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The Mass Media

Olympic Industry Boosters and Critics



As is the situation in most Western countries, Australia's mass media reflect and reinforce the role of sport as a key component of popular culture. It would be hard to imagine an Australian newspaper or news broadcast that did not include extensive coverage of sporting events. The Sydney 2000 slogan *Share the Spirit* exemplified this view of sport as an unqualified good. First of all, it suggested the "spirit of Australia": the liberal myth of upward social mobility through hard work, egalitarianism, and anti-elitism, and a national identity cemented by largely uncritical support for all competitive sporting endeavors. Secondly, the slogan evoked the "Olympic spirit": the pursuit of sporting excellence.

The Australian media played an indispensable role in shaping public opinion concerning Olympic sport in general and the Sydney 2000 Olympic bid and preparations in particular. And, as 2000 approached, the international media joined in these efforts to boost public support for all things Olympic. The Olympic product was, of course, eminently marketable, and it was relatively easy for the Olympic industry to use the mass media to maintain its relentless promotion of the Sydney 2000 project not only as a "magic moment" in Australian history, but also as a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity to boost the economy through tourism, employment, and private sector investment.

Following the discussion of Australian media ownership and the distribution of Olympic properties, this chapter will examine media treatment of Olympic-related issues in the first half of 1996—the crucial period

An earlier version of part of this chapter, titled "Sydney 2000: Olympic Sport and the Australian Media," appeared in the *Journal of Australian Studies* 62, 1999, pp. 76–83.

leading up to the Atlanta Games and the halfway mark in Sydney's Olympic preparations—in order to show the state of play at that particular historical point. This chapter will also examine the changing role of the media in the late 1990s, following the International Olympic Committee (IOC) bribery scandal.

The focus will be on the print media, with particular attention to the coverage provided by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (hereafter the *Herald*) throughout the 1990s. I analyzed the *Herald's* Olympic coverage every day of publication over the following periods: January-June 1996, April-May 1997, and April-May 1998; from November 1998 to February 2001, I systematically monitored the *Herald's* website <smh.com.au>.

MEDIA OWNERSHIP: THE GIANTS

The ownership structure of the Australian media industry became increasingly concentrated in the 1980s and 1990s (Turner & Cunningham, 1997). By 2000, Rupert Murdoch's News Limited owned six capital city newspapers and one national newspaper (*The Australian*), representing 67 percent of total newspaper circulation in the country, while John Fairfax, publisher of the *Herald*, *The Age* (Melbourne), *Australian Financial Review*, and *Business Review Weekly*, controlled 22 percent (Australia's media giants, 2000). Not too surprisingly, with Murdoch's empire expanding, power struggles at the top were often reflected in the pages of Fairfax's papers.

A *Green Left Weekly* article (Healy, 2000) captured the problems flowing from the "marketplace of ideas"—which, under capitalism, transformed ideas into commodities to be bought and sold by the mass media. Neatly summarizing the divide between the two major print media corporations, Sean Healy explained how "down-market" and "popular" News Limited publications, such as Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*, aimed at the stereotypical Australian-born, White, suburban, working-class family man, serving up "a standard fare of blaring sensationalism, crime stories, sport and gambling . . . tough on crime and dole bludgers [welfare bums], anti-union, crudely nationalist and covertly racist." Bryan Dawe, of the popular television satire, *The Games*, probably had a News Limited publication in mind when he described a particular tabloid as "a light-hearted mixture of racism and pornography." Fairfax's "up-market" papers such as the *Herald* played to different prejudices—those of "the wealthy, well-educated, inner-city professional"—and, as the "liberal establishment media," displayed a clear probusiness bias (Healy, 2000, 17).

In the Australian context, long-standing antigovernment sentiment, hostility to unions, and opposition to Indigenous land claims—in other words, racism—all helped to create fertile ground for procorporate media

messages that were the key components of the propaganda model developed by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman (Chomsky, 1988; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). This approach conceptualized the mass media as a key force in ideological struggles, an effective means of “manufacturing consent,” and a powerful tool for corporate elites. For their part, consumers could resist corporate propaganda by deconstructing its hidden messages and developing alternative, community-based media sources. In the Sydney Olympic context, electronic communication (e-mail and the Internet) was particularly well suited to this kind of resistance (see chapter 7).

Sydney Media as Bid Boosters

In the mid-1990s, the *Herald's* coverage of issues related to Sydney 2000's budget, administration, and construction was dominated by pro-Olympic journalist Glenda Korporaal, who also happened to be the coauthor of Sydney bid chief Rod McGeoch's book, *The Bid*, in 1994, and Australian IOC vice president Kevan Gosper's book, *An Olympic Life*, in 2000 (McGeoch & Korporaal, 1994; Gosper & Korporaal, 2000). McGeoch/Korporaal's explicit business orientation continued to influence the *Herald's* coverage in 1996, especially in relation to volatile issues such as government versus private funding and environmental protection. In a 1998 controversy involving allegations that McGeoch was exploiting his Olympic connections for personal profit, Korporaal's *Herald* article (1998) included an acknowledgment that she was coauthor of *The Bid*.

By 2000, Korporaal had switched allegiances by joining the staff of News Limited's *Daily Telegraph*. At this time, however, Korporaal's byline failed to signal to readers that she was coauthor of a book by a second powerful Olympic industry figure—Gosper—and that she might have been in a conflict-of-interest situation. Australian journalists who were members of the Media, Entertainment, and Arts Alliance committed themselves to follow the Journalists' Code of Ethics (2000), which specifically directed them to disclose conflicts of interest and not to allow “advertising or other commercial considerations” to influence their accuracy, fairness, or independence.

Chomsky's propaganda model noted the importance of “necessary illusions”: the ways in which the mass media occasionally engaged in self-criticism in order to convey editorial independence. In the Australian context, newspaper editorials, letters to the editor, television documentaries such as *Media Watch*, and political satires such as *Good News Week* all supported the illusion that the media functioned as their own monitors and critics. Unlike views expressed in the independent media, however, dissenting voices and debates were carefully contained in the mainstream media.

Despite the *Herald's* positioning as the most liberal of the Sydney newspapers, in the mid-1990s it had at least two regular columnists, including sports reporter Jeff Wells, whose views regularly came under attack in letters to the editor amid allegations of sexism and racism. In a similar illusion of debate and balance, Australia's best-selling sports magazine, *Inside Sport*, (in)famous for its regular ten-page centerfold pictorials of women in bikinis, had as regular contributors two respected sport scholars, Colin Tatz and Douglas Booth, who presented radically dissenting views on controversial issues, including racism and drugs in sport (Lenskyj, 1998). In fact, Tatz's article on White Australians' racist treatment of Aboriginal people, both inside and outside sport, was one of the few to name the hypocrisy of the Sydney 2000 bid supporters who focused on China's human rights abuses and ignored Australia's own shameful record (Tatz, 1995a)

SELLING OLYMPIC PROPERTIES

In 1997, it was announced that, for the first time in Olympic history, Sydney 2000 would have two newspaper sponsors: Fairfax and News Limited. In keeping with the IOC charter's requirement to maximize Olympic news coverage and audiences, Olympic minister Michael Knight assured the Australian media at the time that "All Olympic events are open to be covered by all news media, so there's no exclusivity in terms of editorial. . . ." (Knight quoted in Coultan & Evans, 1999).

Sharing Olympic sponsor status made the two media giants key Olympic players on two major and potentially conflicting fronts: the coverage of Olympic news stories, and the marketing and promotion of what were termed *SOCOG properties*. The goodies were divided up as follows: the torch relay and the ticket sales to News Limited, and volunteer recruitment, the arts festival, and the school newspaper to Fairfax. These arrangements served the interests of the Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) very well, by covering both the upmarket and downmarket readership sectors, and by maximizing the number of Olympic stories on any given day. Even squabbles between the two newspaper companies put the Olympic industry on the front page, and it was in the interest of neither to resort to a "sour grapes" position by ignoring an Olympic story.

Although it was understood that the newspapers' sponsorship rights were for marketing and promotional purposes only, and not for giving a particular company an exclusive news story, it soon became clear that there was a fine distinction between the two dimensions. In March 1999, the Australian Press Council and the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance expressed concerns about these arrangements, whereby the two News Limited papers received information about the torch and ticketing programs before other media—a situation that allegedly resembled "check-

book journalism” (Korporaal & Evans, 1999). At that time, the particular controversy concerned News Limited’s announcement of the Olympic torch design, a story that Knight claimed was an Olympic promotion, and not a news item. Fairfax’s director of group publishing, Robert Whitehead, revealed that his company had declined to enter into an agreement similar to News Limited’s: “We refuse to buy editorial exclusives. The notion is anathema to a free press. Fairfax papers are the only ones now able to provide balanced, objective Games coverage” (Whitehead quoted in Coultan & Evans, 1999).

Discussing these issues on an Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) radio program, a journalist for News Limited’s *Australian* assured listeners that, regardless of one paper’s ownership of a particular SOCOG property, Olympic organizers had no influence over the editorial “slant” that a news story took (King, 1998). Of course, it would be hard to imagine that a newspaper company, having spent millions of dollars on exclusive rights to promote the torch relay, would then permit its journalists to criticize that particular “Olympic property” by drawing attention to the Anglo-Celtic overrepresentation in the list of escort runners’ names that appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*’s February 28, 2000 supplement, “Tickets to History.”

The division of media marketing rights did not prevent Fairfax or News Limited from capitalizing on Olympic news at every opportunity. As was the case during the bid process, they used their “value-in-kind” contributions to good effect, by regularly offering special supplements, glossy posters, souvenir programs, and so forth, to mark various points on the Olympic dateline: 1,000 days to go, 500 days to go. On June 7, 2000, for example, the *Herald* published a eight-page section, “100 Days to Go,” which also appeared as a special supplement to the *New Zealand Herald*, the *West Australian*, *The Age (Melbourne)*, *USA Today*, as well as in the *Herald*’s Sydney rival, the *Daily Telegraph*.

In a classic ambush marketing (illegal use of Olympic words and symbols) coup, Qantas—which was *not* the official Olympic airline—managed to occupy one quarter of the *Herald*’s supplement, with a full page Qantas ad and a full page ad for the One World airline alliance, which included Qantas. International recognition of this airline proved a major challenge for Ansett, a less recognized airline that was the official Olympic carrier. For example, as late as September 2000, after Ansett’s ad campaign had been running for years, the *Guardian*’s (U.K.) Sydney-based Olympic reporter Patrick Barkham asserted that Qantas was an Olympic sponsor (Barkham, 2000b).

Over three years before the Games began, the *Herald* started publishing a half-page weekly feature titled *Insight*, which presented “official information” from SOCOG. The section focused on promoting souvenir sales and auctions of Olympic “collectables,” as well as advertising test events, profiling Olympic athletes and sports, and recruiting volunteers and paid workers.

Some of the early versions of *Insight* were sprinkled with inspirational thoughts from Olympics' founding father, Pierre de Coubertin. On June 21, 1997 (p. 15), for example, it carried his pronouncement that "Humanity must take from the heritage of the past all the force it can use to build the future. Olympism is one of those forces." Printed in the adjacent column was a news item on the probable selection of Bondi Beach for Olympic beach volleyball competition—a particularly ironic juxtaposition in view of subsequent developments that proved that "all the force" of the Olympic industry was indeed powerful—more powerful than the widespread community opposition to the Bondi Beach stadium, as shown in chapter 8.

By 2000, the half-page had expanded to a weekly three- or four-page section called *Spirit 2000*. The cover routinely carried a "feel-good" story, and the *Herald's* Olympic editor Matthew Moore and others presented more critical Olympic coverage on an inside page, where stories about the venues and the sporting events also appeared. Overall, as Moore argued, this weekly section was largely devoted to celebrating Olympic athletes and sport, a fact that some critics of the *Herald's* investigative journalism tended to ignore.

On November 19, 1999, with three hundred days to go, the *Herald* launched its SYDNEYGAMES newsletter, available electronically upon request anywhere in the world. The newsletter included most of the content of the weekly *Spirit 2000* section, as well as the top Olympic news stories of the day, and, by mid-2000, was posted four or five times per week.

OLYMPIC COVERAGE IN 1996: HALFWAY TO 2000

The *Herald's* coverage of power struggles between the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC), SOCOG, and the New South Wales (NSW) government in 1996 provided clear evidence of support for corporate interests. In the original terms of the Olympic bid, the NSW government was to provide over \$1b for Olympic construction and to make good any losses, and the AOC was to receive 90 percent of any SOCOG profits to fund Australia's Olympic athlete program. Both the NSW government and the AOC had veto power over SOCOG budget. In March 1996, with higher than expected television revenues, Michael Knight sought a change in the agreement so that the NSW government could gain a share of any profit over the estimated \$26m—which in March was upgraded to \$210m if other budgeted costs were kept in line.¹

¹Figures are given in Australian dollars unless otherwise specified. Before and during the Sydney 2000 Olympics, the Australian dollar was valued at between 55 and 65 cents U.S.

According to *Herald* reporter Glenda Korporaal, John Coates, the AOC, and the IOC were correct in wanting to “avoid Games revenues being used to pay for long-term facilities for the State” (Korporaal, 1996a, 32), a contradictory statement in view of the way in which the legacy of Olympic facilities is routinely held up as a major benefit to the host city, state, and country. Korporaal went on to criticize Knight for “throwing the spotlight” on the AOC’s control of 90 percent of the profit and for “aiding the public perception that the State Government is generously shouldering the financial burden.” An AOC official, less subtly, complained that the government was trying to portray the AOC as “money-hungry bastards” (Korporaal, 1996a; Korporaal & Vass, 1996). It is worth noting that AOC assets were at that time valued at \$23m, including a \$7.3m investment in a Queensland casino (Korporaal, 1996c). One might reasonably argue that Knight, as an elected representative, was only doing his job by trying to gain a bigger share of profits for taxpayers, but it clearly disrupted the corporate agenda to mention the government’s considerable financial involvement—approximately one third of the budget at that time—in the same breath as the AOC profit. (By 2000, the NSW treasurer reported that the government’s contribution had increased to one-half.)

Strategically placed adjacent to Korporaal’s piece was an article on Atlanta’s tight budget, absence of government funding, and the expectation of zero profit for its organizing committee (Turner, 1996). In a follow-up story a few days later, yet another article on Atlanta’s financial problems reported how added security for the 1996 Games was expected to cost the American taxpayer an extra \$1b (Games dollars, 1996). Presumably, the reader was expected to admire Sydney’s superior financial planning and to be grateful that Australian taxpayers would have any share of the profit. On the profit issue, the AOC ultimately agreed to give up the power of veto on SOCOG matters in exchange for a guaranteed \$100m of profits, thus forgoing the earlier 90 percent profit figure. Korporaal praised John Coates’s business sense in going for the guaranteed sum rather than the unknown percentage (Korporaal, 1996b).

But the issue was not laid to rest. *Herald* headlines two months later were proclaiming “Sydney \$375m Olympic Blow-out” and “Public Funds for Games up by \$400m” (Humphries, 1996a; Vass, 1996). Failure of anticipated private sector funding (\$65m) for several major facilities was blamed, and unexpected costs in environmental cleanup to the Homebush Bay site were also cited—a fairly predictable blame-shifting to the troublesome environmentalist lobby. Knight was quoted as defending the additional \$400m in public funding as taxpayers’ investment in the future. By July 1996, the government estimate stated that the Olympic Village would cost at least \$300m less than the original projection, thus significantly decreasing the cost to taxpayers (Humphries, 1996b; Korporaal, 1996d).

Lest the corporate sector be offended by the implication that it was shirking its responsibility, an article under the same “Olympic blow-out” banner explained that the NSW Registered Clubs Association, which was expected to fund the \$23.2m Olympic velodrome, had been suffering from a “misunderstanding” about its right to use Olympic symbols for marketing purposes (Wright, 1996). Above this report, the *Herald* strategically placed an article on IOC rules concerning the promotion of Sydney 2000 in Atlanta, and drew attention to the Atlanta Organizing Committee’s “unusually aggressive tactics” designed to protect sponsors and licensees from illegal use of Olympic words and symbols (known as “ambush marketing”) (Clark, 1996). What was not mentioned in the *Herald*’s coverage was the fact that, one year earlier, in March 1995, the Australian Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee had heard submissions that called for equally “aggressive tactics” in order to protect the IOC’s and AOC’s copyright and trade monopolies over Olympic properties.

Green Games or Empty Promises?

One of the much vaunted features of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Bid was the promise of a Green Games, with Olympic facilities designed according to environmentally sustainable development (ESD) principles. Early in 1996, Olympic environmental planning came under attack from a Sydney physics professor, who claimed that lack of design integration between the projects at the Homebush Olympic site had jeopardized the proposed solar-thermal energy plant and diluted the commitment to a Green Games. This was followed by scathing criticism of the design plan by a landscape architecture professor. The *Herald* devoted extensive coverage to the “expert” critiques and a headline titled “Games Vision ‘Boring Mediocrity’ ” spanned six columns at the top of the page, even though the story was only two columns wide. The article only briefly summarized the Olympic Coordination Authority’s (OCA) denials of all these allegations (Beale, 1996; Byrne, 1996). The adjacent article, although covered by the same banner headline, reported on the winners of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Gold Medal Awards—a transparent attempt to link the winning firm of Denton, Corker, and Marshall to the Olympic project. This group of experts was lavishly praised for their achievements, and much was made of their unique strengths in large commercial projects (Susskind, 1996a).

Two weeks later in the *Herald*, architects again attacked the government for focusing “too narrowly” on price in their tendering of the design work for Olympic buildings. One of the complaints came from the same firm of Denton, Corker, and Marshall, who stated that their (presumably

superior) standards of work did not allow for cost-cutting, and that therefore they had not been in contention for the tender—a criticism that portrayed the government as bargain-hunters who had missed the opportunity to use the country’s top design team. This time, the *Herald* reported the government architect’s response in more detail, explaining that the preference for NSW firms was aimed at boosting the local building industry and architecture profession (Susskind, 1996b). Overall, however, more favorable attention was paid to the critics than to the government’s legitimate concerns with cost.

As might be expected, media treatment of environmentalists was not uniformly positive. It occasionally served the antigovernment agenda to give them air time—especially if the environmentalist was a university-based “expert” rather than a grassroots activist—but it more often served the corporate agenda to blame them for problems with the Olympic budget and timetable. For example, in a heated attack on environmentalists (as well as human rights advocates, union leaders and others), an article in the business section of News Limited’s *Australian* provided an unfettered forum for a “leading construction industry heavyweight” to lash out at all of the so-called pressure groups whose interventions, he alleged, would delay progress at the Olympic construction site. According to this Olympic project management director, environmental issues could be taken too far, with the result that the enterprise becomes “uncommercial.” He concluded by warning that unpredictable delays cost money and asking sarcastically, “Who knows if there is someone worried about immigration or the fact that perhaps there are not enough female workers on the site?” (Allen, 1996, B3).

Dominated by the views of one member of the corporate sector, this article would leave readers with the impression that environmental and human rights concerns were alien to the Sydney Olympic project, even though at the time of the bid preparation, supporters boasted of Australia’s superior human rights record (in contrast to China’s) and Greenpeace endorsement of (part of) the Sydney 2000 design. There were, in fact, several environmental health issues associated with Olympic construction, apart from the obvious problems associated with remediating the Homebush Bay Olympic site, which at this time were still mostly unknown to the media and the public (see Lenskyj, 2000, chapter 8). Air, water, and noise pollution were significant problems in the Sydney metropolitan area, with commercial aviation and heavy industry in and around the region largely responsible for the problem. Early in 1996, the *Herald* presented a series of articles on pollution, while aircraft noise, which was the subject of a commission of inquiry, was reported on an almost daily basis. A higher incidence of respiratory problems had been reported in the western suburbs, where most Olympic events were to take place. It was therefore

particularly hypocritical that, in his self-congratulatory account of the bid, McGeoch attempted to discredit the Beijing bid on these same grounds: that is, that air pollution and dust storms in the Beijing area produced “a strong risk of sinus and bronchial problems as athletes were trying to perform at their physical peak” (McGeoch & Korporaal, 1994, 226).

The details about Beijing came from a research report that McGeoch had commissioned to uncover, and to present, in as unfavorable a light as possible, all of the problems with the Beijing bid. It was McGeoch’s proposed strategy for releasing the document, rather than the document itself, which was more disturbing. Intent on mounting a public relations campaign that could not be “sourced back to the Sydney bid,” he enlisted the services of a London public relations expert (to whom he referred as his “private weapon”). The plan was to fund a human rights group in London to speak out about China issues and then to publish a book based on the research report—with none of this to be linked to the Sydney bid. The NSW government got wind of the campaign, which they correctly perceived as a threat to Australia-China relations, and McGeoch was forced to abandon the plan. It was clear that he was more concerned about “the millions of dollars in corporate money riding on [the bid’s] performance” than about the ethics of the situation or the implications for international relations (McGeoch & Korporaal, 1994, 233). Although little was made of this scheme when the book was first released in 1994, it was examined in detail five years later, as the IOC scandal unfolded, in a special *Herald* report titled “Breaking China” (Ryle & Hughes, 1999).

Drugs: Demonizing “Other” Countries’ Athletes

The predictable pattern in Australian media reports on the use of performance-enhancing drugs in Olympic sport was strongly evident in the period leading up to the 1996 Games. The uncovering of “drug cheats” from Communist countries and big sporting powers such as the United States was hailed as a step forward in the struggle for “clean” international sporting competition, and the culprits were presumed guilty until proven otherwise. Chinese female swimmers and their famous muscular physiques were a favorite target, and the establishment of a “rebel world swimming association” to counter the international swimming federation’s alleged inactivity on the Chinese “problem” was sympathetically reported (Hutcheon, 1996; Magnay, 1996a).

However, when Australian athletes tested positive for banned substances, the media tended to treat them as innocent victims. At a 1995 international competition, swimmer Samantha Riley was found to have taken a prohibited prescription headache drug, and, while Scott Volkers, the coach

who provided it, was banned for four years (subsequently reduced to six months), Riley escaped with only a strong warning. (Volkers's ban conveniently ended a few days before the team left for Atlanta.) Both pleaded ignorance that the drug contained a banned substance. A July 1996 report on drug testing in the *Weekend Australian* revisited the "ignorance" and "innocents abroad" defenses with sympathetic references to Riley, and warnings that the ingredients in medications purchased overseas might differ from an Australian product with the same name (Jenkins, 1996).

When track athlete Dean Capobianco tested positive to the steroid Stanazolol during pre-Olympic competition in the Netherlands in May 1996, Australian sport officials managed to keep the issue out of the media until July 16. Media response was immediate: on July 17 and 18, the *Herald* had two front page stories, a front page opinion piece, an editorial, and two pages of background articles. These included an unsympathetic chronicle of his performance since 1988, peppered with phrases like "immature race," "lucky to be selected," "a dreadful heat," "sluggish," and "bad form"—a not-so subtle message that he wasn't a medal contender anyway (Dates of dignity and despair, 1996). On the sympathetic side, other articles reported on the "sabotage defense" and interviews with his lawyer, his coach and, finally, his mother—all protesting his innocence.

Jeff Wells's opinion piece, tellingly titled "Capo falls to white man's burden," appeared on the front page rather than in Wells's usual place in the sport section (Wells, 1996). The caption referred to Capobianco's perceived potential as the world's fastest White man in the 400m race; Wells implied that he had disappointed (presumably White) Australians by getting caught. The "fastest man" title took on further significance in light of ongoing debates about the particular running event that would determine that status.

One *Herald* article made much of the "official gag" and the "legal stranglehold" whereby the AOC and John Coates prohibited the Australian team from talking to the press about Capobianco on threat of expulsion from the Games. Near the end, the article finally explained that the AOC Athletes' Agreement, already signed by all team members, forbade talk about any matter apart from their own performance (Magnay & Blake, 1996). However, the *Herald* failed to report that Coates had ignored infringements of the agreement by Australian swimmer Nicole Stevenson just one week earlier, when she had aired her views on the drug habits of the Chinese women swimmers (Magnay, 1996c). It is also relevant that Samantha Riley's press conference—which, according to the *Herald's* editorial, was Australia's response to Chinese sport officials' underhand attempts to "exploit" the Riley incident—had been held one day before the Capobianco controversy became public (Testing, 1996).

Faced with a “decidedly sympathetic” international press, Riley had duly avoided answering questions about drugs and had focused on her own performance and prospects (Magnay, 1996d). Finally, maintaining the illusion of self-criticism, *Herald* reporter Patrick Smith discussed how Australia risked being labeled either *hypocritical* or *naive* by criticizing drug cheats in other countries while suffering the embarrassment of positive tests for two of its own athletes, Riley and Capobianco (Smith, 1996). In 1996, however, this kind of commentary was rarely found in the Australian mass media.

THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD AS OLYMPIC CRITIC

The editorial sector of the *Herald* prided itself on having developed a culture of editorial independence, codified in the late 1980s in a seven-point charter; current Olympic editor Matthew Moore, formerly head of the staff union and a political reporter, had been active in the campaign to establish this autonomy. There were, of course, continual battles with management, owners, and shareholders, but, by the mid-1990s, *Herald* journalists generally experienced no managerial opposition to legitimate news stories that were critical of the government and Olympic organizers, as long as they were accurate and balanced.

This is not to suggest that there was no criticism or unhappiness on the part of Olympic organizers, as the experiences of the *Herald's* environment editor, Murray Hogarth, demonstrated. He had first uncovered evidence of environmental contamination at the Homebush Bay Olympic site while he was preparing an ABC-TV *Four Corners* documentary in 1995. Starting work as a *Herald* journalist in 1996, he continued to investigate these issues, with the environmental groups Greenpeace Australia and Green Games Watch 2000 serving as important resources. His subsequent *Herald* articles revealed how Olympic and government officials had kept the dioxin contamination problem under wraps since 1992 in order not to harm the Olympic bid (see Lenskyj, 2000; chapter 8).

The Environment Protection Authority's investigations vindicated Hogarth by showing that Olympic organizers had indeed breached the regulations—but not before he had borne the brunt of Olympic boosters' “extreme displeasure” along with the predictable *unpatriotic* and *unAustralian* labels. One former ministerial adviser threatened Hogarth with lawsuits and discreditation, calling him “the last toxic site on the list to be cleaned up” (Hogarth, 1998, 102).

Overall, Hogarth viewed the *Herald's* early 1990s boosterism of the Olympic bid and preparations as atypical, and the tougher approach to Olympic issues after 1998 as indicative of its usual uncompromising editorial approach. He acknowledged that management may have been

uncomfortable dealing with the conflict between the paper's critical content and its role as an Olympic sponsor, but reported that he had experienced "no suggestion of pressure" not to run his stories (Hogarth, 1999). Moore agreed that, while there was extensive debate, there was no managerial pressure to stop writing critical stories (Moore, 2000d).

Of course, from Olympic organizers' point of view, critiques in Fairfax newspapers were to some extent "balanced" by News Limited's generally blind support for all things Olympic. Not only were Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* and Melbourne's *Herald-Sun* excellent sources of Olympic boosterism, but some of their columnists—Piers Ackerman, for example—could be relied upon to produce anti-Greenpeace diatribes whenever that group was poised to disclose a new environmental problem. In fact, some activists had reason to believe that the IOC's international spin doctors, Hill and Knowlton, may have been responsible for this pattern (Luscombe, 1999).

In the late 1990s, in the wake of the international Olympic bribery scandals, Sydney Olympic organizers generated their own new controversies over ticket sales, the marching band, and Kevan Gosper's torch relay blunder. In light of these events, one might reasonably expect that Olympic journalists would start identifying the *patterns* of secrecy, arrogance, and sense of entitlement on the part of Australian members of the "Olympic family," and to situate those patterns and values in the bigger context of the transnational Olympic industry. In practice, the mass media were much more likely to attack individuals than to examine the system that normalized dishonesty at all levels: from the IOC, national Olympic committees, and bid and organizing committees, to the so-called values of Olympic sport itself, which might be characterized as winning at all costs by whatever means necessary. "You don't win a silver medal, you lose gold"—the advertisement that Nike ran during the 1996 Games—summarized what was, for many, the most salient value of Olympic sporting competition.

Admittedly, some Australian Olympic reporters had limited experience in the area, and lacked the time as well as the background knowledge to be able to write about the big social issues underlying the Olympics, or to draw the links between individuals and the system. Moreover, as Moore explained, a news story needed to reflect the concerns of readers, who were generally more interested in the impact the Olympics would have on their cities and their lives than in the broader philosophical and ideological questions (Moore, 2000d). From an international perspective, a Swedish Broadcasting Corporation radio journalist, who had been sent to Australia two years before the Games, reported that there was limited interest on the part of his Stockholm bosses in broader social issues such as homelessness in the Olympic city (Dennis, 2000).

With Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000 representing the first two consecutive Olympics to share a common language, as well as the more advanced

state of information technology in the late 1990s, Sydney journalists were in a better position to compare these two international events than their counterparts in other Olympic host cities in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet there was not widespread media interest in making these comparisons, except in the few instances where Sydney reporters tried to tap long-standing anti-American sentiments by identifying what they viewed as the shortcomings of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics as examples that Sydney should not follow.

Challenging Olympic Industry Secrecy: The FOI Route

In the early 1990s, with widespread support for the bid, and later for the Olympics, it appeared that most journalists and politicians simply accepted the alleged need for a high level of secrecy and confidentiality regarding the endorsement and host city contracts. Every company bidding for a Sydney 2000 contract had to sign a confidentiality agreement regarding every aspect of the process, and the NSW cabinet imposed a ban on Freedom of Information (FOI) requests for Olympic documents.

There were, however, several *Herald* journalists with well-developed investigative journalism skills, and in the late 1990s, their contributions helped to unveil a number of important Olympic industry secrets concerning Sydney 2000. In 1998, Moore decided to investigate Atlanta's 1996 Olympic contracts. Finding that there was a relatively high level of access to these documents, and that neither the American public nor American society seemed to have suffered any ill effects, he made more than ten FOI applications to Sydney's Olympic organizers to see if he could match this level of availability of information. It was soon clear that he could not do so, and, rather than appealing the FOI denials through the court—a route that occasionally produced a positive outcome for the *Herald*—he focused on the absurdity of the situation as his story. It was illuminating to discover that, in a country with a reputation for secrecy, the USA's FOI provisions were more generous than Australia's, a difference that Sydney's Olympic officials attributed to Australia's different traditions and mechanisms for ensuring fairness (M. Moore, 1998b).

On January 14, 1999, the auditor-general's *Performance Audit Review* of the June 1998 Olympic budget estimates was finally tabled in Parliament. The preface explained that the delays had been caused by the "unnecessary secrecy" surrounding Sydney 2000 preparations, most notably FOI exemptions of documents "central to the understanding of the State's obligations," and government agencies' criticism of the auditor-general's draft report for disclosing allegedly "commercially sensitive information." Tellingly, these agencies complained that they would have to answer "a large number of queries from the public" if detailed revenue and expense

estimates were released. Yes, the auditor-general responded, “It is true that accountability has costs. It is also true that avoiding accountability has potentially much larger costs” (Performance Audit Review, 1999, preface). Focusing on the secrecy issue, Moore reported that, in late 1998, the auditor-general had strongly criticized the OCA for denying the *Herald’s* FOI application for access to the criteria used in selecting successful tenders, and had claimed that OCA was breaching public sector guidelines, including those set down by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (M. Moore, 1999a).

Three Sydney 2000 documents—the host city contract, the endorsement, and amendments—were eventually made public early in 1999, a few months after Moore’s story and the release of the audit report, and, not coincidentally, at the height of the IOC bribery scandal. Interestingly, although Moore found through his earlier inquiries that the IOC had no objections to releasing this kind of information, Sydney Olympic organizers claimed that it did (M. Moore, 1998a). For its part, SOCOG simply stated, in a February 10 press release (SOCOG, 1999b), that the board had approved the release of the contract “now that all parties had given approval”—a mere six years after the event. No mention was made of FOI appeals or media pressure. Just one month later, the *Herald* was reporting on SOCOG’s latest creative strategy to maintain a “state of secrecy”: by claiming that its financial documents belonged to its (private) internal auditors, SOCOG ensured exemption from FOI provisions, which only applied to government bodies. The move was criticized by the auditor-general and the NSW ombudsman, both of whom noted that government agencies were increasingly “contracting out” of FOI laws by using private firms—involving close to \$2m worth of business in NSW alone (Clark, 1999).

Other information on Olympic-related decisions—for example, the losing bids for the stadium, village, railway station, and Superdome—were not released. As Moore argued, hundreds of millions of dollars were involved in decisions that the government made in complete secrecy, in much the same way as publicly funded infrastructure projects such as the Eastern Distributor (expressway) were approved. Taxpayers were expected to accept all of these decisions on faith, whereas Moore believed that a public consultation process might have produced cheaper and more practical proposals. An April 1998 *Herald* editorial had expressed the same concerns, concluding, “There is a significant problem of transparency and accountability with the entire tendering process of the Sydney Olympics” (Politics and the Olympics, 1998).

It was clearly in the public interest for Olympic organizers first, to engage in a transparent decision-making process, and, second, to facilitate media coverage of that process. However, with agendas and decisions of all board and committee meetings regarded as confidential, public interest

was ill-served, and Moore was justly critical of SOCOG and OCA policies that prevented journalists from doing their jobs properly. In Moore's experience, the minister would often leave a board meeting, issue a press release and announcement, and postpone revealing the full details to some future date when the board deemed it appropriate to do so. By March 2000, formal press conferences were replaced with "background briefings" where no television cameras or radio microphones were allowed (Peatling, 2000a). Such practices no doubt contributed to public and media skepticism.

Despite this level of secrecy, *Herald* journalists—Matthew Moore, Michael Evans, and Jacqueline Magnay, in particular—were able to keep some of the key financial and social impact issues on the front pages, and to ensure that readers heard from community leaders as well as Olympic industry officials. SOCOG's Social Impact Advisory Committee (SIAC) included a number of community representatives who, in their other roles, were leaders of social service organizations: for example, Gary Moore, director of the NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS), and the Reverend Harry Herbert, director of the Board for Social Responsibility of the NSW Uniting Church. SOCOG obviously could not stop people like Moore and Herbert, or Aboriginal leaders Lowitja O'Donoghue and Charlie Perkins of SOCOG's National Indigenous Advisory Committee, from talking to the media, and their views were regularly reported.

Another Olympic Scandal: Tickets for the Rich

The right to promote and sell Olympic tickets was purchased by News Limited, and this company's papers included ticket application booklets from May 30, 1999 on. The *Herald* subsequently reported that News Limited owner Rupert Murdoch had initially stopped SOCOG's plans to use newsagents, Olympic retail outlets, and the Internet as additional distributors of the order forms, and a *Herald* editorial pointed to the ways in which News Limited's monopoly unduly mystified the already complicated ticket-ordering process, as well as exacerbating SOCOG's ongoing problems of lack of transparency (Games time, 1999; Magnay & Moore, 1999).

In mid-1999, toward the end of the first cycle of ticket sales, SOCOG created the false impression that tickets were in short supply, even to the point of claiming that some events were almost sold out. Moore was skeptical of SOCOG's figures; in the case of baseball, for example, it was claimed that 96 percent of tickets were already sold—when even the 1996 Olympics, held in a baseball city and country, had not matched these sales.

The *Herald* filed an FOI request in early October 1999, seeking the release of information on the numbers of tickets sold to the public on a session-by-session basis during the first round of sales. Knight claimed

that, although he favored releasing the information, the other thirteen SOCOG board members did not, and the request was denied (Humphries & Jacobsen, 1999). A few days later, Knight was reported to have rejected calls for increased public scrutiny of SOCOG's board meetings, including publication of agendas and minutes. Despite the Salt Lake City precedent following the bribery investigations of 1998-1999, when most organizing committee meetings, as well as agendas, minutes, and reports, were open to the public, Knight resorted to the "commercial in confidence" argument, claiming that SOCOG board could not deal with private commercial matters if its meetings were public (M. Moore, 1999g).

On the ticket question, Moore subsequently published a controversial story about SOCOG's premium ticket option. Members of Sydney's exclusive social club, Tattersall's, had been offered between 300 and 400 guaranteed seats to the most popular events, without having to enter the public ballot system that had been advertised as the only method of securing such seats. Fortuitously, as Moore explained, the story appeared on the day that Knight and Hollway were appearing before a parliamentary hearing, with the result that SOCOG was finally forced to reveal the full details of the premium ticket scheme and to comply with FOI requests for a breakdown of ticket availability for every sport (M. Moore, 1999h, see chapter 5).

Herald journalists continued to experience problems with the dual sponsorship system, which converted news stories into products over which one newspaper company had exclusive marketing rights (Magnay & Moore, 1999). For example, on February 29, 2000, the *Herald* provided readers with details of the prices and availability of lower-priced Olympic Opportunity tickets, but only in its late edition because, as Moore explained, Fairfax had to "pinch it [the information] from the News Ltd *Telegraph*" (M. Moore, 2000a). In this particular instance, it was clearly in the public interest to maximize news coverage concerning affordable tickets to Olympic events, but commercial arrangements between the two major newspaper companies served Olympic industry interests first and foremost.

PRIVILEGING TELEVISION RIGHTS HOLDERS

Just as Olympic sport sets international standards and defines international sporting practices through sport federations and national Olympic committees, television largely dictates the actual staging of the Olympics. There was no dearth of examples from the Sydney Olympics:

- NBC's insistence on Bondi Beach as the best television venue for beach volleyball (see chapter 8)
- NBC's request that the overhead power lines and forty-eight electrical towers at Homebush Bay be removed and the cables put underground,

in order to improve television images; the NSW government contributed \$20m toward what Knight first called “a luxury we can’t afford” (O’Rourke, 2000)

- the positioning of the running track at the Olympic stadium resulting in winds that seriously impeded athletes’ performances, simply because television cameras needed a shadow-free main area, not facing the afternoon sun (Magnay, 1996b)
- NBC’s decision to protect its \$1.2b purchase of television rights by delaying all telecasts until evening prime time (since most of the network’s viewing audience lived in a time zone twelve to fifteen hours behind Sydney time)
- the IOC’s policy banning moving images or audio coverage via the Internet

The *Olympic Arrangements Act 2000* gave OCA ultimate authority regarding commercial broadcasting, telecasting, recording, or filming Olympic events or activities within or outside an Olympic venue or facility, or an Olympic live site. Approval was granted if OCA was satisfied that the process would not “adversely affect the organization or conduct . . . of commercial arrangements related to the Olympic Games.” (S.68(4)). A fine of up to \$250,000 could be imposed for unauthorized activities of this kind. A “person authorized by OCA” could, after giving direction to stop the activity, confiscate the equipment used for unauthorized filming. Magnetometer screening of all those admitted to Olympic venues, together with state-of-the-art camera surveillance systems, would detect hidden equipment and unauthorized filming.

The regulation was clearly intended to prohibit non-rights-holders from broadcasting from public areas of Olympic Park, although Olympic organizers also claimed that it was in the interests of security and public safety to minimize the number of video news crews in the area (Evans, 2000f). Major international broadcasters, including Cable News Network (CNN), Reuters, Associated Press (AP), Entertainment and Sports Programming (ESPN), Network and Fox, threatened legal action under international trade agreements that prohibited such restrictions. Although SOCOG’s special arrangements with sponsors such as NBC were exempt from the *NSW Trade Practices Act*, Australia, as a signatory to the World Trade Organization, was still subject to international trade provisions.

In its August 2000 briefing paper, *Liberty in the Olympic City*, the Public Interest Advocacy Center (PIAC) claimed that proposed restrictions on other media gave Olympic rights-holders unprecedented advantages, while at the same time posing an unreasonable restriction on freedom of speech and on Australians’ capacity to benefit from the Games (PIAC, 2000b). Like other critics, PIAC maintained that the Games’ media policy should maximize free-to-air coverage, a particular concern in light of

recent moves to extend rights to cable television companies so that more comprehensive Games coverage would be available for viewers willing to pay the additional cable costs.

Indeed, the Olympic Charter rule 59 required the organizing committee to implement “all necessary steps” in order “to ensure the fullest news coverage by the different media and the widest possible audience for the Olympic Games” (IOC, 1997, 75). Moreover, the IOC itself had the power to establish access rules for members of non-rights-holding radio and television organizations. Therefore, not too surprisingly, the IOC pressured SOCOG to modify its plan. SOCOG finally agreed to issue eight daily permits to be distributed among the one hundred forty non-rights-holders, and an additional eight daily permits for Australian television stations; a balloting system would determine which companies would be granted access on any given day. Live broadcasts from the Olympic site could only cover nonsport topics, and actual sport coverage was limited to two minutes, three times per day. At previous Olympics, non-rights-holders had been allowed to report from public areas for three minutes, three times per day.

The final arrangements apparently satisfied the IOC, whose August 3 press release announced its projections of record-breaking reach, coverage, and viewership for the Sydney Olympics. Nearly half of the international broadcasters were increasing their coverage over that of the 1996 Olympics, with the most significant increases—181 percent to 292 percent—for Australia, Canada, South Africa, China, Greece, and the United States. Finally, the news release reiterated its free-to-air policy (IOC, 2000b). In hindsight, however, it was clear that NBC suffered when the host city lay in a time zone fifteen hours ahead of American eastern time.

DANGEROUS VISITORS: NONACCREDITED MEDIA

In a less publicized aspect of the credentialing process, Sydney Olympic organizers made a serious attempt to avoid what they saw as Atlanta’s failure to “manage” the nonaccredited media. Popular wisdom, particularly in SOCOG and OCA circles, held that these journalists would arrive in Sydney determined to uncover controversial background stories, and Atlanta’s fate was seen as an example of an undesirable level of international “scrutiny” (*Performance Audit Review*, 1999). It was important, from the Olympic and tourism industry perspectives, to exercise some control over these roving reporters, and Tourism NSW proposed the novel solution of providing the expected 15,000 unaccredited print media with their own facility, the Sydney Media Center (SMC), in Sydney’s central business district at Darling Harbor. IOC regulations only required a media center for the 6,000 accredited print media, who were located at the Main

Press Center (MPC) at Olympic Park, and for the 12,000 accredited broadcast media and technicians working in the Sydney Olympic Broadcasting Organization.

In tourist trade jargon, it was important to assist these journalists “to find and file stories that are consistent with the destination positioning that Australia seeks to achieve. . . .” (Chalip, 2000, 3). This particular selling job was, in fact, a long-term project, having had its beginnings in 1989 during the early stages of the bid, with the Australian Tourist Commission’s (ATC) wooing of international journalists through the Visiting Journalists’ Program. Its aim was to produce “favorable publicity on Australia as a tourist destination,” and between 1998 and 2000, over 3,000 media writers and broadcasters were invited to Australia under the program, and almost \$2.3b worth of publicity was generated (ATC, 2000).

The NSW Department of State and Regional Development, Tourism NSW, the ATC, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade directed \$4m toward the SMC, which was estimated to cost \$8.2m; private funding provided the balance. The Sydney Harbor Foreshore Authority owned the property, which was slated for redevelopment after the Games “for residential, business and recreational purposes”—no doubt in keeping with its upscale neighbor, the Darling Harbor redevelopment. The goal of the SMC, according to the information in the Commonwealth Government’s media kit distributed in 2000, was “to inform media about Australia’s achievements, attractions, business and investment opportunities, tourism, lifestyle, arts and culture” and to “position” the country’s image as “a high tech, multicultural and sophisticated trading partner and exciting tourist destination.” On the same theme, lessons in “selling Australia and Sydney as tourist destinations” were, according to one source, a component of Sydney’s Olympic volunteer training program—presumably yet another attempt to reinforce the Olympic mantra that the host city would reap long-lasting tourism benefits (M. Evans, 1999d). And, outside of Sydney, Australian towns and cities hosting pre-Olympic training also hoped to capitalize on the tourist potential by encouraging international athletes to become “ambassadors” for them (Chalip, 2000). (In another example of the Olympic industry’s opportunistic use of athletes, the Media Institute instructed Canadian national swim team members on ways to promote the Toronto 2008 bid to the media while they were in Sydney for the Olympics (MacNeill, 2000).

The Sydney Media Center’s (SMC) facilities included a media conference room, internet access, a resource center, workstations, and hospitality facilities. It was open to any journalists who could demonstrate their affiliation with a media outlet. Members of Sydney’s Independent Media Center (IMC), an alternative Olympic news source, investigated accessibility to the SMC a few months before the Games. Finding that it only