

JOHN
LEONARD



FAIR GAME?



TACKLING
POLITICS
IN SPORT!



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Introduction: Strutting the World Stage

AS Vladimir Putin stood for the Russian national anthem at the opening ceremony of the Sochi Winter Olympics, diplomatic storm clouds were gathering over the capital cities of athletes from the Western nations gathered before him. Ukraine was in turmoil. Russia was preparing to make a land grab. World leaders were contemplating how to deal with a rapidly unfolding political, diplomatic and military nightmare. Surely nothing would happen during an Olympics dubbed cynically by his critics as 'Putin's Games'? These were the Games in which the Russian president was anxious to promote his nation as one with its self-confidence restored. No longer would it be overshadowed by the United States and its Western allies after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics gave the Kremlin the chance to demonstrate to the world Russia was once again a global power, a force to be respected and feared. For Putin's Western critics, it appeared as a chilling reminder of the 1930s and Hitler's Games; the Berlin Olympics. Few of them realised at the time the extent to which the Russian state was going in its aim to achieve international sporting supremacy with allegations emerging of a sinister and corrupt doping programme.

Backed with the promise of European Union money, Ukrainian nationalists, in the months prior to the Sochi Olympics, deposed their president, a man backed by Putin. Perhaps they felt the Russian ruler would not exact revenge

during a forthcoming sporting jamboree with the eyes of the world upon him. He would just bask in the glory of staging the Olympics Games. If so, they were wrong. Within weeks of Ukraine's president Viktor Yanukovich fleeing to Moscow, Crimea had been annexed; Ukraine forced to give up its Black Sea naval bases. Russian tanks were being gathered on the eastern borders of Ukraine. It was eerily similar to the Anschluss of Hitler's Germany some 80 years earlier; a ruthless land grab. Hitler's Games and international sporting contact with Nazi Germany went on regardless. The Olympic torch was lit for Putin's Games as his tanks lined up to open fire on Ukrainian nationalists. Putin's Olympics meant global sport was tied to global politics, a political leader exploiting the platform given to him by strutting on the ultimate world sporting stage.

Almost two years after Winter Olympians had left Sochi, the sinister nature of Russia's elite sporting programme was laid bare. An independent investigation for the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) supported claims from the German television channel ARD of state-sponsored doping of athletes. It was so extensive agents from Russia's Federal Security service (FSB), the successor to the KGB, were working in the country's anti-doping labs during the Sochi Winter Olympics. Their job was simple. It was to cover up any positive tests of Russian athletes tacking performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs); to ensure Russian cheats enjoyed global sporting glory. In assessing the Moscow Laboratory of the Russian Anti-Doping agency, an independent commission set up by WADA found 'its impartiality, judgment and integrity were compromised by the surveillance of the FSB within the laboratory during the Sochi Winter Olympic Games'.

Such was the extent of the state-sponsored Russian doping programme, the world athletics governing body, the IAAF, an organisation under heavy criticism for its almost laissez-faire attitude to the illicit use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) and blood doping, had no choice but to provisionally suspend Russia's track and field team from the Olympic Games. What was the Russian reaction to these disturbing revelations? Well predictably it was to denounce it all as a Western plot. Without a hint of irony, Maria Zakharova from the Russian Foreign Ministry accused WADA's investigators of being 'biased and

politicised'. One Russian MP, Valery Shestakov, a member of the State Duma's sports committee, even went as far as suggesting the drugs allegations from the German TV station ARD came in revenge for Russia being awarded the hosting of football's World Cup.

Putin himself played a cleverer game on this occasion, offering conciliatory promises to clean up Russian sport. After all, he would never admit as much but he was shamelessly using sport as a diplomatic tool; the Sochi Games, now sullied by the drugs revelations, a brazen propaganda opportunity to promote a 'Greater Russia'. On Russia winning the right to stage football's World Cup in 2018, Putin planned to do much the same. It mattered little to him the sport's governing body, FIFA, became mired in allegations of 'rampant, systemic and deep-rooted' corruption over the awarding of the most popular sport's prestigious competition. The fact Russia's nemesis, the United States, was leading investigations into malpractice at FIFA, only emboldened Putin; sport reflecting geo-political rivalries.

Briefly Ukrainian athletes did consider boycotting those 2014 Sochi Olympics; Putin's Games. Eventually they decided to compete, despite their fellow countrymen and women's anger over the annexation of Crimea by Putin's armed forces, believing as so many do sport and politics don't mix. Sadly too many others think otherwise; these include the likes of Putin and Hitler. Now, any Western democratic leader opposed to Putin and Hitler would resent of course being put in the same category as those autocrats. Yet even with these advocates of democracy and freedom there is an unsavoury record of exploiting sport. They revel in the feelgood factor from their compatriots winning gold medals, World Cups, and European Championships. Athletes are summoned to the White House and Downing Street with gleeful politicians vicariously celebrating sporting success; doing so in some countries as playing fields are bulldozed over to become building sites and gymnasiums closed down. Even more cynically, athletes are ordered by political leaders to boycott sporting events held in countries run by governments deemed as rogue regimes; yet little or nothing is done to stop business and trade with those self-same regimes. Sport and politics are not supposed to mix. Sadly, inevitably they do mix. They mix

with chilling results. Occasionally, though seldom intentionally, they mix with comical results.

All of this occurs when governing bodies of sports claim to be above politics; apolitical organisations with solely a sporting and cultural agenda. Yet those same organisations often dabble in politics. FIFA, the world governing body of association football or to use the nickname soccer, and the International Olympic Committee both expelled South Africa from international competition even long before those running world cricket were forced to act over the apartheid regime's treatment of England cricketer Basil D'Oliveira. The IOC, rightly, had decided a country with an apartheid regime discriminating on the basis of the colour of a person's skin could not send athletes to compete in the planet's greatest multi-sport competition. Those men at Lord's running world cricket took a while to come to the same conclusion.

It took decades for the international rugby community to respond with one voice to oppose apartheid. Yet, when the International Rugby Board (IRB) decided to stage its first World Cup in 1987, it made one crucial decision. The IRB, for all its previous protestations of being an organisation operating outside the grubby sphere of politics, excluded South Africa from the competition. It was a blow to the Afrikaans' pride. Rugby was their sport. They had been snubbed by even those who had supported them for decades by controversially sending international touring teams. Even to the IRB, though, allowing South Africa to compete in the inaugural World Cup seemed a step too far. The South African Springboks rugby side was banned. Can it be a coincidence the apartheid regime was dismantled in less than a decade after its chief opponent, Nelson Mandela, was released from prison?

In fairness, the opposition to apartheid from the IOC and FIFA is a rare example of sports' rulers dabbling in global politics. Many exist in their own strange little bubble, oblivious of human rights abuses, so there's bizarrely some merit in their claims of being apolitical as a result. Some, though, are also inextricably linked with the sporting and cultural history of their country; the national aspirations of their country, tragically at times the divided politics of their country. It is perhaps no coincidence

the National Football League, despite being an organisation desperate to give its code of football an international profile, has the American flag proudly incorporated into its logo. The NFL, though, barely compares with Ireland's Gaelic Athletic Association in being almost part of the DNA of a country. The GAA claims to be non-political. Yet this was an organisation promoting a nationalist vision of an Irish-Ireland. It once did so to the extent of banning anyone from its organisation from going along to watch a 'foreign sport' (i.e. an English sport such as rugby, association football or cricket); let alone playing a foreign sport.

The zealous enforcement of the GAA's infamous rule 27 led to one of the most embarrassing incidents in modern Irish history. Remarkably, the GAA decided to boot out its patron, president Douglas Hyde, for attending an international soccer match in his role as head of state. It mattered little to the GAA that Hyde was a true patriot, recognised by many as father of the Irish-Ireland movement, promoter of the Gaelic language and a leading advocate of GAA sport. Hyde was dumped. By indulging in a brand of politics its critics warned bordered on fascism, the GAA's protests of being non-political rang hollow.

The GAA apologised decades later; most of its infamous bans dismantled and abolished. Relations were repaired with organisations promoting sports with rules drawn up by English public schoolboys; most notably rugby union. Relations too were repaired with the established Irish political classes. They even invited the Queen of England to their Croke Park headquarters; scene of a massacre by crown forces loyal to her grandfather during Ireland's war of independence. For the GAA to impose its own form of boycotts in the guise of bans on the support of 'foreign' sports, ostracising even the president of Ireland in the process, was perhaps in a bizarre sense somewhat appropriate. After all, the term 'boycott' was coined in Ireland. It came about thanks to a Mayo landlord, Captain Thomas Boycott. His tenants and the rest of the community refused to co-operate with him as part of the land agitation protests in 19th-century Ireland. The GAA's bans imposed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were the original sporting boycotts. More were to controversially follow worldwide.

It simply was not enough for sporting organisations to impose their own boycotts such as the apartheid bans from cricket and the IOC. Government leaders saw the propaganda value of sport. They sought to impose boycotts, flexing their political muscles. A few countries boycotted the Melbourne Olympics of 1956, either in protest at the crushing of the Hungarian uprising or the invasion of Suez. Different countries took their pick.

Many African nations boycotted the 1976 Montreal Olympics in protest at New Zealand maintaining links with South Africa in the sport of rugby union. Four years later, Jimmy Carter, president of the United States, and Margaret Thatcher, prime minister of the United Kingdom, took their chance. Carter succeeded in imposing a boycott, preventing his athletes from attending the Moscow Olympics in protest at the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Thatcher's pleas for a British boycott of the Moscow Games fell on deaf ears. The British team went. It did not help Thatcher that the British and Irish Lions rugby team were touring South Africa in the summer of 1980; a controversial decision supported by her own backbenchers. Sport and politics had formed a toxic mix.

Of course revenge from the Soviets for the Americans' failure to turn up in Moscow was inevitable. They boycotted the Los Angeles Olympic Games four years later, ordering Eastern Bloc countries to do the same. In between came an opportunity at a Winter Olympics to play out the Cold War on ice and indulge in some classic nationalistic tub-thumping for an American president and his electoral rival. The 'miracle on ice', an Olympic ice hockey semi-final between the Soviet Union and the United States, served as a remarkable propaganda coup for Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, a triumph for the 'land of the free' over the dark forces of communism. The Americans won, eventually securing gold in the final. The players, all-American heroes, were given a White House reception. Their sporting achievement as amateurs and students pitted against to all intents and purposes full-time professionals was acknowledged. Their value, though, as propaganda tools at the height of the Cold War as the USA tried to strangle the life out of the Soviet Union, was of more importance.

At least in the cases of these sporting boycotts no athletes or coaches died at the hands of the politically motivated. Sadly though many sporting tragedies have been born out of politics; chief among them the massacre at the Munich Olympics of 1972. It seems inconceivable the Games carried on despite the deaths of Israeli athletes; murdered by the Palestinian terrorist group Black September. Yet the event continued regardless.

Too often commentators refer to sporting failure as a tragedy. This glib, lazy and ignorant use of the word is put in context by the murder of Israeli athletes and coaches at Munich in the autumn of 1972 and the massacre of spectators at Croke Park in Dublin half a century earlier. Politics has also played a part in the tragic history of the world's most popular team sport, association football. Two countries, El Salvador and Honduras, went to war ostensibly on face value over the result of a World Cup match. It may have served as an excuse for countries with strained relations, yet remarkably a sport, football, gave them no better excuse for committing young men into battle. Arguably, soccer also played a role in the Arab spring; football matches between club sides serving as a focal point for protest with tragic, fatal results. Even if organised rallies were banned or prevented by the authorities, there was always the opportunity to go along to a football match, mass spectator sport the ideal cover for political protest.

Occasionally the sporting world appears to embrace rather than merely mix with the political world, despite administrators and athletes claiming to the contrary. One such controversial example is as whether an athlete is a drugs cheat; just who carried out and sanctioned the pharmaceutical doping? Often it was done at government level during the Cold War era, especially in the Soviet bloc; also there were growing suspicions that some Western capitalist nations such as West Germany indulged in the dubious practice too. Now, in a throwback to the Cold War era, Russia is accused of indulging in state-sponsored doping, though whether it is the only country to engage in such a dubious practice is perhaps open to question.

Dick Pound, the chairman of WADA's independent commission investigating the doping allegations declared with a degree of exasperation, 'It's pretty disturbing. It's disappointing

to see the nature and the extent of what was going on and to reach the conclusions that it could not possibly have happened without everybody knowing about it and consenting to it. It's worse than we thought. It has the effect unlike other forms of corruption of affecting the results on the field of play.'

Russia had, in playing its own geo-political games, choreographed what the chastened president of the IAAF, Sebastian Coe, described as a 'horror show'; one his own organisation appeared unable or reluctant to pull the curtain down on. In recognising his own organisations' failings, one far too susceptible to being manipulated by malevolent political influences, Lord Coe commented, 'The whole system has failed the athletes, not just in Russia, but around the world. This has been a shameful wake-up call and we are clear that cheating at any level will not be tolerated.'

It is not just the scourge of drugs. Financial doping causes heated argument in sport. Did a football club effectively buy a league title or a European Cup with its rivals unable to compete with the owners' financial firepower? Those owners are occasionally foreign governments seemingly on a diplomatic and public relations mission to boost their status in the international community; Qatar investing in Paris St Germain, Abu Dhabi's ruling family injecting money into Manchester City. Forget the abilities of the players on the pitch. It's the size of the wallet of the owner sitting in the boardroom which matters. At the Olympics, did a nation win a clutch of gold medals by pumping millions of dollars of public money into nurturing athletes and coaching programmes? Most times the answer is yes; Great Britain's improved performance, for example, at successive Olympic Games from the mid-1990s onwards being largely down to extra public money in the form of lottery funding.

Worse still, the spectre of corruption hangs over many sports; especially the influence of money on key policy decisions, such as the award of a World Cup or an Olympic Games. Again politics becomes entangled. How much a nation state can influence an individual's vote in a key policy decision of a sporting governing body is always open to question. Allegations of bribery are common, though more than often never proven. Dark rumours abound of delegates being persuaded by their

own national governments to vote one way or another for reasons of trade and commerce. Sport, in the guise of the bureaucrats running its governing bodies, does little to dispel lingering suspicions. It is almost as though those in charge thrive on controversy.

This is a select sample of controversial episodes; the potent mix of sport and politics. The aim is to give a simple guide to those events, some tragic, others plain sinister, a few bizarre; all the subject of hot dispute. Here are just a few examples of how sports and politics do not only mix but collide, how sporting governing bodies can be cynically manipulated at times by the most unsavoury of characters. Ultimately, it is the athletes, the coaches and the fans being manipulated. Worse still, lives have been lost thanks to the potentially toxic mix of politics and sport.

1

Hitler's Olympics: Berlin 1936

JUST who was responsible for the modern Olympics; this multi-billion pound orgy of sport and largesse? Forget the history books, forget Athens 1896 with Baron Pierre de Coubertin's Games. These were the innocent Games in the Corinthian spirit, a sporting festival promoted as the modern industrial nations of the time began to embrace organised professional sport. De Coubertin insisted his Olympics was to be amateur, strictly a festival for 'gentlemen'. The French aristocrat was inspired by Shropshire farmers trying to bring ancient Greece to the English Midlands. It was a quaint vision; a remarkable legacy to leave to future generations. Yet strictly in many respects, Pierre de Coubertin is not the answer. The true solution, the sinister and depressing outcome, might well be Adolf Hitler. He instituted the ritual of the torch relay; a curious tribute to ancient Greek and Nordic mysticism. He is to blame for everything from the largesse to the mind-numbing jingoistic and nationalistic tub-thumping; using a sporting jamboree to showcase a country. Berlin 1936 served as a blueprint for the organisation of the modern Olympic Games.

One other man could and should be credited for creating the modern Olympics – Hitler's propaganda minister Joseph

Goebbels. Hitler was no fan of sport. He saw little value in it apart from the need for physical exercise to build up fitness in soldiers for war. As for the Olympics, Hitler condemned the movement in predictable racist rhetoric as a 'plot by Freemasons and Jews'. Goebbels thought otherwise. He spotted an opportunity; not for improving one's health, nor for friendly competition in the spirit advocated by de Coubertin, but for political exploitation. Goebbels recognised the award of the Olympic Games to Berlin gave Germany's Nazi regime the perfect platform for launching a global propaganda coup. He persuaded Hitler to embrace the Olympics, not to promote sport but to showcase Nazi Germany; to hoodwink the world into perhaps believing the Third Reich was governing a modern, benevolent state.

To do so, not a single Reichmark would be spared; the best stadia, the best training facilities, the perfect living quarters built for the world's athletes. Crucially, money would be poured into providing state-of-the-art media facilities. These were the first games to be televised. Letting the world know who had won gold, silver and bronze was of secondary importance to the arch propagandist Goebbels; promoting Nazi efficiency was the primary concern. He wanted to showcase a 'new Germany'. By 1935, the British ambassador to Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps, felt moved to comment on the 'tightening' of the Nazi regime's control of German sport. He also lamented the Nazi 'exploitation' of German sporting victories. In the months leading up to the Berlin games, the Nazis had published a manual of political education, which stressed the importance of sport. *Deutschland über Volk, Staat, Leibesübungen* or in English 'Germany, about people, state, physical exercises' asserted among other things, 'Gymnastics and sport are thus an institution for the education of the body and a school of the political will in the service of the State. Apolitical, so-called neutral gymnasts and sportsmen are unthinkable in Hitler's state.'

Bruno Malitz, the man in charge of the Nazi Brownshirts sports programme in Berlin, declared, 'For us National Socialists, politics belongs in sport. First, because politics guides everything; and second, because politics is already inherent in sport.' Evil politicians had hijacked the world's biggest sporting spectacle for their own sinister ends.

The International Olympic Committee had unwittingly handed Hitler and Goebbels their propaganda coup, one even Hitler himself was slow to recognise. The games of the 11th Olympiad were awarded to Berlin in May 1931, before the Nazis came to power in Germany. Those games to be staged in 1936 would come 20 years after Berlin was originally due to stage the Olympics. Instead, those Games were cancelled because of the First World War.

Hitler was about to provoke the Second World War. In the early years of the Nazi regime he was recognised as a threat to world peace and the IOC was urged to reconsider a decision made before the rise of the Nazis, not least because of the sickening growth in anti-Semitism across Germany. The president of the German Olympic Committee, Theodor Lewald, was forced to stand down from his lead role in organising the Games because his paternal grandmother was Jewish. Instead, Lewald was forced to take up a liaison role between the Nazis and the International Olympic Committee, the acceptable face of German sport. His successor, the Nazi sports boss Hans von Tschammer und Osten, set about excluding Jewish athletes from German teams. Gypsies were also excluded. Sport and politics toxically mixed thanks to the Nazis' anti-Semitic and racist policies. Critics worldwide, including leading politicians in Great Britain and the United States, thought it inconceivable the Olympics could be staged in Nazi Germany. Yet the IOC pressed ahead with the staging of the Berlin Games in 1936. Not only would the summer Games go ahead in Germany but also the Winter Olympics in the Bavarian town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen in February 1936. Those Games were staged just a fortnight after German troops entered the de-militarised zone of the Rhineland, set up between Germany and France after the First World War.

Not even the prospect of staging both the winter and summer Olympics would stop the Nazis from flexing their military muscle, the International Olympic Committee appearing weak and manipulable. An inspection team from the IOC visited Germany in 1934 and found no problem with the treatment of Jewish or Gypsy athletes. It was a remarkable observation. The Nazis were so intent on pursuing their all-Aryan policies that world class athletes were prevented from participating in

sport. Jewish and Gypsy athletes were deemed inferior, members of races the Nazis dismissed as sub-human. They were barred from sports clubs, training facilities or competing as individuals. In such a depressing context, sporting integrity counted for nothing.

Avery Brundage, president of the American Olympic Committee, posed as a zealot advocate of Corinthian values. He would emerge as president of the IOC, a controversial and divisive figure firmly believing in the amateur ethic and of sport being kept apart from politics. Curiously despite advocating this view, Brundage initially appeared hostile to the staging of the Games in Berlin and favoured any boycott by America and other nations if necessary. It was clear the unsavoury political creed of the Nazi regime threatened the Olympic ideal. He declared, 'The very foundation of the modern Olympic revival will be undermined if individual countries are allowed to restrict participation by reason of class, creed, or race.'

Nevertheless, once Brundage was feted by the Nazis; given full VIP treatment with lavish hospitality by Goebbels and his fellow henchmen; it led to him changing his mind. Brundage carried out his own inspection of Germany once US sports administrators indicated they were unhappy with the IOC giving the Nazis a clean bill of health. He remarkably concluded Nazi Germany was pursuing the 'true spirit of the Olympics' and pompously asserted, 'The Olympic Games belong to the athletes and not to the politicians.' This politically astute sports administrator ignored the potential propaganda value for a vile regime. He apparently appeared to believe Nazi pledges to include Jewish athletes on their Olympic team; pledges Hitler's regime had no intention of keeping.

Brundage backed the Berlin Games and worked towards persuading his American colleagues to ignore calls for a boycott; despite deep reservations especially from not just the Jewish community but Christian groups, including the Catholic Church. Its American journal *The Commonwealth* declared that going to the Berlin Games would set the seal of approval on radically anti-Christian Nazi doctrines. It called the Nazis not only anti-Semitic but 'pagan to the core' and pleaded, 'In the interests of justice and fairness we suggest that no Catholic, and

no friend of the sports activities of Catholic institutions, ought to make the trip to Berlin.'

The United States still appeared in the months before the Games the most vociferous opponent of a Nazi Olympics; boycott movements in other countries, including the European powers of Great Britain and France, gaining little traction. Brundage still had his work cut out to persuade the American Athletic Union to send a track and field team. Its president, Jeremiah Mahoney, clearly recognised the Olympics were being cynically manipulated by a racist and totalitarian regime; the Nazis. He dismissed German assurances given to Brundage, concluding, 'I am convinced, and I do not see how, you can deny that German Jews are being excluded from the possibility of competing in the Olympic Games merely because they are Jews.'

'I believe that participation in the Games under the Swastika implies the tacit approval of all that the Swastika symbolises. Surely, it does not imply the disapproval and the abhorrence, which so many Americans feel. I believe that for Americans to participate in the Olympics in Germany means giving American moral and financial support to the Nazi regime, which is opposed to all that Americans hold dearest. Therefore, I hope that all Americans will join me in opposing American participation in the Olympic Games and aid me in having the Games transferred to another country.'

Support for this position came from Jesse Owens, the athlete destined to become the inspirational figure of the Berlin Games. Owens told a radio station in November 1935, 'If there is discrimination against minorities in Germany, then we must withdraw from the Olympics.'

Walter White, the secretary of the American civil rights group the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), wrote to Owens congratulating him on his stance. Yet even White admitted he felt 'somewhat divided' over the issue of a boycott of the Berlin Games. White explained that he found Nazi policies 'a duplication of what we Negroes have suffered for three centuries in America'. He mused, 'There have been times when I have felt that there might be a certain psychological value in having blond Nazis run ragged by yourself and others.' As it turned out, Owens

had already changed his mind. He wanted to go to Berlin and compete; so did most of his black colleagues.

A vote on whether or not to boycott the Berlin Games was held at a convention of the American Athletic Union at the Commodore Hotel in New York City in December 1935. Brundage, not his arch opponent Mahoney, narrowly won the day. Brundage had seen no irony or any contradiction in his statement the Olympics were meant for 'athletes not politicians', despite a despicable bunch of politicians clearly hijacking the games for their own sinister motives. Crucially, the US president Franklin D. Roosevelt had stayed out of the Olympic boycott debate, taking a neutral stance. If American opponents of going to the Nazi Olympics hoped for support from their president, it was not forthcoming. On hearing American participation in the Berlin Olympics had been guaranteed, Sigfrid Edstrom, the Swedish member of the IOC and an ally of Brundage, sent him a cable couched in racist terms to congratulate him on foiling what he described as a 'plot by the dirty Jews and politicians'. He further suggested Brundage's reward might be a seat on the IOC. Brundage's place was duly offered by the committee prior to the Berlin Games in July 1936.

The Berlin Games were going ahead and involving American, British and French participation. Of the major nations, only the Soviet Union was absent, not coming into the Olympic fold until the Helsinki Games of 1952. In all, 49 teams took part; more than in any previous Games. One of the American participants seeking a gold medal was a certain Avery Brundage. He took part in the strangest of sporting disciplines, the art competition.

Prior to the world's top athletes gathering for the Games, the Nazis had gone out of the way to lavish competitors, officials, travelling fans and journalists with hospitality. They made sure Berlin was a pristine city, shorn of incriminating anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda. Instead the city was adorned with Olympic flags; alongside the Nazi German flag. 'Jews not welcome' signs, seen all over Germany since Hitler came to power, were removed from hotels, restaurants, bars and other public places. Anyone deemed 'undesirable', people likely to embarrass the Nazis, were rounded up and locked up; out of sight from tourists and

inquisitive foreign journalists. On just one infamous day, 16 July 1936, more than 800 Gypsies were detained by police and frogmarched to a camp on the outskirts of Berlin. The Nazis had not just built an Olympic village for athletes; they built a detention centre for Gypsies. As for Berlin's Jewish population, Hitler's notorious elite army corps, the SS, were apparently ordered to refrain from taking any action against them. For once, they were to be left alone. However, any foreign journalist, wanting to speak to Jewish leaders and gain an insight into life under the Nazis, had to go to the Gestapo for permission. From that point, those journalists would be closely monitored for the duration of the Games. Just as an added measure, another act of deceit, the anti-Semitic publication *Der Stürmer* was absent from newsstands. It would be back in circulation after the games. In pulling off a grand propaganda coup nothing was left to chance.

It helped the previous summer Games in Los Angeles four years earlier had been something of a flop, thanks largely to the depression. Only half the number of competitors present for the 1928 Games in Antwerp turned up in Los Angeles. President Edgar Hoover decided not to attend. Given a record number of countries and competitors were descending on Berlin, the Nazis were presented with a golden opportunity to showcase their country, to send a positive message to the rest of the world. Crucial in all this was the ability to exploit technological advances in 1930s media. These were the first televised Games, though the pictures were deemed poor with the medium only in its infancy. A viewing room was set up in the Olympic village. Berliners were able to watch the Games live on television at designated venues across the city; very few had a TV at home.

Radio was a different matter. It had grown into a reliable and popular medium worldwide. The Nazis ensured the world's broadcasters were able to operate the best equipment available. More than 20 outside-broadcast vans were made available to the foreign media with radio journalists given prominent commentary positions. Once Joseph Goebbels was congratulated by a producer from the American broadcaster NBC for the facilities on offer, the Nazi propaganda chief was able to reflect on a personal triumph. He had persuaded Hitler to embrace the Games; one to confirm Germany's status as a

modern country recovering from economic depression and defeat in the Great War; one dishonestly able to portray itself to the world as culturally tolerant and inclusive. The world's media, while suspicious, appeared to conform, promoting a positive view of the Berlin Games.

Goebbels must have been delighted with the favourable press on offer from the international media for the Berlin Olympics of 1936. Athletes, officials and journalists were impressed with the impeccable organisational skills of their German hosts and in awe of the state-of-the-art sporting facilities. In justifying the 20m Marks spent on the 1936 Games, Hitler declared it as 'absolutely necessary in light of the impression this creation will make on the rest of the world'. Final estimates put the cost of the Berlin Games as more than 100m Marks. The Olympic village, spread over 130 acres, served as a model for future Games; better than anything built for the competitors at previous Olympiads. Yet for all the cold efficiency here there was a dark side to the Nazis, one to be spotted years later and not known at the time to the outside world. It was designed by Captain Wolfgang Feurstner of the German army and built by the men under his command. There were more than 140 buildings, including a post office and a bank. The residential accommodation consisted of apartment blocks with 13 twin bedrooms and separate provision made for stewards able to act as interpreters for their foreign visitors. A 400-metre athletics track and an indoor Olympic-size pool on site made it easy for the competitors to access training facilities.

There was just one snag though as far as the Nazis were concerned; Feurstner was of Jewish descent. Therefore, despite the brilliant job he had done in designing the village, Feurstner was demoted. Here there appeared to be a dark pattern. It followed the decision to force the head of Germany's Olympic Committee, Theodor Lewald, to accept a lesser role because of his paternal Jewish grandmother. Instead of Feurstner, Lt Colonel Werner Gilsa was given the credit, and thanked and honoured by the Nazis at a lavish reception. Feurstner, devastated by the snub, went back to his barracks from the party in honour of Gilsa and shot himself. The Nazi propaganda machine responded by burying him with full military honours and falsely claiming he had died in a road accident. Hitler's

Games had claimed a life. Millions more were to follow in war and concentration camps.

In the summer of 1936, though, the Nazis were intent on holding out the hand of friendship to a sceptical world, attempting to showcase a modern and vibrant nation. In doing so they assured the best facilities were available, the competition venues just as impressive as the Olympic village. The main stadium housed 100,000 spectators and it still stands to this day, though it was refurbished and modernised to stage football's 2006 World Cup Final. Three other stadiums were built along with a polo field and an outdoor theatre. As the athletes lined up to enter the Olympic Stadium for the opening ceremony there were some notable absentees. Avery Brundage accepted Nazi assurances of fielding a German Olympic team selected on merit rather than race or creed. Yet just a fortnight before the Games, Jewish athlete Gretel Bergmann was dropped from the German team despite being the joint world record holder in the women's high jump. She was the favourite to win gold. Other world-class Jewish athletes were excluded from the German team in a brazen act of racial discrimination. Gypsies were also not allowed to compete, among them the boxer Johann Trollmann, who was the German middleweight champion. This evil political regime had ruined the sporting dreams of its country's own citizens. Later, of course, they were to do far, far worse, embarking on war and genocide.

Yet the exclusion of Jews and gypsies from the German Olympic team proved politics and sport mixed in a disturbing poisonous cocktail; the most ruthless of politicians able to exploit sport for their own dubious ends. It showed the world had been hoodwinked but frankly very few people noticed or cared. As the Games progressed the Nazis managed to build a favourable impression of the Games; thanks to their own organisational skills but also the infamous 'feelgood' factor from world-class sporting competition.

On Saturday 1 August 1936 Adolf Hitler greeted the world's athletes at the opening ceremony for the Games of the XI Olympiad. For the ceremony, the grey skies hovering overhead served as a reminder of the metaphorical dark clouds gathering over Europe in the build-up to the Second World War. Yet

the Olympics were about triumph and joy, tempered only by sporting despair and disappointment. How competitors would greet Hitler was just one of the thorny issues at stake; specifically the offering of the Nazi salute to the German leader. Most teams chose not to do so as they paraded around the stadium. Controversially though, the French team did salute Hitler, causing fury back home in France. The French team insisted the salute offered was the 'Olympic salute', a gesture similar to the Nazi salute; one not seen at any Games since 1936. It was uncomfortably far too similar to the familiar gesture to greet Adolf Hitler. For all the protestations of innocence, the French team's decision to offer a form of salute to Hitler was greeted with despair and disappointment by their own supporters. The British and American teams, in contrast, merely marched past Hitler; not a smile on a face, not a wave to the crowd who were giving them polite applause.

Hitler had already completed the first stage of his propaganda triumph with tens of thousands of German citizens enthusiastically flocking to freshly-built stadia to welcome the world and greet its best young athletes. His own citizens were impressed with the show on offer; the world's media giddy with praise. Frederick T. Birchall of the *New York Times* filed copy describing the scene and asserting it was a triumph for sport over politics. He did note the mixed reaction given to the parading teams from the crowd; notably enthusiastic applause for the Nazi-saluting Hungarians and a muted greeting for the Americans and the British. Yet on Hitler he observed, 'Adolf Hitler was receiving the plaudits of a league far removed from politics, a league of peaceful sport to which he had become the proud host. There can be no doubt that he was proud at this moment of the climax of two years' patient preparation and endeavour. For once pride in an achievement showed in his bearing.'

Perhaps Birchall was trying to be balanced with just the faintest hint of criticism. Yet he gave a ringing endorsement of the Nazi Olympic Games in tones echoed by others from the international media contingent, 'For him [Hitler] it has been a day of triumph, exceeding perhaps any that have gone before. From soon after dawn, when a military parade down Unter den Linden and back revived the old imperial custom of "Great

Waiting”, until he retired past midnight, he was the object of enthusiasm exceeding all bounds.’

Birchall concluded, ‘These Olympic Games have had an opening notable even beyond expectations, high as these were. They seem likely to accomplish what the rulers of Germany have frankly desired from them, that is, to give the world a new viewpoint from which to regard the Third Reich: It is promising that this viewpoint will be taken from an Olympic hill of peace.’ That peace yearned for by the *New York Times* correspondent was, of course, to be shattered only three years later.

For all the plaudits from those normally suspicious of Nazi intent, one man memorably ensured Hitler and the Nazis would be thwarted in their aims of promoting Aryan racial superiority; thwarted in making the Berlin Olympics a complete propaganda triumph. He was Jesse Owens, who would later be shamefully treated by Avery Brundage, the sporting plutocrat who asserted that the Olympics was above the murky world of international politics. Owens was one of ten African American athletes in the US track and field team and for all the Nazi boasts of Aryan superiority he was a clear favourite to strike gold in Berlin.

Just a year earlier, he had remarkably set three world records in the space of 45 minutes at the ‘Big Ten’ meeting in Michigan. Owens first equalled the world record for the 100-yard dash, clocking 9.4 seconds. He then broke the world record for the long jump before going back on the track to break the world record for the 220-yard dash with a time of 20.3 seconds; also in the process breaking a world record for the metric equivalent, the 200 metres. Just to round off his day Owens then broke the world record for the little-run 220 yards low hurdles in 22.6 seconds, again a world best in the metric equivalent. His achievement was all the more remarkable because he was complaining of a bad back and didn’t bother to warm up because it would have been too agonising. Given Owens’s record breaking feats it was odd of the Nazis, to put it mildly, to mock the Americans for relying on black athletes to bring the United States Olympics glory; people the Nazis considered to be an ‘inferior race’. One Nazi officially shamefully dismissed them as ‘Black Auxiliaries’.

In his quest for gold medal glory, Owens was only seriously challenged in the long jump; Germany’s Lutz Lang offering

the challenge before finally conceding defeat and warmly congratulating his American opponent. Hitler, so the narrative goes, was less than impressed and apparently stormed out of the Olympic Stadium, although there is little evidence he actually did so. In all, Owens won four gold medals: the 100 metres in 10.3 seconds, the 200 metres in 20.7 seconds, the long jump and the 4x100 metres sprint relay. It was in the latter more controversy emerged thanks to the intervention of Avery Brundage. Despite winning the individual sprint events, the US track and field management decided to leave Owens out of the relay team for the heats. He was rested and the US sprint relay team was doing quite nicely without him, comfortably making the final with gold seeming certain. Brundage then intervened. He insisted Owens, and Ralph Metcalfe, another black athlete, ran in the final instead of Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller; both Jewish athletes. They were the only Jewish members of the American track and field team at Berlin. They were also the only American Olympians not to take part in the Games. It was a clear snub to Glickman and Stoller; one based not on sporting integrity as it might have appeared at face value but it seems on the basis of their religion and race. Observers alleged Brundage deliberately blocked the selection of the Jewish athletes to appease the Nazis; remarkable if true.

At no point did Hitler present medals to black athletes, despite the men's 100 metres sprint being viewed widely in sport as one of the Olympics' 'Blue Riband' events. He was not to be seen shaking hands with any black athletes, least of all Owens, the greatest athlete of his generation and perhaps arguably of any generation; the man shattering Hitler's myth of Aryan supremacy. Yet years later it emerged Owens himself was unfazed by the so-called snub from the Nazi leader. Instead, he poured scorn on his own political leaders at home in the United States; a country openly at the time practising racial segregation in professional team sport. Owens remarked, 'It was all right with me, I didn't go to Berlin to shake hands with him, anyway. When I came back, after all those stories about Hitler and his snub, I came back to my native country, and I couldn't ride in the front of the bus. I had to go to the back door. I couldn't live where I wanted. Now what's the difference?'

Owens lived in 'Jim Crow America', individual states imposing segregation by passing laws branding African Americans as 'separate but equal'. It is no wonder Owens challenged the notion of the United States being a morally superior nation. Instead of criticising Adolf Hitler, he castigated his own president Franklin Roosevelt. 'Hitler didn't snub me. It was our president who snubbed me,' he told American journalists. Owens added, 'The president didn't even send me a telegram.' He even went further by claiming Hitler waved to him; a gesture none of the 110,000 people in the stadium seemed to notice. Owens's coach Larry Snyder reasoned he was trying 'to take the sting out of Hitler's apparently rude behaviour toward him and other American blacks'.

Owens was unquestionably the hero of the Berlin Olympics and yet his achievements were, as he bluntly pointed out, largely ignored by the American political establishment. Not for another 40 years would he receive an invitation to the White House, where he was honoured by president Gerald Ford with the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honour for an American citizen. Furthermore he was unable to capitalise on his new-found fame and was instantly stripped of his amateur status for daring to ignore a call to go on a post-Olympic European tour with the American team. Owens complained he was tired, missed his wife after three months away from home, and wanted to return to the United States. Brundage stripped him of his amateur status, a decision he defended years later as president of the International Olympic Committee. Brundage told *Sports Illustrated*, 'They said I declared Jesse Owens a professional. Jesse is a fine man. I have the utmost respect for him. His accomplishments in the '36 Games were remarkable. But Jesse had agreed to go with a group that was to visit Sweden. Well, some smart fellow in New York had a bright idea on how to make a quick bundle of money and he sent Jesse a telegram offering him \$40,000 to turn professional. \$40,000 is a great deal of money, and Jesse was just a young fellow, so he announced that he was going to accept the offer. And he didn't go to Sweden, as he had promised. All right; he was suspended. What did the headlines say? The headlines said "Brundage declares Jesse Owens a professional"! His face was truculent again and his voice rose slightly in intensity.

“Brundage had nothing to do with it”! Jesse Owens declared Jesse Owens a professional. I think it was a shame.’

Brundage was indignantly unrepentant. For him even the promise of money was enough to punish Owens; just weeks after his triumph at the Berlin Olympics. Brundage insisted sport and politics did not mix, despite being an arch-political manipulator. He certainly made sure sport and money would not mix as far as athletes were concerned, just for administrators to give people like himself a decent living. Brundage was right to view it as ‘a shame’. The shame was on him. Owens’s treatment was shameful.

Hitler’s apparent reluctance to meet and greet Owens along with the other black athletes competing in Berlin oddly suited Goebbels and his propagandists. They possibly felt it was a good thing for Hitler to take a low profile during the duration of the Games. It also suited the IOC; Hitler’s background role, once the opening events were over, ensuring prominence given to sport. Few members of the IOC recognised they were being cynically manipulated for political propaganda; a Nazi strategy ruined, though only in part, by the brilliance of Jesse Owens. The world went away by and large with a favourable but distorted view of German life and also of a Nazi regime already flexing its military muscle. Brundage was smugly satisfied with events in Berlin. In his assessment of the Games he said, ‘The Games of the XI Olympiad at Berlin, Germany, was the greatest and most glorious athletic festival ever concluded – the most successful and colourful of all time.’

He praised the Nazis for throwing millions of marks into staging the Games and concluded without irony that the Games had been ‘far more than an athletic spectacle’. He was right, but it appears not to have dawned on Brundage that he was endorsing Hitler’s Nazi regime. At the outbreak of war, the American correspondent William L. Shirer expressed his despair at the naivety of Brundage and the Olympic movement. He wrote, ‘Hitler and his Nazi thugs had succeeded in making the XI Olympiad the most colourful in history and, what was more important, had used the Olympics to fool the world into believing that Nazi Germany was a peaceful, civilised and contented nation.’

Post-Berlin, there was not to be another Olympics for a dozen years. At the closing ceremony on Sunday 16 August 1936 the call was made for 'the youth of every country to assemble in four years at Tokyo, there to celebrate with us the 12th Olympic Games'. Instead, Germany and Japan were allies as the youth of the world was at war; one engineered by Adolf Hitler, the man feted by the international Olympic movement in Berlin, August 1936.