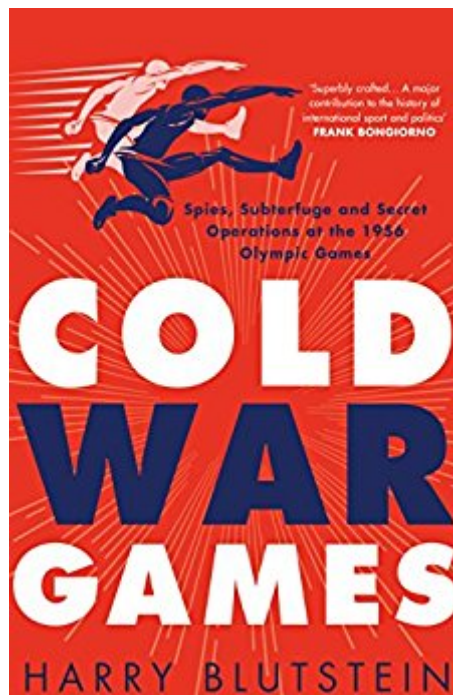




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Cold War Games: Spies, Subterfuge And Secret Operations At The 1956 Olympic Games



Synopsis

The 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games have become known as the "friendly games"™, but East-West rivalry ensured that they were anything but friendly. The bloody semi-final water polo match between the USSR and Hungary provides just one example of how sport and politics mixed during the Cold War. Cold War Games shows vividly how the USSR and US exploited the Melbourne Olympic Games for propaganda, turning athletic fields, swimming pools and other sporting venues into battlefields in which each fought for supremacy. The Melbourne Olympics also marked a turning point. For the first time, the USSR beat the United States by winning the most medals, which Khrushchev hailed as a major victory in the Cold War. The Melbourne Olympics were held in the shadow of the Hungarian revolution, which broke out a month earlier. Eisenhower's former Cold War advisor, CD Jackson, directed a clandestine operation in Melbourne to encourage communist athletes to defect. A total of 46 athletes defected, despite the efforts by secret agents attached to the teams from the communist bloc. Many of the defectors went to the US and participated in the Freedom Tour, which the State Department exploited for propaganda. Cold War Games also tells the love story between Czechoslovak discus thrower, Olga Fikotová and American hammer thrower, Hal Connolly, and their struggle to overcome Cold War politics to marry. New information from ASIO files and newly discovered documents from archives in the USSR, US and Hungary reveal other secret operations in Melbourne that confirm that the 1956 Olympics were undoubtedly the first Cold War Olympics.

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Customer Reviews

The modern Olympic movement was the brainchild not of a Greek but of a French nobleman: Baron Pierre de Coubertin. He announced his vision of a revived Olympics in 1894, in the course of an international congress in Paris on the theme of amateurism in sport, and the first modern Olympic Games were held in Greece in 1896, when 11 nations competed. Both the ancient and modern Olympic games have been subject to political pressures. A sacred truce, initially of one and later of three months' duration, forbade the entry of armies into Elean territory and ordered safe passage through any state for all travellers to and from the ancient games but this truce didn't stop wars: Sparta was fined for attacking Elean territory in 420 BC, and Arcadians even invaded the Olympic sanctuary itself in 364. The modern Olympic Games have been exploited for their propaganda value (Berlin, 1936); had black power salutes (in Mexico, 1968); boycotts (notably Moscow in 1980 and Los Angeles in 1984) and even a massacre (in Munich, 1972). Harry Blutstein's *Cold War Games* (not to be confused with Toby C. Rider's book of the same name) focuses on the 1956 Melbourne Games, which were billed as the 'friendly games' but which were anything but, not only given intense East-West rivalry but also because of the Hungarian Uprising poisoning relations between Hungary and the Soviet Union to such an extent that one had the 'blood in the water' match, when the two sides met in the water polo semi-final (the Hungarians defeating the Soviets 4-0, and going on to win gold). The latter story is quite well known - not least because it is the subject of an excellent documentary, *Freedom's Fury* and a superb feature film, *Children of Glory* - but Blutstein retells it with aplomb. Although the water polo clash represents the centerpiece of Blutstein's book he has much more to say about the mixture of sport and politics at Melbourne, and is careful and, as far as one can tell, wholly successful, in disentangling the truth from the propaganda, by critically examining not only the secondary sources but also the evidence of participants, spectators and journalists (although scholars would doubtless prefer that evidence to be more formally footnoted). In short, this highly readable history deserves a wide readership.

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