Ten Reasons to Oppose Olympic Games

...and strategies for change

There are lots of reasons to oppose Olympic Games as we know them, not just the 1996 or 1998 Games, but the whole genre of sporting events. Twenty reasons, at least. Some of ten reasons is given here. The points made here summarize ideas analysed in far more detail in my book "FREEDOM PRESS BOOKSHOP". What follows is a summary of ten reasons is given here. The points made here summarize ideas analysed in far more detail in my book "FREEDOM PRESS BOOKSHOP". What follows is a summary of ten reasons why Olympic Games are objectionable. The first ten reasons are given here.

1. Nationalism
The Games are an arena for power politics. The 1936 Berlin Games were used by the Nazi regime to bolster its prestige. The US government used the 1960 Rome Games to protest against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviet government led a boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow as a pay-back for the 1980 boycott. The usual rhetoric is that sports and politics don’t mix, but actually the Olympics have been perverted into a political arena. Sports is involved in decisions about hosting the Games and about which countries can participate. Boycotts of the Games are used to exert political pressure. It is precisely because sports seem to be neutral that it is so effective to use them for political ends. Theinferiority of the Olympic Games is a discretion between states. Athletes can’t participate if their country doesn’t participate. Victories by athletes are awarded as national victories, symbolised by flags and anthems and beamed around the world. Media coverage in particular countries is often biased towards the country’s own athletes, reflecting and reinforcing nationalism. The International Olympic Committee (IOC), a highly bureaucratic organisation, is composed of representatives from member countries. The IOC is a vehicle for international political struggle. Hosting the Games is seen as an opportunity for promoting national prestige. States of all political coalitions, liberal democratic, communist, fascist, military, have embraced the Olympics, suggesting the lack of a moral core to the Games. The IOC has become an institution of all states, without applying any standards.

2. Commercialism
Corporate interests penetrate the Olympics through sponsorship of the Games themselves and through sponsorship of athletes and of athletes for commercial purposes. The media foster the Games as a giant spectacle, promoting professionalism and commercialisation. Visibility of Olympic events can be the key to the economics of endorsement. Sporting success becomes a means of selling products. Gold medals become a way for financial capital to be invested in sport to make money. Commercialism and nationalism have gradually turned the Olympics into an enterprise dominated by corporate capitalism, professionals in reality if not in name. The Olympics have become big business mainly through the corporate sponsorship of sport to sell programmes to advertisers. The Games, with their image as the ultimate sporting event, are easily exploited for profit. The number of sports involve violence themselves, with ostensibly non-contact sports such as boxing. The international sport event is a part of sport to which athletes are increasingly dictated by money flows.

3. Competition
The Games are excessively competitive. This means that most competitors are ultimately losers. The focus is on a few top winners, whereas there are far more who struggle for little or nothing. Some countries or states have the means or the machinations of sporting bodies. In any case, the nature of competition at an inter- national level is in that it can end up ending universally. Competition with high stakes – Olympic medals – means that the aim becomes victory at all costs. The result is a culture of guilt, deceit and drug use, secrecy in training techniques, attempts at psychological manipulation of opponents, and other techniques. The emphasis on competition and victory means that forms of physical activity that are more cooperative and competitive are marginalised. Sport can be satisfying and beneficial, both physically and mentally, for nearly everyone in the community. This can only occur when the primary goal is participation, not victory in competition. The Olympic Games are elite in the way they are run, they are for the states. The obsession with Olympic success undermines the goal of cooperative, participatory sport.

4. Male dominance
From the beginning, the Games have always been dominated by men. Women’s sports are a fraction of the total number of events. Many national Olympic committees have no women members and send no women to the Games. Women’s participation in the Games are mostly that give men an advantage, notably sports emphasizing strength and speed. Women’s sports are not well represented in the Games and events are over in a matter of seconds or minutes. Women are already much closer if exposed in their sports within the Games. Women’s sports are much more important than in the Olympics. Similarly, events emphasising precision and skill rather than strength would give women a better chance. It would be quite possible to select or designate events that are over emphasised in the Games and events that would give women a better chance. Instead, sports are expected to adapt to male sports. This also helps maintain the emphasis on competition rather than cooperation. Male dominance in the Olympic movement reflects and reinforces the predominance of men in the sports that receive the greatest attention in most countries of the world.

5. Racism
The Games were set up by European elites and built on western sports. Through the worldwide publicity for the Olympics and the competition for national glory, more and more of these sports have been adapted into the Olympics, over which they had no popular following. Many non-western countries have long histories of indigenous sports and games that do not fit the an equal chance to win in direct competition with men, but this has never been considered. Instead, women are expected to adapt to male sports. This also helps maintain the emphasis on competition rather than cooperation. Male dominance in the Olympic movement reflects and reinforces the predominance of men in the sports that receive the greatest attention in most countries of the world.

6. Violence
Many sports, such as boxing, archery and the like, are commonly applied on the field of battle. Many of these sports involve violence themselves, including ostensibly non-contact sports such as judo. The international sport event is a part of sport to which athletes are increasingly dictated by money flows. Instead, they have simply provided another arena for the continuation of violence between individuals in events and between states in the struggle for power and status. The awarding of the Games to Athens established Greek nationalism, leading to a war with Turkey in 1897. The Olympic movement is powerless to turn its original goal of promoting peace into reality.

7. Celebrity
The Games foster a culture of celebrity that focuses on stars at the expense of non-elite participants. Spectators identify with Olympic heroes, attributing to them moral virtues such as courage and integrity. Yet the combination of specialist events plus a premium on success means that Olympic athletes are often not suitable role models. They may develop certain skills and strengths at the expense of overall health, compete at the expense of other commitments or value personal success more than competing fairly or helping others. The Games foster a sense of the symptoms of an elite competition in which victors are glamourized by the media and become potent symbols of national success.

8. Technological intensification
Olympic-level competitions are increasingly a struggle between applications of advanced science and technology to equipment, training, psychology, and drugs (legal and illegal). In the extreme, the quest for victory goes as much to the swiftest bike as the best cyclist. Bicycles are treated like machines, as are all things in the Olympic Games. The increasing role of sophisticated scientific and technological interventions means that individuals and countries who have access to the most advanced facilities are handicapped, creating another dimension to the racial built into the Olympic structure. The Games would be better if we considered this, for example by assigning standard equipment to competitors randomly, but this would not serve the interests of governments with a technological edge.

9. Spectatorship
Watching sports such as the Olympics serves to integrate supporters (especially men) into the dominant value system of competitive striving for success. Under the guise of entertaining and supporting ones’ favourite team or athlete, spectators of sport are inculcated with the assumptions that life is a competition, that the rules are fair, that most of the rewards go to the winners, and that losers do not count for anything. This implies that the ideas are convenient for keeping workers on the usual treadmill. It is because of the similarities between competitive sport and competitive business that sporting metaphors (the level playing field, scoring) are so prevalent in non-sporting arenas.

10. Government repression
Olympic Games are sites of reduced civil liberties. Male athletes, because of the values of the Games, may be implicated in special laws and special policing to prevent disruption. Terrorists used the 1972 Munich Olympics as a springboard to their cause. The Olympics have become a springboard to the Olympic Games. The Games serve as a conveyor belt for the real Olympic Games to be caught up in the same sorts of problems, such as commercialism, competition and spectatorship. A fourth approach is to promote cooperative games (not Olympic-style Games but games that are actually fun) and other alternatives for the psychosocial functions of sport. Some forms of drama and role play may accomplish this. The emphasis on the value of the Games is a huge symbolic value of the Olympics, various groups trying to make their cause through direct action. In general, a mix of strategies, necessitating special laws and special policing to prevent disruption. Terrorists used the 1972 Munich Olympics as a springboard to their cause. The Olympics have become a springboard to the Olympic Games. The Games serve as a conveyor belt for the real Olympic Games to be caught up in the same sorts of problems, such as commercialism, competition and spectatorship. A fourth approach is to promote cooperative games (not Olympic-style Games but games that are actually fun) and other alternatives for the psychosocial functions of sport. Some forms of drama and role play may accomplish this.