Book Review


This book is a useful addition to any sports history library. It chronicles the Olympic host city bid process over the last decade. Leyskyj’s greatest insight is to substitute the term “Olympic industry” for “Olympic family” and “Olympic movement.” As she explains in her introduction, “most aspects of the Olympics are organized to maximize power and profit rather than to promote the welfare of individuals and groups engaged in sport as a healthy and fulfilling human activity.”

Her first chapter covers the controversy surrounding the Salt Lake City Olympic bid process. In 1998 members of the press discovered that the Salt Lake Olympic Bid Committee, in an effort to have Salt Lake City be chosen the site of the 2002 Winter Olympics, lavished gifts on and did favors for some members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Depending on who is interpreting them, such acts have been variously described as bribes, friendly cross-cultural gestures, or standard IOC operating procedure. Not everyone, and certainly not the IOC, viewed gift giving as a major concern. Lenskyj points out that IOC developed guidelines in 1994 limiting the size of gift given out during the bid process “to reduce costs to candidate cities, not to address abuses of the bid process.” And she further notes, “it did not appear that the IOC was empowered to take away a host city’s right on the grounds that the process was fraudulent.” With the Salt Lake City bid process being described in such detail in the first chapter, Lenskyj gives the impression that it is, in and of itself, significant. However, other Olympic critics have suggested that the Salt Lake situation was merely a manifestation of bigger issues within the Olympics. It is not until Lenskyj is well into Chapter 2 does she bring up what many critics would consider the larger problem with the Olympics. She quotes a report from the United States Olympic Committee issued as a result of an investigation into the Salt Lake City Olympic bid process. It placed blame on the IOC’s “broader culture of improper gift-giving, ... made possible by the closed nature of the IOC and by the absence of ethical and transparent financial con-
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trols in its operation.”

In the third chapter, Lenskyj explores the power structure within the IOC. For example, she states that “its members represent the IOC in their respective countries, rather than acting as delegates of their countries to the IOC.” That’s a thought-provoking statement, but more questions are raised by it than answered (e.g., Since many members of the IOC are from small countries, is there any particular benefit in having them represent the IOC back home?). Similarly, a page later Lenskyj states, but does not expand upon, a very important point: “Athletes numbering approximately ten thousand comprise the biggest but arguably the least powerful and prestigious branch of the family.”

Chapter Four, Toronto and Sydney Olympic Bids: When Winners Are Losers, starts out with a revised version of an article published in the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. This is the first time Lenskyj lets the reader know she is working from a neo-Marxist perspective: “... the analysis will employ neo-Marxist concepts of accommodation and resistance in order to explore the difficulties facing individuals and groups who challenged hegemonic assumptions about the Olympic industry.” By this point, it seemed as if Lenskyj’s goal was to make a case that an Olympics of any kind was socially and environmentally disruptive and that it should be eliminated altogether. On the last two pages of the book she states, “What is needed is the dismantling of the Olympic industry as presently constituted. ... the so-called Olympic movement is simply a transactional corporation that in many instances exploits young athletes’ labor and aspirations for its own aggrandizement and profit.”

Her agenda continues in Chapter Six. “This chapter will document political repression associated with the staging of the Olympics, and the resistance work of the major anti-Olympic and Olympic watchdog groups concerned with social, economic, and political impact.” She particularly targets universities. “... a university with a mandate to promote unethical business practices should not form partnerships with the unethical Olympic industry.”

Chapter Seven continues in the same vein, with links being made between the Olympics and social conditions. Lenskyj devotes three pages to saying that after Atlanta won the bid to host the Olympics,