

BOOK REVIEW: Olympic Games Stepped Back from the Brink of Extinction to Become the World's Best Known Brand – and a Multibillion Dollar Global Franchise Michael Payne (2012)

Oxford: Infinite Ideas e-book, £8.99

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A notable moment in the 1993 film adaptation of Kasuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* comes when Lewis, a wealthy American dinner party guest, pillories a table full of European aristocrats. The party, a group reminiscent in habitus and preoccupation with Pierre de Coubertin's foundational International Olympic Committee (IOC), is taken aback. Lewis throws up his hands at their meddling in the serious business of global diplomacy, as it turns out, hurtling into World War II: You are, all of you, amateurs ... Do you have any idea of what sort of place the world is becoming around you? ... You need professionals to run your affairs, or you're headed for disaster (*The Remains of the Day* 1993, adapted from Ishiguro 1989:106-107). Transplanted into the field of global sport and projected 50-odd years later, Michael Payne's *Olympic Turnaround* recounts a similar 'wake-up' call – in this instance aimed at the IOC of the late 20th century. Payne is a former athlete (skiing) whose career flourished in sports marketing management – in an era (the 1970s) when this was a relatively underdeveloped area.

In the 1980s the IOC and the Olympic host cities were struggling to adapt to new global-political alignments, to new economic orthodoxies, and, primarily, to demands for relative commercial independence. Amateurism and a trenchant anti-commercialism remained defining values in the practices and tenets of the movement – the IOC was not future proofed.

In Payne's view the mega-event-sized Olympics faced imminent 'extinction'. Boycotts, corruption and financial woes had dogged the IOC throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. City and national governments balked at the cost of staging an ever-growing event. There was only one semi-credible bid to host the Games in 1984: Los Angeles. This re-issued book, first out in 2005 with London Business Press, is now re-published in its second edition in 2012 as an e-book. The re-issue is designed to update and contextualise this most important story in the recent history of the Olympic movement – with added material on Beijing and some

prefatory comments on London: notably outlining Payne's advice to bid-leader Sebastian Coe on the 'big idea' for London's pitch – inspiring youth.

The book will feed into the resurgence of interest in the Games sparked by London's successful hosting of the XXXth Olympiad. Payne's is a credible voice offering a detailed look into the genealogy of contemporary Olympic marketing and commercial management. Alongside a useful history of the successive deal-making to sell broadcast rights – beginning in earnest after Melbourne 1956 and ending with updated figures on Beijing – the book examines the emergent structure of Olympic marketing rights in the 1980s. We learn about the transformation of the Olympic movement into a 'brand' in itself. Special attention is given to Payne's first hand account of developing financial, legislative and marketing frameworks to support the TOPs scheme: TOP stands for The Olympic Partners, an exclusive top table of sponsors who buy global and other rights to utilise the rings, key imagery and 'vocabulary' that signify 'Olympics' in commercial communications. Payne is both protagonist and observer in this globe-spanning account that sets the Olympic movement alongside IOC presidential politics, national governments, city mayors, international media conglomerates, the burgeoning Internet and celebrity sporting heroes. Ambush marketing is explained and contextualised. Payne's stories are structured against the backdrop of successive Games – summer and winter – with special focus on Atlanta 1996 and through to Athens in 2004. The book provides topical interest in its detailed portrait of the marketing of the Salt Lake City winter games, and the figure of Mitt Romney looms large in a sympathetic account of his role in the successful delivery of the 2002 Games – at a time of especial difficulty for the IOC, then rocking from scandals associated with the bidding process. Both the 2005 and 2012 editions mention Romney's presidential aspirations in passing. The book does not tell us too much about London 2012 however – too recent for detailed accounting. Payne's further views on the logo, policing ambush marketing or the 2012 mascots would have been of interest. Overall, this 2012 edition of the book is timely and a welcome re-issue of a seminal account of the latest phases in Olympic and sports marketing. It is likely to be of continuing interest to the general reader, researchers and students focusing on the professional business of the Olympic Games.

Reference

Ishiguro, K. (1989) *The Remains of the Day*. London: Faber and Faber.