



Onward to the Olympics: Historical Perspectives on the Olympic Games. Gerald P. Schaus and Steven R. Wenn, editors. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-88920-505-5. Pp. xxviii + 376.

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In October 2003, the Canadian Institute in Greece and Wilfrid Laurier University co-sponsored a conference on the Olympic games, ancient and modern. This volume contains 23 papers from that conference, divided into two parts, "The Olympics in Antiquity" and "The Modern Olympics." Taken as a whole, the book gives a good overview of the current state of knowledge of the ancient games and a glimpse of the kind of work being done in modern sports history.

Part I, on the ancient Olympic games, is the longer of the two. Nigel B. Crowther's "The Ancient Olympic Games through the Centuries" introduces this section briskly. He observes that the traditional date of the first Olympic games, 776 BC, is not as certain as we used to believe (p. 6), reminds readers that the modern idea of "amateur" as opposed to "professional" athletes "would have had little meaning to the ancients" (p. 7), and traces the gradual decline of the Olympic festival in late antiquity (p. 9).

In "Politics and the Bronze Age Origins of Olympic Practices," Senta C. German considers the evidence for Mycenaean-era athletic competition. Although there is no archaeological evidence for such competition at Olympia itself (p. 17), the site probably was in use in the period. Bronze Age athletic practice is documented in paintings and other art objects from Crete, Mycenae, and elsewhere; German

cautiously suggests that athletic competition in this period may be connected with “building group identity” (p. 20), just as the Olympic games were. The relationship between Bronze Age games and the later games “might very well indicate continuity of Bronze Age practices into the Iron Age” (p. 23).

The origin of the Olympic games is also the topic of Thomas K. Hubbard’s contribution, “Pindar, Heracles the Idaean Dactyl, and the Foundation of the Olympic Games.” The first problem here is which Heracles founded the games—the well known Theban hero, as Pindar suggests (in *Olympian* 10 and elsewhere), or one of the Dactyls, “metalworkers with magical powers” (p. 27) associated with Mount Ida. Hubbard traces the Idaean Dactyls’ long-standing association with Olympia, probably pre-dating the connection of Heracles with the games and even most of the traditional mythology of Heracles. Hubbard suggests (p. 32) that when the new Heracles myths gained prominence, followers of the older cult of Cronus, the Great Mother, and the Idaean Dactyls gave the name “Heracles” to one of the Dactyls as a way of co-opting the new story into their old cult. He further proposes “that the story of Heracles the dactyl at Olympia evolved out of ... a contest of mythological claims and counterclaims ... between pro-Spartan and anti-Spartan elements within Elean politics” (p. 33). Moreover, Pindar seems to be aware of the varying stories, and consistently follows the “Dorian” versions (p. 39): “Pindar’s perspective ... is pre-eminently Panhellenic, but with a Dorian bias” (p. 38). Pindar himself is a Theban, and his Dorian bias may reflect the political alignment of Thebes with Sparta and the other Dorian states during the early fifth century.

Max Nelson reviews the evidence for ancient scholarship on the Olympics in “The First Olympic Games.” He argues that there were various lists of Olympic winners (p. 48), not all consistent with each other and not all starting from the same year. Ancient authorities also give different stories about the founding of the games. It was probably Aristotle who gave the date of 776 BC for the first Olympiad, followed by Eratosthenes and many others, but not by everyone (p. 52); ancient scholars give dates as early as the sixteenth century BC or as late as the seventh. Nelson concludes that we must be skeptical of all the early dates and victory lists (p. 54).

In “The Transformation of Athletics in Sixth-Century Greece,” Paul Christesen argues that “it was not until the first half of the sixth century BC that athletics came to play a dominant role in Greek life and identity” (p. 59). Moreover, the dramatic increase in sporting activity at

this time was politically motivated, and had in turn political effects. “During the Archaic period, participation in athletics became a means by which non-elites could make a regular, public claim to socio-political privilege, and this in turn brought about fundamental changes in the place of athletics in Greek life and consciousness” (p. 61). One major factor was the introduction of “civic nudity” (p. 64; the phrase is Larissa Bonfante’s), that is, the practice of nude athletics in the gymnasium. This is a short, dense paper, one of the best in the volume.

“The Ancient Olympics and their Ideals,” by Nigel B. Crowther, compares the modern Olympic movement’s ideals with those of the ancient games, particularly during the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Crowther concludes that while the modern Olympics are associated with a desire for peace between nations, this was not a value of the ancient games. Instead, the city of Elis used the Olympic festival for its own political purposes (p. 72). There were occasional brief moments of “brotherhood and unity” (p. 74) among Greek *poleis* promoted by and through the Olympic games, but there was no question of true panhellenic unity, still less of the kind of world-wide peace the modern Olympic movement talks about.

Victor Matthews takes up the paradoxical “instances where the names of men who lost at Olympia have been recorded” (p. 81) in his paper, “Olympic Losers: Why Athletes Who Did Not win at Olympia Are Remembered.” Losers may be named when they are also winners, for example if someone wins after losing in previous Olympiads, or returns and fails to defend his title, or wins in the other games but not at Olympia. Losers’ names may also appear as details in the stories of famous victors. There are also stories of what can go wrong—victims of bad luck or of poor officiating, or athletes disqualified for cheating or the like. Many of the names come from Pausanias, some from Pindar, and others from other sources. This is an engaging paper, collecting details about memorable contests through the history of the ancient Olympics.

The next four papers discuss technical details of the festival. David Gilman Romano takes up “Judges and Judging at the Ancient Olympic Games.” There were several kinds of judges and their functions and number evolved over time. Romano reviews the literary and archaeological evidence for Olympic judges: how they were selected, what happened if they were caught cheating, where they prepared and observed during competition.

Aileen Ajootian discusses “Heroic and Athletic Sortition at Ancient Olympia.” It was customary to draw lots for lanes on the

racetrack, for grouping into heats, and for opponents in combat sports. Tokens, vessels to mix them in and draw them from, and even marked racing lanes have been found at various athletic sites throughout Greece. At Olympia itself, the Achaean Dedication was a statue group depicting the scene in *Iliad* 7 in which Nestor draws lots to see who will fight Hector in single combat. Ajoatian points out that the placement of this statue group, as Pausanias describes it, is neatly related to the procession of the athletes from the altar, where they swear not to cheat, into the stadium. “Having just sworn their oath to support fair play, athletes processed below a similar scene re-enacted in marble above in the east gable of the Zeus temple, and walked between the two parts of the Achaean Dedication where bronze statues performed allotment” (p. 127); she observes that the pediment of the temple shows Pelops and Oinomaus preparing for their chariot race and notes that it has been suggested that Oinomaus is seen swearing not to cheat.

In “Fabulous Females and Ancient Olympia,” Donald G. Kyle reviews the evidence for women at Olympia. Girls ran a race at the Heraea festival, in the Olympic stadium, but this was probably an Elean rite of passage, not a Panhellenic competition (p. 135). Adult women were not permitted to come to the Olympic games as spectators, and the story of a mother accompanying her son as his trainer, known from Pausanias and other sources, reflects a confused conflation of other stories (p. 138). Young, unmarried women were not present either, except perhaps under special circumstances along with a Priestess of Demeter (p. 141). We know that Cynisca of Sparta won the four-horse chariot race in 396 and 392 BC, but even she did not attend the games; Kyle suggests that she was entered as owner of the chariot by her brother Agesilaus. “If she lost, it was just a woman losing. If she won, declaring Cynisca the ‘only’ woman winner in all Greece would make a mockery of Alcibiades’ claim to excellence” (p. 144); “to discredit Alcibiades, Agesilaus emasculated the Olympic chariot race” (p. 145). In short, modern women athletes can find no prototypes or role models at Olympia.

Hugh M. Lee’s piece “The *Halma*: A Running or Standing Jump” considers the notorious question of jumping weights. Vase paintings show jumpers holding weights in each hand, and example of weights have also survived. Quintilian suggests (10.3.6) that jumpers take a running start, but in modern experiments jumpers have found that the weights are a hinderance. Lee’s new proposal is that ancient jumpers took a *shorter* running start than the 40 meters used by modern long

jumpers. If they only run for, say, 10 meters, they will not reach top speed and the weights will make the jump longer (as they do for a standing jump). Moreover, in the stadium at Olympia, the space leading up to the starting line for jumps is only a bit over 10 meters, so a 40-meter running start would have been impossible. This proposal tidily accounts for the visual evidence, the few texts that say anything about jumping technique, and the shape of the stadium.

Gerald P. Schaus discusses “Connections between Olympia and Stymphalus.” Stymphalus, in Arcadia, was the site of the sixth labor of Heracles: he was to kill off the birds that plagued the city. This labor, like all the others, appears in the sculptural program of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, in particular on the west porch. Stymphalus was also the home city of Hagesias, victorious in the Olympian mule-cart race, for whom Pindar wrote *Olympian* 6. Pausanias tells us that another Stymphalian, Dromeus, won the two-stade race in all four of the great games at around the same time. Thus for a few years—when the temple was new and these men were winning races—Stymphalus “basked in Olympic glory” (p. 175). The most prosperous time in the city’s history came later, but its moment of fame came in the fifth century.

The final paper in the first part bridges the gap between ancient and modern games. In “Commemorative Cash: The Coins of the Ancient and Modern Olympics,” Robert Weir studies coins and medals issued by ancient and modern authorities. Occasionally since 1940, and regularly from 1976 on, the nation hosting the Olympic games produces a special issue of its coinage with Olympic and athletic designs. The coins may be used in ordinary circulation, though special proof-quality coins are also struck and sold to collectors at prices well above their face values. For example, the Royal Canadian Mint produced 28 different five- and ten-dollar pieces for the 1976 games, showing “geography; ancient Olympic motifs; early Canadian sports; track and field sports; Olympic water sports; Olympic team and body contact sports; and Montreal Olympic venues” (p. 182). The profit from these coins was \$124.5 million (Canadian dollars)—not as much as the Canadian government had hoped for, but still quite significant. Ancient Greek mints did not issue commemorative coins in quite the same way; although there are coins from Olympia, they “give every appearance of being a functional coinage rather than a souvenir” (p. 186). The Romans came slightly closer to the modern idea, with occasional coin designs alluding to the games—a victor’s wreath or a depiction of a statue from Olympia. In the second and third centuries AD some athletic venues issue coins that seem

very much like modern commemorative issues, not necessarily intended for ancient coin collectors (as Weir notes, p. 189, this is an anachronism), but certainly evoking the games and possibly functioning as souvenirs.

The second part of the book is introduced by Robert K. Barney. His chapter, "The Olympic Games in Modern Times," outlines the history of "the modern world's foremost example of sport spectacle and extravagant cultural ritual" (p. 222). He includes a useful brief list of recent scholarly books in English on the modern Olympic movement. As the modern games have grown larger, including more nations, more athletes, and more sports, the task of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has become ever more complex. Barney acknowledges the difficulties facing the IOC (p. 239) but ends with an optimistic reminder of the values of the Olympic movement.

Jim Nendel's chapter profiles an early Olympic victor. "Duke Kahanamoku—Olympic Champion and Uncle Sam's Adopted Son: The Cultural Text of a Hawaiian Conqueror" tells the story of the swimmer Duke Kahanamoku, who won gold medals in 1912 and 1920. Although Hawaii was not yet a state, it was a US possession, so Hawaiian athletes competed under the American flag. Kahanamoku, however, was always conscious of representing Hawaii and its culture, which he did "with grace and an easygoing manner" (p. 245). Nendel points out that Kahanamoku's calm manner, his concern for fair play, and his outstanding achievements as a swimmer helped combat the mainland media's preconceptions about Hawai'i and its people, although Nendel does not suggest what those prejudices may have been. The article is a colorful profile of a great athlete and, from all accounts, a great man.

"Carl Diem's Inspiration for the Torch Relay? Jan Wils, Amsterdam 1928, and the Origin of the Olympic Flame," by Robert K. Barney and Anthony Th. Bijkerk, suggests that the Dutch architect Jan Wils may have inspired one of the great icons of the modern Olympic games. Wils designed the stadium for the Amsterdam games of 1928, and in the course of the design changed the proposed searchlight at the entry into a cauldron which could contain a flame. Carl Diem, secretary general of the organizing committee for the 1936 Berlin games, arranged a torch relay for the opening ceremony. The authors propose that Diem's idea for the relay came from Wils's stadium flame. This is the shortest article in the collection, making just one specific point and briefly reviewing Wils's career.

Jonathan Paul's "The Great Progression: A Content Analysis of the *Lake Placid News* and the *Los Angeles Times*' Treatment of the 1932

Olympics” considers the media coverage of the 1932 Winter Games in Lake Placid, NY, and of the same year’s Summer Games in Los Angeles, California, looking in each case at articles in a newspaper based in the host city from 1929 until the games. Paul concludes that newspaper coverage was generally neutral, and suggests this is different from “the divisive media coverage of the past ten years about the importance of the Olympic Games” (p. 268, referring to the present, not to the ten years before the period of the study). Although the survey of news stories leading up to the games has some intrinsic interest, the study could have been more rigorous. For example, Paul shows that 10 of 141 articles in the Lake Placid paper are positive, the rest neutral (p. 266), while the Los Angeles paper prints 3 positive articles and one negative out of 74. In percentage terms the two corpora are therefore quite close: 92% neutral in Lake Placid, 94% in Los Angeles. Yet for the Lake Placid paper, “the lack of negative spin in the remaining [neutral] articles also indicates a positive stance” (p. 266), while the Los Angeles analysis “reveals a generally neutral stance It is clear that the paper adopted a hands-off approach to reporting on the event.” (p. 268) It seems that Paul’s careful division of articles into positive, neutral, and negative is ignored when the resulting figures are not conclusive. The article observes that comparison with other area newspapers would be useful; indeed, this would have made a much stronger article.

In “Womanizing Olympic Athletes: Policy and Practice during the Avery Brundage Era,” Kevin B. Wamsley looks briskly at the place of women in the Olympic movement during the 1950s and 1960s. There was debate about whether the Olympic games should continue to include women’s events (p. 279), and there were questions about whether the women athletes were appropriately “feminine,” leading to sex testing for competitors at the 1968 games (p. 278). Wamsley suggests that women’s freedom to compete “had to be rationalized and recast so as not to disrupt the gender hierarchy” (p. 279) as it was understood by (male) IOC members. The issues raised here are important and deserve a fuller treatment.

Courtney W. Mason’s study, “The Bridge to Change: The 1976 Montreal Olympic Games, South African Apartheid Policy, and the Olympic Boycott Paradigm,” considers how international sports communities pressured the South African government to end apartheid. Mason observes, “The anti-apartheid movement progressed rapidly in the international sport community, mostly because the peripheral nature of sport made it the easiest way for many nations to express their dissent.”

(p. 286) Other countries could demonstrate disapproval in a low-stakes, but nonetheless highly visible, area; the resulting publicity also prompted wider opposition (p. 292). Mason focuses on the African boycotts of the 1972 Munich and 1976 Montreal Games, also touching briefly on the absence of the Republic of China (or Taiwan) from the 1976 games. Boycotts—actual or only threatened—were useful against South African apartheid, and this is where Mason’s analysis stops. The next two Summer Games, in Moscow in 1980 and in Los Angeles in 1984, were also boycotted by various nations (p. 234-235), but with no significant results; in the introductory chapter to this part, Barney says “in effect, boycotts simply did not work” (p. 235) as cold-war tools.

David A. Grieg also considers South Africa in the context of the parallel games now known as the Paralympics in “Splitting Hairs: The Struggle between the Canadian Federal Government and the Organizing Committee of the 1976 Torontolympiad concerning South African Participation.” What is particularly interesting in this chapter is the history of the Paralympic Games, which grew out of an annual festival for athletes with spinal cord injuries, originally held in Stoke Mandeville, England. In 1960 this festival was held in Rome alongside the Olympic Games; in 1964 the name “paralympic” was adopted (p. 298). The 1976 Paralympic Games in Toronto faced the same political problems as the Summer Olympic Games in Montreal over South African participation. Ultimately, the organizing committee allowed the South African team to compete, the Canadian federal government withdrew funding, and at least eight other countries boycotted the Paralympic Games (p. 304-305). The resulting publicity, however, “generated substantial interest in the Games, and was far more helpful than harmful to the 1976 Olympiad for the Physically Disabled.” (p. 305)

“Juan Antonio Samaranch’s Score Sheet: Revenue Generation and the Olympic Movement, 1980—2001,” by Stephen R. Wenn and Scott G. Martyn, discusses the finances of the Games during Samaranch’s tenure as IOC president. Television coverage and corporate sponsorships were the two main sources of funds, and both grew immensely, and became more complicated to manage, during this period. The authors conclude that Samaranch put the Olympic movement on a firm financial footing (p. 319), but “was much more successful in enhancing the Olympic movement’s revenue generating potential than he was in managing the results of his success” (p. 320); they suggest that “doping, gigantism, and bid scandals” (p. 320) are direct results of Samaranch’s policies. This is the strongest article in the modern half of

the book, making excellent use of the IOC's archives.

Tim Elcombe's "Olympic Ideals: Pragmatic Method and the Future of the Games" argues that "theoreticians ... must seek not to merely be academics who speak to each other in isolation, but professionals enacting real change for real human experience" (p. 332-333). That is, our view of the "Olympic ideals" should condition the questions we choose to study.

The final chapter is Mark Dyreson's "'To Construct a Better and More Peaceful World' or 'War Minus the Shooting': The Olympic Movement's Second Century." In a chilling, dystopian essay, Dyreson speculates about what may be ahead for the Olympic movement. He suggests that the so-called "extreme sports"—snowboarding, mountain biking, triathlon, and so on—will replace the more traditional events like "the hammer throw, the modern pentathlon, and even the marathon" (p. 343). Even the contrived "grand-races-through-exotic-landscapes series" (p. 344), such as *Raid Gauloises*, *Eco-Challenge*, *Primal Quest*, and *The Amazing Race*,—who knew there were so many of these?—may, or even should, become Olympic events. These are reality television shows, "a nearly perfect contemporary amalgam of sport and soap opera" (p. 345, referring specifically to *Survivor*). Dyreson speculates that what Olympic viewers really want to know is "not only who won the race but who is sleeping with whom, who is trying to sabotage a coach, and who is working on a teammate's personal frailties in order to maximize a competitive advantage." (p. 346) Is the true *sports* fan a dying breed?

Each part of the book has its own bibliography, with little or no overlap. The bibliographies are quite full (26 pages for part I, 8 pages for part II). There is a brief glossary of terms related to the ancient games. I was surprised to see no information about the contributors. Classicists will recognize most, if not all, of the names of contributors to part I; I assume the modern historians in part II are equally eminent.

As a group, these papers demonstrate that the concerns and methods of ancient and modern sports historians are more similar than different. What is different is the type and amount of evidence available. Senta German's and Courtney Mason's pieces, for example, both look at politics and the Olympic games. But whereas Mason can consult contemporary news reports and archives, German must rely on the remains of buildings demolished centuries ago. Similarly, Donald Kyle and Kevin Wamsley both consider women and the Olympic Games. Kyle, evaluating scanty references to women, most of which turn out to be mythical, concludes that women were not part of the ancient Olympic

games at all. Wamsley can begin from the undisputed presence of women in the modern games and go on to interpret how they have been viewed.

Except for one or two rather technical pieces, the book is accessible to non-specialists. Undergraduates working on Greek history or on the modern Olympic movement should be able to read it with profit. The book will be a worthy addition to college libraries.