

SARANTAKES, NICHOLAS EVAN. *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xvi+340. Notes, bibliography, index, and photos. \$28.99 pb., \$90.00 cb.

The father of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, believed that keeping the games free from politics was crucial for their survival. He promoted an Olympic ideal in which international sport would serve as a tool for the establishment and maintenance of peaceful relations between nations. Nicholas Sarantakes maintains Coubertin's point of view in his recounting of the controversy surrounding the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the American boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

Sarantakes' detailed account of the boycott focuses on the Carter administration's thought processes and course of action in carrying out the boycott. His work provides an interesting snapshot of Carter's unique style of diplomacy, which Sarantakes characterizes as being marked by leadership that was "ineffective" and "counterproductive" as well as being plagued by "poor judgment" (p. 281). Arguing against the works of David B. Kanin, Martin Barry Vinokur, and to a degree, Derick L. Hulme, Jr., Sarantakes sees the boycott as a complete and utter failure. He places the blame for the "ineffective" boycott on Carter's shoulders saying he "failed as trustee" (p. 281). At the heart of his study is the story of, in his words, an American presidential cabinet's attempt to destroy the Olympic movement because of their ignorance of international sport and failure to move the boycott proposal through the proper channels. However, as Sarantakes points out, a majority of the American public, Congress, and many foreign officials favored the boycott—a point that takes the teeth out of his criticism of the Carter administration.

As a work of diplomatic history, Sarantakes also takes on Melvyn P. Leffler by arguing that Carter killed détente by boycotting the Moscow games, rejecting Leffler's contention that Brezhnev killed détente by invading Afghanistan (p. 282). Sarantakes also sees the boycott as an abuse of the Olympic games as well as a cruel and unnecessary punishment for American athletes. While relying heavily on Allen Guttman's and Alfred Erich Senn's work on the Olympic movement, Sarantakes' extensive use of Carter's presidential materials provides an original contribution that highlights the intricacies of the politics surrounding the Olympic movement.

His book effectively takes the reader by the hand and leads them through what could otherwise be a very confusing story, involving numerous politicians and the actions of many countries. Readers will surely appreciate Sarantakes' clarity in detailing the events leading up to the boycott. However, his narrative does stray from the central theme of the book. Such is the case with his first chapter, "Miracle on Ice." It is an exciting read, but an explanation of its relevancy to the boycott of the summer Olympics would help the book seem more complete. There is also an unnecessary chapter detailing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

While admitting that it is impossible to keep the games entirely free of politics, Sarantakes argues that the Olympics have been a "positive force in world affairs" (p. 261).

An example that Sarantakes goes back to on numerous occasions to illustrate this point is the success that Jesse Owens had in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. He contends that Owens' success was powerful enough to refute the Nazi myth of Aryan supremacy and to cause Hitler to suffer "reverses" (p. 20). Readers may take issue with the use of the 1936 games for comparison since the circumstances were significantly different from those in 1980. Some posit that a major factor in Carter's decision to boycott was his desire to reinvent himself as tough on Communism, specifically in an election year; it would have been interesting to see Sarantakes' insights into this theory. It would have also been interesting to see more Russian sources incorporated into the text. Regardless, *Dropping the Torch* is an engaging read that makes a meaningful contribution to the fields of sport history and diplomatic history. Sarantakes' use of the Olympic games as a lens for understanding foreign policy is a fresh and exciting perspective. Overall, he does an excellent job in demonstrating the importance of interrogating sporting events for the greater meaning they reveal about the wider world.

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SKIPPER, JOHN C. *Charlie Gehringer: A Biography of the Hall of Fame Tigers Second Baseman*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2008. Pp. vii+201. Photos, box scores, endnotes, bibliography, and index. \$29.95 pb.

Hammerin' Hank Aaron's feats, moniker, and given name ultimately roll into one and the same in baseball history and mythology, the way we are used to with our larger-than-life heroes: a John Henry of the diamond, beating back all comers, hammer in hand. Similarly so for someone like Walter Johnson, whose "Big Train" nickname is evocative and imposing enough to imagine a generation of batters cowering in the box like John Kruk at the 1993 All-Star Game. But what of someone known—albeit complementarily, for his perceived flawless fielding—as "The Mechanical Man" and as baseball's answer to (silent) Calvin Coolidge: what to do with the Charlie Gehringers of the world? We celebrate them just the same, for their brilliance on the field, regardless of their star power or aspirations outside the baselines.

This is the design of John Skipper's *Charlie Gehringer: A Biography of the Hall of Fame Tigers Second Baseman*, and for someone who actively sidestepped the spotlight, Gehringer's career is well documented and researched in this quick, but thorough, study. Notably, Skipper intimates that while Gehringer's still waters may not necessarily run deep, they were also not shallow. It is doubtful, for example, that many other Hall of Fame inductees curiously hinted at ambivalence as Gehringer did, when he answered that he "probably would" on his biographical questionnaire to the prompt, "If you had it all to do over, would you play professional baseball?"—a complexity underscored by Gehringer's skipping his Hall of Fame induction altogether, choosing to bypass the spectacle and focus instead on his imminent nuptials. Clearly, then, Gehringer is not in the mold of most decidedly iconic and godlike Hall of Famers about whom we read. In this work, Skipper