advances of women athletes at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, is equally upbeat. However, she warns that women's sport could go either way, it 'could prove to be a fickle advertising trend' or it could precipitate more widespread and lasting social change (p. 115). The article on the Gay Games by Vikki Krane and Jennifer Krane is of interest because there is limited scholarly literature on this subject. It is interesting to note that the Gay Games were initially ostracised by the US Olympic organisers — they were not allowed to refer to the event as the 'Gay Olympics' — though the United States Olympic Committee has been less hostile in recent times. This article presents a largely idealised and anecdotal view of the Gay Games in which the authors contend there is a spirit of camaraderie, a joy of competing and inclusiveness —

all the things that the Olympic Games are supposed to be about — though there are hints that practice of the Gay Games does not always live up to these ideals. Given that the Gay Games were initially spurned by the Olympic organisers it is intriguing that their supporters even measure themselves against Olympic ideals.

The politics of race is also a theme that is well developed: there are two chapters on Aborigines and the Olympic Games. Darren Godwell is critical of the way that the Sydney Olympic organisers co-opted 'indigenous images, motifs, and artistic representation of indigenous peoples themselves' without proper representation of indigenous voices. Lisa Meekison addressed the contradictions associated with the indigenous 'Festival of the Dreaming' which opened the Cultural Olympiad. While SOCOG deserved some credit for attempting to promote inclusiveness in a generally intolerant environment, the Organising Committee attempted to capitalise on the Festival. Despite this, Meekison believes that indigenous participants performed what they wanted to and resisted being incorporated fully into SOCOG's agenda. There is an informative article by three authors on Jewish athletes from a variety of countries and the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games: some still believe that they had good reasons for attending, while others believed it was proper not to attend. The authors catalogue how a number of pre-1936 Olympians died in concentration camps. C. Keith Harrison revisits the celebrated 1968 black power salute of two United States medallists, John Carlos and Tommie Smith, and explains why this tradition of African-American political activism has not persisted.

The editors have an interesting chapter on the 'Olympics in everyday lives', which they define as 'the effects of the Olympic Games that surround us'. Their chapter mostly relates to changing everyday life in the host city, from the time a bid was won until the Games itself. The citizens of an Olympic city are affected both by the physical restructuring of the city and the mobilising of various communities, such as schoolchildren and key minority groups, to demonstrate community support. Everyday life in an Olympic city is altered even more dramatically during an Olympic Games. Some of the themes developed here are worthy of further treatment. Roy and H.G.'s daily comedy, *The Dream*, was a fascinating example of the Olympics as popular culture. There is also the interesting problem of how the majority of citizens return to mundane life after what for them has been festival time.

Like many edited volumes the chapters vary considerably in quality and approach and there is no consistent thread throughout the book. However, the book includes some interesting material and important chapters and demonstrates that the Olympic Games will continue to be a rich source of scholarly debate in the new millennium.

Helen Lenskyj admits frankly at the outset that her book, *The Best Olympics Ever?*, is political and is shaped by her stance as an activist: 'I make no claim that the book is comprehensive or balanced, or that it employs a traditional scholarly approach'. Her aim is 'to examine social inequalities generated or exacerbated by Sydney's Olympic preparations from the perspective of disadvantaged people whose voices would not otherwise be heard' (p.1). While she admits that there may have been 'some positive outcomes' from the Games her concern is 'to disclose what the Sydney 2000 Olympic industry suppressed', the forgotten 'costs and impacts' and the unrecognised oppositional groups and victims. Her book, like her previous work *Inside the Olympic Industry* (2000), is a radical critique documenting the darker side of the Olympics. A central thesis is that 'Olympic legacy' benefits, such as they exist, 'accrue to the already privileged sectors of the population'. By contrast, the disadvantaged bear a disproportionate share of the burden (p. 131).

To advance her argument Lenskyj examines a wide array of topics such as the media and the Olympics; the increased powers given to the police; legislation passed to restrict protest; the representation of Aborigines and the Olympic Games; the worsening conditions for homeless and underprivileged groups due to the Games; the relationship between selected Australian universities and the Olympic organisers; local and global resistance including community opposition to many aspects of the Games.

Lenskyj's work is a well-documented criticism of the modern Olympic Games and for that matter similar hallmark events, sporting and otherwise. She has a good chapter on the contrasting approaches of the two Australian newspapers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian*, who were both Games sponsors. The issue of Aborigines and the Olympics is treated with some subtlety given divisions in the community and differing stances of SOCOG and the Australian Government on the issue of reconciliation. Other chapters document anti-Olympic protests, such as resident opposition to the Bondi Beach Volleyball Stadium.

While the book makes an important contribution to Olympic studies and is a useful counter to the works of Olympic apologists, it is a book of uneven quality and is deeply flawed at a number of points. Lenskyj's activist stance appears to cloud her judgment about the significance of Olympic opposition movements. She confided to one journalist before the Games that 'I expect there will be violence, there may even be fatalities' (p. 39). When protests did not eventuate, she provided the lame explanation that they did not occur because of the power of the Olympic industry to 'engage' the mass media and government departments to undermine any potential opposition.

A disappointing part of this book is the brief and unsatisfactory discussion of the volunteers because of an obvious determination to discredit the volunteer

program. She quoted some unnamed volunteers who considered the orientation session a 'propaganda' exercise and a 'waste' of time. She implied that volunteers were overworked and exploited: they had to work about 12 shifts or 12 hours each day, with a rest day only every five or six days. She further cited a 1990 circular of the anti-Olympic coalition, 'Bread Not Circuses', that Olympic 'volunteers had a negative effect on unionized labor and its displacement of volunteers from work of greater labor' (p. 115). There is a further unsubstantiated statement that the demand for Olympic volunteers had 'obviously trumped Meals on Wheels' (p. 116). If volunteers were subjected to long shifts and bombarded with propaganda, it is all the more remarkable that some 50,000 volunteers, across the age spectrum, went about their tasks with enthusiasm and why there was such a low drop-out ratio. Brendan Lynch's report on the volunteer program, published in a study of the contribution of the higher education sector to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games,<sup>1</sup> is much more comprehensive, informative and balanced.

Lenskyj's chapter on universities and the Olympics is also deeply flawed and incomplete. Her statement that universities were co-opted by the Olympic industry — swept up by a rapacious Olympic industry — conveniently ignores the fact that at least 29 institutions of higher education had their own (sometimes selfish) agendas: personnel from the academic 'industry' were just as keen to co-opt the Olympic Games as was the Olympic 'industry' to recruit universities. Lenskyj is also very careless with her presentation of details of the programs of particular universities. If you read the material on the controversial decision of the Vice-Chancellor of The University of New South Wales to hire an Olympic box at Sydney Olympic Park you would get the impression that the Centre for Olympic Studies was privy to this decision and supported it since the issue is mentioned after the heading 'Centre for Olympic Studies' and following a sentence on the Centre's teaching program. Centre personnel were not consulted about the hiring of the box before it was announced. They were not invited to sit in the box during the Olympic Games! The assertion that 60 students, who were recruited as volunteers for the IBM Surf Shack, gained course credit is simply not correct. Other evidence presented is based on hearsay and third-hand evidence. Lenskyj is convinced that her interpretation of events at a 1999 conference — when the response to gift-giving was read in totally different ways by delegates there — proves that the subsequent actions of the organisers demonstrated a need to appease the Olympic industry. However, Lenskyj was not at this conference, nor was the writer of a review in *Olympika* whom she cites, who was equally adamant that he knew what took place. Surprisingly, Lenskyj leaves out one of the most controversial university contracts relating to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Although Monash University had a limited involvement in the Olympic Games, it was awarded a significant contract from

the IOC (for which there was no public tender) to organise a future transfer of knowledge program. This involvement of Monash University is discussed in the Cashman and Toohey report cited below. While Lenskyj focuses only on four or five institutions of higher education mainly in the Sydney area and its region, the authors of the report explore the positive and negative experiences of some 29 higher education institutions across the country.

The problem with this book is that Lenskyj speaks with two separate voices, the radical scholar versus the anti-Games activist, that often are at cross purposes. She is more convincing when she speaks as the scholar. Such arguments are thorough and well-documented. The activist voice, by contrast, is subjective, partisan and conspiratorially-inclined and speaks of a 'chilly climate', the 'seamy' side of events and 'sinister' motives. People who are convinced of conspiracies on a grand scale usually have no trouble finding them or even conjuring them up when the evidence is problematic.

#### Note

- 1 Richard Cashman and Kristine Toohey, *The Contribution of the Higher Education Sector to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games*, Centre for Olympic Studies, UNSW, Sydney, 2002.