

# Starting Strength

## The Olympic Games: Time to Stop

by

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The Olympics has turned from a celebration of human physical performance that once transcended global politics and popular culture into a propaganda event for the dominant interpretation of global politics and popular culture. It is no longer about athletics and who wins the athletic competition – it is now concerned with shaping our perceptions of what it means to compete with each other, and why we probably shouldn't celebrate winning at all. It has become an embarrassing mess for the entire human race, and it's time to stop wasting resources, time, and attention span on it.

There are two distinct problems: the Games themselves, and the media coverage of the Games, which shapes the public's perception of everything about them.

The Olympic Games were originally contested in ancient Greece, and consisted of a combination of athletics and equestrian events that derived primarily from the most practical of considerations of physical prowess – warfare. Various footraces, throwing contests, and jumping events comprised the ancient Games, which were held in the familiar four-year interval for about a thousand years.

Reconstituted in 1894, they have changed quite a bit over the past century. They now include three basic types of contests: 1.) games such as Golf, Baseball, Hockey, Soccer, and Basketball, where the athletes compete within the framework of a "score" generated within the rules of the game; 2.) artistic judged events such as gymnastics and diving, where the athletes attempt to get as close as possible to a standard for the contested movement developed by their governing organization, and judged for conformation to the standard by the consensus opinion of a panel of expert judges and 3.) athletic events such as the races, the heavy field events, and Weightlifting that generate an objective quantitatively measured score, and combat sports such as wrestling and fencing that generate a win or a loss.

Of these three types of contests, the athletics events display the greatest fidelity to the original idea of the Olympic Games. As far as I'm concerned, the addition of men's and women's Golf was the best indication of the developing intent of the IOC.

The arguments against the Olympics are important. The Olympics are no longer the most important event within most of the sports contested. The professional versions of the games events have their own world championships, at which the best athletes compete for Real Money, not just medals. All sports within the International Olympic Committee have their own annual World Championships,

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meets that happen more frequently than every four years and which form the basis for the training schedules of most athletes.

The Olympic Games are hideously expensive to host, and the taxpayers of the host nation are often left with a burdensome debt and several abandoned facilities for their trouble. In essence, Greece spent billions of dollars it didn't have to build facilities it doesn't need to host a competition for which NBC Sports could sell advertising.

There are basically two types of competitors at the Olympic Games: those who have been caught using performance enhancing drugs (PEDs) and those who have not been caught using PEDs. This is true of all human athletic competition, so somebody please tell Bob Costas that when the stakes are even *marginally* high competitive people will do anything it takes to win.

Is this cheating? I guess this depends on your definition of cheating, and not everybody has the same definition, because the concept itself is quite subjective. If you are offended by the idea that essentially everybody entered in the Olympics every four years has taken or is taking some type of a very wide selection of substances that improve athletic performance, then you'd better find something besides high-level sports to watch. Sorry, but this is the truth of the matter, sincere denials notwithstanding.

Possibly in reaction to this, NBC Sports, the de facto owner of the Olympic Games, just doesn't include the "testosterone" sports in their coverage – unless there is a severe injury that looks very bad (good) on TV. Swimming is fine (no hairy men), all women's sports are fine (no hairy men), gymnastics, ditto (basically a children's sport), skiing is okay (hair doesn't show through lycra), and the equestrian events are just fine (horses are innocent even if hairy). What you will not see are more than one or two Weightlifters, shot-putters, hammer throwers, or discus throwers. Javelins are too pointy, as are epees and sabers, and such weapon-y things are *threatening*. Basically, you get to see activities you would personally enjoy on a Sunday afternoon – you know, wholesome stuff without the slightest whiff of meanness, bullying, or testosterone.

These errors of omission are quite thoroughly intentional, and are designed by the people who present the vast majority of most people's exposure to the Olympics, 99% of whom are not watching the internet feeds. The Media controls the popular culture, and control is, by definition, not accidental. If you lose in the preliminaries of the 100m Freestyle, you get out of the pool and leave, and everybody's fine – you went *swimming*; if you lose in Freestyle Wrestling, you were *beaten*. And we just can't have that.

But even more offensive to sensible people everywhere is the abject silliness of the media coverage of the Olympic Games. The focus of the coverage has shifted from the sports and the athletes' performances to the human interest stories that are, at best, extremely peripheral to the contests. My impression, and probably yours too, is that NBC Sports is far more concerned about the uplifting story of the athlete's mother who overcame cancer, the athlete's brother who is overcoming a learning disability, the athlete's gender-fluid husband who is overcoming workplace discrimination, or the athlete's dog who was just yesterday hit by a gas-guzzling SUV driven by a White Man who was on his way to the Board of Directors meeting of a Private Company that contributes to Global Warming than about the *athlete's* performance in the sport it is ostensibly covering. The feel-good story of two women, one of whom is a rugby player and the other a stadium manager, who got engaged on the field after a rugby game following a two-year romance in Brazil (we seem to know a lot about this) apparently justifies the incessant, annoying, repetitive commercial breaks, which have generated NBC a reported \$1.2 billion in ad sales for the 2016 Games.

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The time has come to move past the Olympic Games, and to move past NBC's attempts to use them as a restructuring device for society even while they make billions of dollars in the process. As the internet develops, NBC will become obsolete, but until then, do yourself a big favor and do not allow them to ride the coattails of sports into your brain.

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