

---

0:00:00.0

*Interviewer:* The relationship between the politics and the Olympics. You mentioned there's always been one, and I just wanted you to kind of elaborate on that relationship a little bit and what is the character of that relationship?

*Allen Guttman:* What one has to remember is that Pierre de Coubertin entered the modern Olympic Games as a political movement. He was a 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal, and he had a universalistic vision of sports open to people all over the world and sports as a venue for people to come together and become reconciled. It was a very internationalistic and even pacifist vision.

What's happened over time, of course, is people have had different ideas about how politics should be embodied in the Olympic movement, but I think it's very wrong to say that politics and the Olympics don't mix or that Olympics should be free of politics because Coubertin wanted them to be political. What you have to remember is he wanted them to be political in a liberal sense. The problem arises when people hijack the games and use them for other political positions, as the Nazis did or tried to do in 1936.

*Interviewer:* And we'll get more into those games a little bit later. It seems also in the structure of the Olympics--being national representation--there's this sort of inherent political component to that as well.

*Allen Guttman:* Well, nationalism is one of the political positions that Coubertin hoped to keep out of the games, but inevitably, nationalism entered, even as early as 1896 at the first games. The Greeks were very, very determined that their athletes do well in the first games, and it was a stroke of luck that after the Greek athletes had done very poorly a Greek peasant had managed to win the marathon and recoup things for Greek pride.

*Interviewer:* And I want to start back with Pierre de Coubertin and talk about his vision and ideas a little bit. Who was this man, briefly, and what compelled him to found these modern games?

0:02:35.8

*Allen Guttman:* You'd have to start with the fact that he was born in 1863 and grew up in the shadow of France's humiliating defeat by the Prussians in the Franco-Prussian War. He was a French aristocrat. He was a baron and was sent to military school where he nourished dreams of revenge against the Prussians. And he decided that one reason that Prussia had won this humiliating victory was that the German

---

soldiers, Prussian soldiers and their Austrian allies were physically fit, as French soldiers were not. He then turned to sports as a way to make French youth physically fit and robust enough to win the next war. He turned for inspiration to England. Germany had a sports movement of its own, kind of a patriotic gymnastics, but he did not want to copy the German model. He looked to England and was inspired by the kinds of sports that were played at the English public schools. By public schools I mean places like Eton and Harrow, rugby.

He then tried to introduce this English-style sport system into the France educational system and was fairly successful. It was slow work, but he was fairly successful. And as time went on, he became less and less nationalistic, less and less of a revanchist and more of an internationally-minded person so that by 1894 when he was ready to propose the new modern Olympic Games he really removed himself from this kind of nationalist, chauvinist position that he had occupied, and he was now thinking in terms of international friendship, reconciliation among nations. Sports as a way to avoid warfare. So, he did a complete turnaround, a complete about-face between his youthful dreams of revenge and his mature adult dream of a world at peace.

*Interviewer:* And the Olympic games vision got off to a slow start somewhat. There wasn't vigorous international participation. What were some of the impediments early on to the Olympics gaining widespread popularity?

0:05:18.1

*Allen Guttman:* Well, one of the impediments to widespread popularity was certainly the lack of adequate communication. We did have the telegraph, of course, but many nations were not accustomed to 24-hour-a-day news communications back and forth. Coubertin sent all of his invitations out by mail, and sometimes the mail took weeks, if not months, to reach the recipients. Then there were nationalistic considerations.

The British were not enthusiastic about the first Olympic Games because they felt they had their sports. They knew how to do their sports. They did them in their schools. They had their soccer. They had their rugby, their cricket. They weren't interested in a revived Olympic festival at which there would be no soccer, no rugby, no cricket. The Germans were committed, as I said a moment ago, to their system of patriotic gymnastics called turnverein. That's what Coubertin invited them to come to the first Olympics they refused to answer. When he tried again, they let

---

him know they had no intention whatsoever to become involved in some French-inspired international sports festival, that they were doing very well on their own.

The United States – it was really only one person in the United States who was responsible for putting together an Olympic team in 1896, professor named William Milligan Sloane at Princeton. The team consisted of a handful of Princeton students and a handful of Harvard students, and the Olympic games were so far down on Harvard's priority that when one of the students went to the Dean and told him he was going to Athens to participate in the Olympic games the Dean said, "No, no." Student said, "You won't let me go?" "No.," "Well, then I resign from Harvard," and off he went to the Olympic Games. But they were a very, very small affair in 1896. It's only in retrospect that they loomed large.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. Tell us a little bit more about those initial games in Athens. Just give us a little color. Describe them to us. I want to understand how these first games were held.

0:07:38.6

*Allen Guttman:* The games were planned to occur at about the time of the Eastern Orthodox Easter season, and when the Greek government was told, "You are now lucky. You are now about to be the host of the first modern Olympics," their response was, "We're not interested. We can't afford games of this sort. We have our economic problems." Coubertin had to rush to Athens and win the support of the royal family. Luckily for him, Prince Constantine, the crown prince, was a sports enthusiast, and luckily for Coubertin the government fell and it was replaced by a new government which a little bit more receptive. So, it was a very rocky beginning. It seemed for quite a while that there weren't going to be any Olympics.

*Interviewer:* And from these modest beginnings, in your opinion, which games are the turning point, where these games really burst on the international stage?

*Allen Guttman:* Well, most of the people who were in Athens felt the games had been a success. The Greeks won the marathon, which soothed their pride, and the royal family was now so enthusiastic about the games that they suggested that all future games be held in Athens. Coubertin said no to that because his universalistic vision required the games to move from place to place so that various parts of the world could learn about the games and adopt his vision.

The next games in Paris in 1900 were filled with confusion

---

because they were placed in the midst of a World's Fair. The French government didn't want these games either. So, they made them a part of a universal exposition, and many of the athletes who went to Paris in 1900 didn't even know they were competing in the Olympic games. All sorts of comic events occurred in 1896 and 1900.

*Interviewer:* And then I just want to move forward a little bit to when the games become serious. When are nations bidding for these games? When did they become an internationally prestigious event?

0:10:11.7

*Allen Guttman:* Well, the games are a bid for in 1904. Chicago gets the games and then decides it doesn't want them after all and St. Louis steps in because they were having an exhibition also, a World's Fair to mark the hundredth anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase. So, the 1904 games take place in St. Louis with hardly any foreign athletes. The United States won practically every event because there were so few athletes from foreign countries, and the International Olympic Committee didn't even come to St. Louis for its annual meeting but stayed in London.

In 1908 the games were in London, and this is where they begin to appear on the world's radar. The interesting thing about the 1908 Olympics was they came in the midst of the struggle for Irish home rule, and a large part of the American team was composed of Irish American athletes. So there was all kinds of tension in the air in 1908 because by this time nations were beginning to see the games as an important way to enhance their prestige, make them look larger on the world's scene. The marathon was the apogee of this English versus Irish American. Typically hostile competition because the winner of the marathon – the person who was about to be the winner with an Italian name, Dorando Pietri, he entered the stadium and had a lap to go. Right behind him came an Irish American runner, Johnny Hayes. Pietri was so exhausted that he collapsed on the track, and the British officials rushed forward and literally carried him, dragged him the last few meters so that he could cross the finish line and defeat the Irish American behind him. The Irish American was then declared the winner by the judges at the Olympics, and the British were so unhappy they denounced the United States as a nation of poor losers and bad sports. Queen Alexandra had a special trophy made and awarded it to Dorando Pietri. That was just one of the incidents that occurred in 1908.

---

*Interviewer:* *Chariots of Fire* is a famous movie about the 1924 Paris games. Is that right?

*Allen Guttman:* Right.

*Interviewer:* And one of the themes coming out of that is the exclusion, in this case of Jews, but also there was exclusion of women to a certain degree or marginalization. Can you talk about that element of the Olympics? Has it always tried to incorporate different minorities or different groups? What's the tension there?

0:10:11.7

*Allen Guttman:* When Coubertin began he wanted to include every male. He wanted to exclude nobody on the basis of race or religion or ethnicity or nationality. But he was a 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal and not a 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal. It was very hard for him to think of women as serious athletes, so he just insisted that participation by female athletes was inelegant and unaesthetic and absolutely impossible. He wanted no part of women's sports.

A few women competed in 1900 in golf, for instance, and yachting. Then in 1912 women were included as swimmers and divers; the first aquatic events took place in 1912. Despite the opposition of many women's groups who felt this kind of competition at the international level was simply too strenuous, too taxing. It wasn't right for women to compete before the entire world on the global stage.

The push for women's participation into track and field came from a French woman named Alice Milliat, who organized Women's Olympics in 1922, to which the women in charge of American college sports refused to allow American women to go. American women did go to the 1922 Women's Olympics in Paris but only under the ostracis of the Amateur Athletic Union, which was run by men.

It's interesting that female physical educators in this era were dead set against women's participation in sports at the national and international level. This woman, Alice Milliat, persisted. The 1922 games for women were a great success. They were followed by games in 1926 and 1930. In this period she campaigned for women's track and field at the Olympic games, and she persevered. She won. Over the objections of Pierre de Coubertin, women's track and field was introduced in 1928 at the Amsterdam games.

0:16:08.3

---

*Interviewer:* I want to move forward a little bit now to the games that are infamous and often quoted or at least referenced, and those are the Berlin games in 1936. That began I guess in 1931 when Germany was given the games. Was there a political motivation for the IOC to give Germany the games in 1931 in that inter-war period?

*Allen Guttman:* The IOC had awarded the games to Berlin for 1916, and we all know what happened in 1914. There were no 1916 games. But it was always on the minds of the International Olympic Committee members to have the games in Berlin because Germany was a very, very advanced country on the sports scene. They were anxious to host the games. The IOC wanted Germany to host the games. So, the decision was made in 1931, and of course, two years later Adolph Hitler comes to power, and the question arises, "Will Germany host these Olympics?"

It was a question because the Nazis were extremely hostile to the idea of the Olympic Games. The Olympic Games contradicted everything they stood for. They were open. They were liberal. They were cosmopolitan, internationalistic. The Nazis had their own agenda which was very different. So, it was common for Nazi periodicals to sneer at the Olympic games as a place for – I quote– "Pollacks and Jew-Niggers" to compete.

Hitler comes to power and the International Olympic Committee is immediately worried. Will this Nazi movement abide by the requirements of the Olympic Charter? Will they indeed accept the games at all? To the astonishment of the head of the German Olympic Committee, a man named Theodor Lewald, Hitler embraced the idea of hosting the Olympics, and Hitler decides to have the greatest, grandest Olympics ever, and this will be an opportunity for the Aryan race to show its superiority. German athletes will clearly outperform athletes from any other country.

And that's the situation we have except the International Olympic Committee is aware of the Nuremberg Laws and the disenfranchisement of German Jews. Then the question becomes: will the German hosts honor the Olympic Charter and allow German Jews to participate? There was never any question about Jews from other countries, but will German Jews be allowed to participate for Germany? The International Olympic Committee managed to get Hitler to say yes, to promise there would be no impediment to German Jews on the German team. There actually was, but that became clear only later.

*Interviewer:* And what about the rest of the international community? Was there a discussion of sanction or boycott of some sort?

---

0:19:39.2

*Allen Guttman:* Definitely. When it became clear that Germany was not going to honor this agreement, when it became absolutely clear that German Jews were not going to be allowed to compete on the German team there was a boycott movement. It was a movement that spread through many countries, but principally the United States. There was a boycott movement in Canada, France, Great Britain. But the boycott movement in the United States was the real threat to the games.

The movement against participation was led by a Roman Catholic Republican lawyer, Judge Jeremiah Mahoney, and the movement to go to the games was led by Avery Brundage, who later became president of the International Olympics. It was a fierce battle. It lasted for more than a year. Great bitterness on both sides. Mahoney's position was that the Germans are not honoring their agreement, and Brundage's position was, "Yes they are. I was told they were by the head of the German Sports Movement. We have to go. The games must go on." That was his credo then and for the rest of his life: The games must go on. We did indeed send a team to Berlin.

There was one fencer on the German team who had a Jewish father who had actually been reared as a Christian. His family had converted to Christianity, but she was the one person that the Nazis pointed to and said, "See, we do have a German Jew on our team," but that was farcical. She was the only one.

*Interviewer:* And the political benefits that Hitler and the Nazis had hoped the games would deliver, were they a success?

0:21:49.6

*Allen Guttman:* Yes and no. The Aryan message was debunked and ridiculed by the incredible successes by African American athletes. Everybody remembers Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals and was absolute star of the game, and this was in the eyes of the German public as well. He was written up in the German newspapers as "ein wunder athlet," as absolutely unparalleled athlete. Whenever he entered the stadium, the crowds, the German crowds would start chanting their pronunciation, "Yes-ay Oven, Yes-ay Oven." Even in the documentation after the games his photograph appears more often than the photograph of any other athlete at the games. In that sense, the Aryan ideology was invalidated and made to seem ridiculous, but what most Americans don't think about is if you count up all the events, all the medals, the Germans won. Their

---

team outperformed all the other teams. The United States was second. So, in that sense the German message got through.

There was also the fact that these games were magnificent. They were magnificently well organized. They were a festival. They were a pageant. They were what we now call a mega-event, and the Nazis took credit for this, for having organized the most amazing Olympics ever, and all of this was captured in Leni Reifenstahl's two-part film, *Olympia*, which he worked on for two whole years after the games and then released on Hitler's birthday in 1938, and that film – it's still in the eyes of most film historians the greatest documentary ever made. People are still arguing about whether it was essentially a propaganda film, glorifying German success or whether it was, as she always proclaimed, an aesthetic study of the marvels of the human body in action.

*Interviewer:* Yes. We got a copy of that film, and I think we're going to try to run a little bit of it, but it was very helpful to kind of understand the Olympics by watching that film.

0:24:33.5

*Allen Guttman:* Well, everybody who does a documentary film about the Olympics uses bits of this movie. Just as everybody who does a documentary about the rise of the Nazis uses bits and pieces of her other great film, *Triumph of the Will*.

*Interviewer:* Right. It seems to me there's a negative pattern forming here for the IOC because the next games are supposed to take place in Tokyo. Is this just a coincidence, or is there something else that the IOC was trying at least to get done there?

*Allen Guttman:* The IOC wanted desperately to have the games in an Asian country. As I said, it was Coubertin's vision that these become truly cosmopolitan, truly international event. So, there was a constant search to bring in IOC members from Latin America, from Asia, not yet from Africa. That came after the Second World War. And part of this drive to make the games truly universal was the first for an Asian venue, and Tokyo was the most practical place in Asia to hold the games. It's probably the only city that had the infrastructure. They voted to have the 1940 games in Japan. It's interesting that the IOC, having experienced Hitler's bad faith in 1936 were not dissuaded from having the games hosted in another militaristic country. There was no opposition that I can remember in the IOC to go into Japan. Although Japan was already, when the decision was made to send the games to Tokyo,

---

Japan was already on a militaristic path that was leading directly to what they called The Great Pacific War, World War II.

*Interviewer:* And if we skip past World War II and we look at London in 1948, this is a city and a country and a continent that are still in the midst of rebuilding. Is this a time to be playing games, or what was the IOC's hope for the London games?

0:27:03.4

*Allen Guttman:* The IOC was very, very unhappy the games had to be halted during World War II. Even after the Japanese decided they were not going to host the 1940 games because they were busy elsewhere, even after that the IOC wanted to have the games and move them somewhere else. What about Helsinki? What about the winter games back in Germany at Garmish-Partenkirchen? The members of the IOC become so committed to what they're doing, so obsessed with the notion that the games have to go on that they'll overlook almost any problems in order to make sure the games are staged, which, of course, if we look ahead, is what happened in 1972 in Munich.

London was chose to symbolize that the allies had won the war, but the important thing is that Brundage, who was vice president at the time, was desperately eager to see the games revived after World War II. So, it wasn't that London bid for them. It wasn't that the IOC went to the authorities in London and said, "We'd really, really like to revive the games, and how about London?" It was difficult. London was still suffering from shortage of food, shortage of fuel. It was an impoverished country in 1948, but the games had to go on, and they did.

*Interviewer:* And Helsinki is an interesting set of games I think because it's the games when the Cold War came to the Olympics. Does that give us a flavor for the competition between east and west?

0:29:15.4

*Allen Guttman:* When the Soviet Union was formed, the leaders of the Soviet Union, Lenin and others, wanted no part of the Olympic games. As far as they were concerned, these were bourgeois capitalist games. They had their own sports festivals run on their own principles. The impetuous came in large part from the IOC in the years after World War II.

Avery Brundage and other leaders of the International Olympic Committee were desperately eager to bring in all of Eastern

---

Europe, including the Soviet Union, as soon as possible. The negotiations back and forth between the IOC and Stalin's government were almost comic because there was no way in which the Soviet Union fulfilled the requirements of the Olympic Charter. There was no way their athletes could have been considered amateurs. There was no way the Soviet Olympic Committee could have been considered as independent of the government, which was a requirement.

So, Brundage goes to the Soviet Union to investigate, and the leaders of the Soviets Sports Movement say to him, "Yes, our athletes are amateurs. Yes, our National Olympic Committee is quite independent of the government." He goes back to the IOC and says, "I was assured the athletes are amateurs and the national Olympic Committee is independent." Of course, he knew perfectly well that wasn't the truth. But he put it that it was: I was told that by Mr. Romanoff.

Therefore, he was not only open to the idea of the communist block participation, he was eager to have it. So, everything changed then in 1952. The Soviet Union arrived, participated in Helsinki, and the ideological divide became one of the central features of the international Olympic movement for almost the next 40 years. The question was: in the capitalist world versus the communist world, which produces the better athletes? If we produce better athletes, then our political-economic system must be superior. If they produce better athletes, then we better do something about it to prove our superiority after all.

And American athletes at the time said there was nothing so thrilling as competing against the Russians because the athletes, too, felt this ideological Cold War competition that went on for four decades.

*Interviewer:* And did the IOC acknowledge this politicization of the games, or was this sort of acknowledged but not talked about?

0:32:39.0

*Allen Guttman:* They continually try to deny it, to pretend that it wasn't there. One of the big questions after World War II was what to do about divided countries like Germany and Korea and, for a while, China. Brundage – I say Brundage because he was the most important figure in this entire period. There were other important leaders, but Brundage felt there should be one Germany, Germany shouldn't be divided, that there should be one Olympic team, and he actually got his way. For several Olympics East German and

---

West German athletes competed on one team, and he wanted the same thing for China. He wanted one Chinese team and struggled for years trying to make that happen, and of course, it never did.

*Interviewer:* Melbourne is interesting to us because of the boycotts that took place, and I know they weren't extensive, but it was the first instance of boycotts. Can you talk a little about how those boycotts had an effect perhaps on future decisions and how the boycotts were dealt with or met with by the IOC?

0:34:04.6

*Allen Guttman:* The boycott in 1956 was a very small one of a very few nations, and the IOC didn't see that as having any important effect on the games. They were more worried and more unhappy about the lack of sportsmanship and goodwill when Russian teams competed against Hungarian teams with the background of the Hungarian Revolution. But the boycott movement, it was just too unimportant. No country with a significant athletic presence boycotted. The IOC would have been very upset if the United States would have boycotted or Great Britain, but they were not bothered by that.

*Interviewer:* And do you think this was a template for later boycotts, this early one in '56?

*Allen Guttman:* I don't know. If the boycott idea had emerged in 1933, '34. I think that was the template.

*Interviewer:* It seems to be a time of relative quiet for the Olympics until we get to Mexico City, and there's two distinct but very important political events that come out of those Olympics, and I was hoping you could take us through those.

*Allen Guttman:* Yes, 1960 was, as you say, relatively peaceful, and 1964 was a great triumph in that it was the first time the games were held in an Asian nation. The Japanese had one great disappointment. They had arranged for judo to become an Olympic sport for the first time, and the gold medal in the heavyweight class was won by a Dutchman. That was kind of a problem. But political disputes were not present in any important way in 1960 or in 1964.

But in 1968 Mexico was involved in a great deal of civil unrest, led by angry, rebellious students and put down by an angry and ruthless government so that a number of student protestors were killed just before the Olympics, very close to the day the games began. At the same time, in the United States a sociologist at

---

Berkley named Harry Edwards organized a campaign among African American athletes to boycott the '68 games. It was quite a struggle because there were athletes who lined up behind Edwards and said, "There's now ay we're going to represent the United States when we're not treated as equals in our own country," and there were other athletes like Jesse Owens who couldn't understand why anybody wanted to boycott the Olympics because the Olympics were, in his mind, the one place where race didn't matter, where African American athletes were treated as equal. So, there were some very bitter debates and hard feelings all around. It happened that there was no boycott. The games did go on, but as everybody knows who has even minimal interest in the Olympics, there was the Black Power protest where John Carlos and Tommie Smith – I've got to check the names.

*Interviewer:* I think those are right, yes.

*Allen Guttman:* Okay. But John Carlos and Tommie Smith shared one black glove each, one pair of gloves, one for each of them, and raised their fists during the national anthem and, in that way, protested the racism in the United States. Of course, they were immediately thrown off the team and expelled from the Olympic Village and told to go back to the United States post-haste. What many people don't remember is that George Foreman – after the Black Power Protest George Foreman won the heavyweight gold medal and danced around the ring with a little miniature American flag. So, there was real dissention even among the African American athletes who were in Mexico City in 1968.

*Interviewer:* It seems that as the Olympics become more prestigious they carry more political weight. So, it's kind of a difficult thing for the Olympics: as it grows more important, there's also more political expression that goes on there.

*Allen Guttman:* Yes. The way I'd put it is to say that as the Olympics became more and more important, there were more and more opportunities to express a political vision other than Coubertin's. The Olympics were a showcase, a stage for all sorts of protests, and what I insist on calling hijacking of the political message in 1936, of course, there was the effort of the Nazis to make the games a vehicle of their ideology. But things happened in Los Angeles in 1932, even before the so-called Nazi Olympics.

0:40:16.0

*Allen Guttman:* The host city tried to turn the message of the games into propaganda for California, sunny California, the tourist center of

---

the United States. Hollywood is the entertainment center of the United States. So, the lines between Hollywood and the Olympic games in 1932 were pretty diffuse. We had Hollywood actors showing up at the games. Athletes were invited to Hollywood studios. Some of the athletes went on to have careers in Hollywood. It was a great effort to use the games for that purpose. The same thing happened in 1984 when the games were – well, the opening ceremony was turned into show business.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. I'd like to get to 1984 momentarily. Mexico was interesting to me because in the first part the crackdown on the students there seems to be that same mantra of the games must go on. Was there discussion of stopping the games beforehand?

*Allen Guttman:* It was a very brief discussion. Avery Brundage was asked, and he said, "No, the games will go on." That was his mantra from 1934 'til the end of his life: the games must go on. They are a force for social good, and we mustn't let it be damaged by any kind of a boycott.

*Interviewer:* But, like we said, the Olympics becomes a more and more important stage, and one group, Black September, really believed that strongly. Can you take us through Munich and 1972 and how they used that stage?

0:42:06.5

*Allen Guttman:* Well, that's a very simple story in one sense. They – members of the Palestinian resistance—realized that by 1972 the games were enormously important, that the eyes of the world were almost literally on the games, and this was the perfect place to get their message across. And they struck. Then the question arose in the International Olympic Committee, "What are we going to do?" There were calls to suspend the games, stop the games, cancel them, and the International Olympic Committee was I think unanimous on this, that there should be suspension for a day in commemoration of memorial to the slain athletes, and then the games should be resumed. That's, of course, the occasion where Brundage made his most memorable speech, which was in some sense in miserable taste because he linked the massacre of the Israeli athletes with the denial of visas to the team from white-ruled Rhodesia. In his eyes these were two great crimes committed against the Olympic ideal. I still think he was right, that the IOC was right not to cancel the games. I think they did the right thing.

*Interviewer:* Why do you think they were right?

---

0:43:51.5

*Allen Guttman:* Because if they had cancelled the games then the terrorists would have won. They would have shown they were powerful enough to put an end to this great celebration. Of course, it would have been a precedent. Who knows how many terrorist attacks, threats of terrorist attacks would have followed if they would have cancelled the games in 1972.

*Interviewer:* Right. This is probably the roughest period for the Olympics when we move to '76 and Montreal when, again, it's politically loaded with a couple different cases, both Africa and China, Taiwan. Those disputes I think are not as clear.

*Allen Guttman:* The dispute over the Chinese team centered on what to call it. The team was from Taiwan. They wanted to call themselves the Republic of China because at that time they were still claiming to be the true China rather than the Mainland People's Republic. Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada refused to agree – refused to allow them to come and compete as the Republic of China. That was one bitter dispute. The other had to do with South Africa.

As early as 1968, South Africa was dis-invited to the games in Mexico City because of its policies of apartheid. There were years of negotiations that led in 1970 to the expulsion of South Africa from the Olympic movement. Then there was a rugby game or a series of rugby games between New Zealand and South Africa. South Africa, at this point, is condemned by the UN. There's all sorts of agreements not to have sports relationships with South Africa, but the New Zealand rugby team decides to play, and they do. At that point a number of African nations, more than 20 of them, demand that New Zealand be expelled, that the team from New Zealand not be allowed to compete at the '76 Olympics. There was no way the IOC is going to accept that. By this time Lord Killanin was president of the IOC, replacing Brundage in 1972. Killanin pointed out that rugby wasn't even an Olympic sport and the International Olympic Committee had no way whatsoever to decide whom the New Zealand rugby team was going to play.

But the African nations were insistent that New Zealand be expelled, and IOC stuck to its guns, so more than 20 African nations packed up and left. Teams were already in Montreal. The athletes were ordered to pack their bags and return to their home countries.

---

*Interviewer:* The liberal internationalism of the Olympics, if that is the political message, doesn't that gel pretty well with excluding a nation like South Africa and the apartheid regime? So, is the IOC a political actor to a certain degree?

0:47:47.7

*Allen Guttman:* Well, I wish I could say yes, but in fact, these people are so obsessed with their vision and their mission and their power that they just don't see things that seem to us quite obvious. Of course the exclusion of South Africa was exclusion on the basis of a liberal, political vision, but Brundage saw this as the intrusion of politics into the Olympic movement. There was no way to convince him that acting on the basis of liberal politics was also politics. It's strange.

*Interviewer:* I want to understand this a little bit more because we're trying to understand the politics of the Olympics. Do you think there was an evolution to a more apolitical thought at least, even though in practice it wasn't that?

*Allen Guttman:* Well, I think from the start almost there was confusion about what we mean by politics because for the members of the International Olympic Committee to take a stand on the basis of liberalism was, in their minds, not politics. That was not political. There was no way to reason with them, and they still take that solution, and I think probably always will.

*Interviewer:* And we're just going to go briefly over the Moscow games just because we've spent an entire segment on it. What was particularly interesting to me was the relationship between a national Olympic Committee and a government, like the United States government, and it seemed like in some of those cases, like the Moscow games, the relationship was very different in, say, Britain than in the U.S. Can you talk about more broadly about that phenomenon, the relationship between the Olympic Committee and the government of a state like the U.S. or like Great Britain?

0:50:09.1

*Allen Guttman:* Sure. When Coubertin set up the International Olympic Committee he said that members of the committee were not representatives of nations but rather they were representatives of the International Olympic Committee who were sent back to their home countries. He also insisted that each national Olympic Committee be absolutely independent of the government. This is

---

an ideal that was obtained, perhaps, attained in a number of western countries, but in most of the world, that's never been the case.

At any rate, in 1980 there was a great irony. President Carter had just received a report studying the U.S. Olympic Committee. The report maintained that the U.S. Olympic Committee was independent of the United States government, no relationship at all. Then when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Carter, who didn't know what else to do, decided to have the United States boycott the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. At that point the U.S. Olympic Committee says to President Carter, "but we're independent of the government. It's up to us to decide whether we go to Moscow or not." The Carter administration's response was very firm. Secretary of State Vance at the Winter Olympics told the International Olympic Committee there will be no American team. We will boycott. You really should move the games. You shouldn't have them in Moscow. He insulted and angered the IOC. Mondale also gave the message to the U.S. Olympic Committee, and the U.S. Olympic Committee having first proclaimed its independence then knuckled under and voted not to go to Moscow.

At the same time, the British, the French, the Italians, most of the countries of Western Europe, they proved their national Olympic Committees really were independent of the government because they voted to go and they did. Ironically, the two major sports powers to join the United States were West Germany and Japan, two countries then completely dependent on American military power for their defense. German National Olympic Committee tried to exercise its independence, and the Germans on that committee were told by the German government, "No, you will not participate." And they didn't. Everybody at the time who knew anything about the Olympic movement realized that the boycott of 1980 was going to be followed by a boycott in 1984. There was never a question of that.

0:53:46.4

*Interviewer:*

Do you think this particularly damaged the Olympic movement, this boycott and then the reciprocal boycott four years later?

*Allen Guttman:*

I think the Olympic movement was badly damaged by these two boycotts. The movement recovered, but certainly the glamour of the 1980 games was greatly diminished by both the American, the German, Japanese teams.

---

*Interviewer:* So did the boycott work then? Was it effective?

*Allen Guttman:* Well, it was not effective in that the games did go on in Moscow, and the Soviet Union proclaimed them as a great triumph. Certainly, a great number of nations did compete. It's interesting the Western European teams that went to Moscow chose to march behind the Olympic rings and have the Olympic flag raised at the medal ceremonies, but this was very, very unpopular with the people back home. The British, the French, the others, they wanted to see their flags. They wanted to hear their anthem. They didn't want to see Olympic rings. That just indicates how powerful nationalism has been, how it has all but overwhelmed the international vision.

*Interviewer:* And L.A., despite begin boycotted by most of the Soviet states, was a unique success because of its economic success. Tell us why that was unusual for the Olympics to be such an economic boom.

0:55:42.6

*Allen Guttman:* Well, partly I think it's just the progression that the Olympics are more and more important and perceived more and more as a media event for which television networks will pay huge sums of money and sponsors will pay huge sums of money, so the games become a bigger and bigger deal. More television money. There's more sponsor money. Peter Uberoff was a genius at getting people to work for nothing, to get volunteers. Then some of the infrastructure was in place. They didn't have to build a huge, huge new stadium and many, many, many venues. So, it was the first Olympics since 1932 to turn a profit, and that, of course, has had a tremendous effect on the bidding for subsequent Olympics. Now host cities realize this could be a great, great financial boom to host the Olympics, and they're willing to spend tens of millions of dollars campaigning for the right to host them.

*Interviewer:* That model seemed to continue in South Korea both politically and economically. Can you talk about Seoul a little bit and how that seemed to kind of cement the Olympics as a really important event internally, for the domestic situation in a country?

0:57:26.5

*Allen Guttman:* Well, I think the Seoul Olympics functioned to solidify the regime in South Korea, and that's I suppose the story that we have in the back of our minds when we think about Beijing.

- 
- Interviewer:* We'll get more to Beijing in a moment. The nature of the Korean government was fragile, and it was a new democracy, and so you think that was a contributing factor to solidifying it?
- Allen Guttman:* Yes. I think the Korean government was using sports all through these years trying to portray itself as the engine of Korean nationalism. The games were one way to proclaim that Korea was an advanced, modern country, capable of hosting the entire world. I think that's a very obvious message.
- Interviewer:* And I was recently looking at literature on the Barcelona Olympics, which was not politically controversial, but it seemed to be sort of a coming out party for a new age. Can you talk about some of the things that the Barcelona Olympics seemed to transcend somehow?
- Allen Guttman:* The Barcelona Olympics look like a continuation of the Los Angeles story. This is an opportunity to put Barcelona on the map, to announce Barcelona's status as a major metropolis, as a global city. The opening ceremony was constructed as propaganda for the city of Barcelona. I think that Coubertin's message was very nearly lost in the opening ceremony because there was so much civic pride and Catalan regional pride and, to some lesser extent, Spanish pride, displayed at that ceremony.
- Interviewer:* Some of the controversies we've been talking about were over by then. Can you talk about how some of the teams reunited, that sort of thing?
- 0:59:49.4
- Allen Guttman:* Well, the end of the Soviet Union meant the end of the intense rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Perhaps in some ways it's more important that East Germany disappeared because in 1976 the East Germans with a population of 16 million outperformed the United States at the Montreal games. This is really stunning if you think about it.
- Interviewer:* Right. We've been talking about the conception of the nature of the Olympics. Coubertin and Brundage had described the Olympics almost in religious terms. Can you tell us about that conception of the Olympics that they had?
- Allen Guttman:* Both of them used religious language. Coubertin referred to "illegio athleti," and Brundage more than one speech referred to Olympism as a modern, viral, dynamic religion. I think they felt that the Olympics were the embodiment of an ethical system with sportsmanship, fair play. That the Olympics had ceremonies and

---

rituals comparable to the ceremonies and rituals of conventional religion, that it had an organizational structure, which, in some ways, is similar to the organizational structure of the Roman Catholic Church, and of course, they were perfectly aware that in the modern world people tend to look upon great athletes as semi-gods – demigods. That's a common conception that we often talk about athletes as god-like. Indeed, many spectators talk the same way. So, there were grounds for comparing what they were doing to one of the traditional religious faiths.

*Interviewer:* And have elements of that vision been preserved, or is the Olympic movement that we see today different from that movement that you just described that they envisioned?

1:02:33.0

*Allen Guttman:* I guess that's the big question. It seems to me that bit by bit the rituals and ceremonies and the vision that Coubertin put in place has been diminished, pushed into the shadows. This happened very, very markedly in 1936 at the infamous Nazi games we always go back to. There were new ceremonies at the Olympic games. The cauldron was still lit. The doves were released. The Parade of Nations was there.

But there were new ceremonies. The torch relay began in 1936, and the point of it was not to spread Olympic ideals, but rather to say that modern Germany, Nazi Germany was legitimate heir of ancient Greece. It was a very nationalistic, ideological kind of a ceremony. There were other ceremonies that were introduced then. Bit by bit, if you just count the minutes devoted to this or that at the opening ceremony, more and more time goes to nationalism, regionalism, and local pride, and less and less time proportionally goes to the old rituals that Coubertin and his immediate successors had introduced.

*Interviewer:* And that's a nice transition to this last question I have which is about China. And what does China hope to accomplish holding the Olympics in Beijing this summer, and do you think that gels with the Coubertin vision?

*Allen Guttman:* I think the Chinese very clearly want the Olympics to be a form of legitimization, a way to validate their society in the eyes of the world, to prove that they are a democratic society as they understand democracy, and to make the point they're a major force in the world today, that they have the organizational skills, they have the economic infrastructure. They have the know-how to organize what is still the greatest athletic mega-event of the

modern world. The only event that comes reasonably close, of course, is the FIFA World Cup in soccer, but the Olympics are, if not the only game in town, still the biggest game in town, and the Chinese are going to prove they can run it. They can put on a show, and they're hopeful that their athletes are going to outperform everybody else. We're going to have to wait and see about that.

1:05:57.1

*[End of Audio]*

**This transcript was edited for clarity**