

# Interview With Andrew Zimbalist, Professor of Economics, Smith College

**Kelsey Slater**

Mississippi State University, USA

Andrew Zimbalist is a leading analyst of the economic issues surrounding cities' and nations' staging of megaevents including the Olympic Games and FIFA (soccer) World Cup tournaments. He has written numerous books on the intersection of sport and economics, including *Circus Maximus: The Economic Gamble Behind Hosting the Olympics and the World Cup*. He has consulted on Olympic-bid projects, most notably the 2012 New York City bid, and he also provided a critical examination of the 2024 Boston bid, which was ultimately withdrawn after heavy criticism from the local community.

Due to the high economic, political, and environmental costs, fewer and fewer cities and countries are willing to bid to host these megaevents. During this interview Zimbalist provided insight as to why some countries have been financially successful, but, ultimately, he has found that there is an overwhelming trend toward economic and environmental burden to the hosting nation. This interview is a good fit for this special issue on "Communication and Soccer," as Zimbalist discusses many implications for the future of megaevents including the FIFA World Cup. Because the next two FIFA World Cups have unique financial and operational challenges, the ideas presented by Zimbalist will have even greater implications in the future. The climate in Qatar necessitated moving the event from the summer to November and December, and the 2026 tournament jointly hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada will see the event expand from 32 to 48 teams. Zimbalist stressed that change is needed to ensure the future success of these athletic contests, which will affect the future of global soccer and the media personnel who cover it.

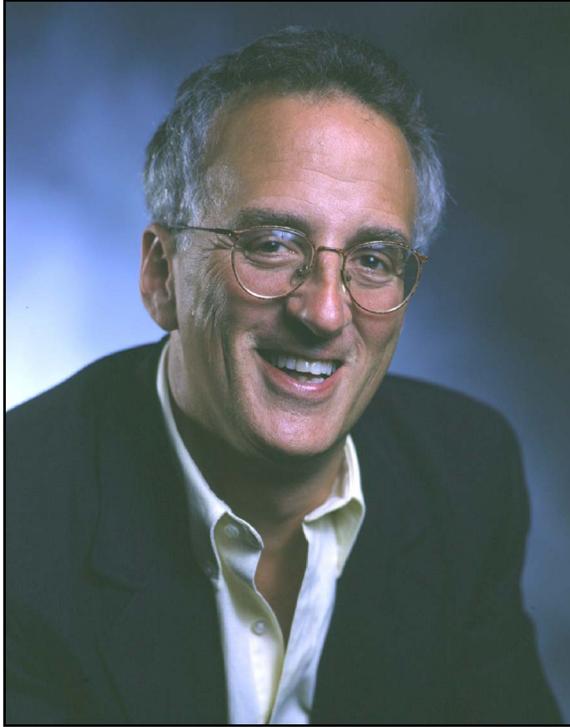
Zimbalist spoke with me on a visit to Mississippi State University during which he gave a talk titled "What's Wrong With College Sports and How to Fix It."

**Slater:** What first piqued your interest in the economics of sporting megaevents?

**Zimbalist:** I was asked by the Shubert Corporation in New York to do an analysis of the impact of New York City's hosting the Olympics—the Summer Olympics. Around 2003–2004 they were hot after getting the IOC [International Olympic Committee] to award 2012 to them. The Shubert Corporation runs many of the

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The author is with the the Dept. of Kinesiology, Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS. Address correspondence to [ks2907@msstate.edu](mailto:ks2907@msstate.edu).



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**Andrew Zimbalist** — Professor of economics at Smith College.

theaters on Broadway, and they were obviously concerned that the Olympic stadium that was going to be built between 33rd and 35th Streets and 10th and 11th Avenues would have an impact on Broadway that would be deleterious.

So, they had me look at it, and I started looking at what the economic impact was on a city for hosting the games—so that started it, started my interest. Then I just started to get asked. After I did this work, because I started doing some public speaking about it, I started getting asked by other cities to look at their situation with regard to megaevents, and I historically have been a Latin American economist so when Brazil hosted the World Cup in 2014, I became still more involved.

Then I basically decided that nobody other than this guy Holger Preuss, who's a German who had written about the economics of hosting the Olympics, nobody had done it. And I didn't like his work, so I decided to write *Circus Maximus* and that got me further. When you write something and get some notoriety, then you get asked to speak about it and consult and write more and so on. So that is more or less the story.

**Slater:** What are the best examples of a city or nation hosting such an event and gaining either economic or political benefits?