

“What is modern about the following features of the history of the West? Write on commercialism and relate it to the development of the games of the modern Olympiad.”

Olympics in terms of the modern tradition, are only a little over 100 years old when Pierre de Coubertin fought for their reinstatement to the western world; to be held as they were traditionally in their true spirit. This dream came true 1896 when the first Games were held in Athens with the financial support of Mr George Averoff who handled much of the expense for refurbishing the Olympic stadium. Companies such as Kodak also provided revenue through advertising in the souvenir program - thus the rebirth and uprising of commercialism was too, born. (Appendix 1)

The idea of commercialism generally for those raised in the last twenty years or so can see the rampant connection between any sporting event, particularly the Olympics and commercialistic capitalism. While "We need commercialism," Samaranch said, "we need money to organize the Games, but commercialism must not run the Games." (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/sports/olympics/daily/aug/05/close5.htm>; [http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/rings/rings\\_2.htm](http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/rings/rings_2.htm)) looks well and good in theory, the money-market has become so far entwined with the Olympics few know whether it is the ruin or the marked salvation of the Games. (<http://cbc.ca/insidecbc/newsinreview/apr99/olympic/sponsor.html>)

Avery Brundage, the former IOC President who ruled for 20 years and resigned in 1972 said, “The minute we handle money, even if we only distribute it, there will be trouble.” (<http://cbc.ca/insidecbc/newsinreview/apr99/olympic/sponsor.html>) How right he was when one examines the ‘Coca-Colympics’ of Los Angeles, 1984 and Atlanta in 1996, but before that, one must examine the reasons for allowing the rampage of commercialism. The major factor in this was the Montreal Games of 1976 which very nearly became the ruin of the Games and was the year a ‘man had a baby.’

The famous and biting quote that was delivered by Jean Drapeau, once the mayor of Montreal insisted that, “the Olympics can no more have a deficit than a man can have a baby.” This quote now makes him the owner of perhaps one of the most disastrous predictions ever made. “He is the inventor of, 20 years later, the sad and seedy scene we have seen on our television screens.” (Fotheringham, 1996)

Because of Drapeau's failure to exploit the commercialism and possibilities of the Games, the 1976 Montreal Olympics became one of the largest money-losing ventures of all times lying at the feet of the Montreal (Quebec province) taxpayers, still being paid off two decades later. As a result of this, countries have little interest in hosting what was once the greatest privilege without "the promise of revenues generated from advertising."

(<http://cbc.ca/insidecbc/newsinreview/apr99/olympic/sponsor.html>)

An Atlanta research team wrote the next year on the Montreal Olympics and suggested that, "On the basis of the Montreal experience, one might question why any city would ever again seek to host the Olympic Games. Enter corporate sponsorship and...Coca Cola a sponsor since 1928.

After the disastrous Montreal Games, those who were still left in the IOC saw that plans needs to be revised immediately. Brundage's rather idealistic philosophy went out the window and as of that moment, revenue raising was the biggest thing on anyone's agenda. Enter Peter Ueberroth the new teacher of capitalism in the classroom of the 1984 summer Games in Los Angeles, California.

(<http://cbc.ca/insidecbc/newsinreview/apr99/olympic/sponsor.html>)

Since Los Angeles was the only serious campaigner for the Olympics that year, the IOC had little choice but to hand them over under great concern that the 1984 Olympics would become a Hollywood-style spectacle, "bringing shame to both the institution and the Games." (ibid) Ueberroth understood the importance and significance of the Olympic rings and what came with them. In the words of one Coca-Cola executive it represents "the bright side of life, people striving to achieve, going for the gold," (ibid) and was to date the most under-exploited of the Olympic trademarks on the planet. Entering into negotiations with the IOC, Ueberroth then gained the rights from the IOC "to allow the host city to market the rings (previously only the IOC could market the rings) and to allow the host city to keep any profits created by such marketing. He then pitched the Games to corporations as an exclusive marketing opportunity and ended up creating a \$235-million surplus. With the remarkable success of the Los Angeles Games, a line had been crossed, and commercialism has been a part of the Olympics ever since." (ibid)

While the Games had faced obvious lasting financial problems in Montreal, by the time the Los Angeles Olympics had arrived eight years later, “the torch run was a corporate outing and the Games were on their way to becoming what they are today - the Visa-not-American Express Games, the UPS-not-FedEx Games, the Coke-not-Pepsi Games.”

(<http://www.archive.sportserver.com/olympics/00sydney/commentary/story/0,4823,500257592-500395986-502358251-0-sportserver,00.htm>)

A shining light of pride and joy to celebrate the achievements of our athletes and more importantly, what they drink. This then continued further into Atlanta in 1996.

“There are serious questions about why Atlanta got the ‘96 Games at all. ....

But Atlanta was the home of Coca-Cola, one of IOC’s biggest sponsors, and America was the home of practically all other sponsors. This of course had *nothing* to do with awarding the Centennial Games to Atlanta...

You could have been forgiven for thinking so. Bang up next to Olympic Stadium was a garish piece of hideousness called Coca-Cola Olympic City which was, said one writer:

...not far from the Coca-Cola Refreshment Centre and the World of Coca-Cola and the Coca-Cola Official Pin Trading Centre - with tables made to look like giant Coca-Cola bottle tops and giant Coca-Cola bottles that doubles as Coca-Cola coolers filled with Coca-Cola bottles. Each day Coc-Cola-holics lined up at this Coca-Colympics to enjoy an art exhibit made of Coca-Cola bottled and a video about how people around the world enjoy Coca-Cola and over 400 refreshing Coca-Cola products. It happened just after the energetic Coca-Cola Kids had performed, but before the artistic Coca-Cola Players appears on the exciting Coca-Cola Olympic City Coke Stage, which was dwarfed by the giant 11-story bright red Coca-Cola bottle outlined against the 25-story Coca-Cola World Headquarters...”

(Rick Reilly, Sports Illustrated, 12th August, 1996.)

Coke’s hideously commercialistic grip on the Games in Atlanta then extended to the Open Ceremony, and Georgia’s most treasured cultural icons. (Appendix 2) One wasn’t even safe upon entering the grounds as security guards were reportedly checking bags for non-sponsor products such as Pepsi.

“(A) Report notes that among the official sponsors are Coca-Cola, Visa and Kodak, which have paid among them £300 million (about 420 million U.S. dollars) to be officially part of the games. A café inside the village even had to stop selling a bacon and egg roll because of its similarity to another sponsor's product, the Egg McMuffin. (<http://law.about.com/library/weekly/aa092000a.htm>)

“As the story illustrates, Coke will dominate old media, new media, venue as medium, consumer as medium, medium as product, and consumers everywhere, always as one in the same as the brand itself. Not bad for a company that is in essence a purveyor of high fructose corn syrup.”  
(McManus, 1995)

“Although Samaranch was nothing but complimentary tonight, he notably failed to refer to these Games as “the greatest in Olympic history”—a phrase that has become routine in his Closing Ceremonies speeches. And, earlier in the day, Samaranch paused to speculate on the rampant commercialism that has marked this Olympic experience, and, at times, almost seemed to dwarf the athletes themselves.”  
(<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/sports/olympics/daily/aug/05/close5.htm>)

So it seems while one is able to stare endlessly at the Coke, Visa, Kodak and whoever else pays enough to be a part of the Olympics, who could wonder why it is getting harder and harder to suspend cynicism each year. A shining example of the insult that is commercialism to the Olympics was highlighted again most embarrassingly at Atlanta where the statue of Pierre de Coubertin, “founder of the modern Olympics, (was) standing hard by the Bug Light Pavilion. That was the year the paradox became most clear.”  
(<http://www.archive.sportserver.com/olympics/00sydney/commentary/story/0,4823,500257592-500395986-502358251-0-sportserver,00.htm>)

“Rampant commercialism threatens to destroy everything the Olympics supposedly represent. And, at the same time, without commercialism, there wouldn't be any Games. The Olympic movement is no stranger to money. In the ancient Olympics, not only did the athletes run naked, they ran for cash. These games died of, guess what, corruption. Or maybe it was because, running naked, there was no place to put a Nike logo.” (ibid; Fotheringham, 1996)

With the financial up's and down's of the last twenty years, it's no wonder that

revenue raising is a key part of the Olympics. Statistics reported in Maclean's magazine, expected revenues of the Nagano Winter Games of 1998 and the Sydney Summer Games of 2000 were up to \$3.5-billion US dollars. The primary sum of this comes from corporate sponsorship and the exorbitant prices paid for television rights. This is just as much fuelling city desire to host the Olympic Games, as is the fear of investment by other companies not to host the Olympics after the tragic Montreal Games.

(<http://cbc.ca/insidecbc/newsinreview/apr99/olympic/sponsor.html>)

"Today, many corporations are not willing to part with the millions of dollars necessary to invest in the Olympics until they have assurances that the IOC is serious about cleaning up its act. This is a potential problem for the networks that have been awarded the Olympic broadcasting rights since they must sell extensive advertising just to recover the exorbitant fees they've paid to the IOC for those rights."

(<http://cbc.ca/insidecbc/newsinreview/apr99/olympic/sponsor.html>)

Undoubtedly, commercialism is here to stay because without it, there is no Olympics and with it there is room for corruption (a major cause of the end of the Olympics in early times and a possibility for today's end as well) but needed, always needed.

"In the words of Roone Arledge, president of ABC News, "I don't think the essence of the Games has very much to do with the heroic words that we use to describe them. It's basically a commercial enterprise that tries every four years to make as much money as it possibly can."

<http://cbc.ca/insidecbc/newsinreview/apr99/olympic/sponsor.html>

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