



The Hellenic Society Prometheas

Newsletter 35

September 2004

Dear Friends,

Welcome back from your vacation!

We hope you had a chance to enjoy the Olympic Games! For this month's newsletter we have gathered a number of interesting articles published both before the beginning of the Olympics and after their successful conclusion. They reflect the skepticism of the world about the ability of the Greeks to organize such an event, about the security, Athens' traffic, Athens' pollution, high temperatures, non-functioning... toilets, etc, and later an utmost praise, apologies to Greece, regrets, and in some instances, shame for the damage they have caused.

Please be reminded that the first **Kafeneio** of the season will take place at *St. Catherine's Greek Orthodox Church* in Arlington, VA, at 7:30 pm on Sept 24 . Join us for an evening of fun and entertainment. Bring your family, friends, your "tavli" and enjoy delicious mezethes, ouzo, wine, sweets and Greek coffee in a relaxed and friendly setting with live Greek music by the popular group **Achilleas and Co**. An announcement providing more details will be mailed soon.

Misc Articles of Interest

July 23, 2004

ART REVIEW

The Olympics as They Were

By GRACE GLUECK

If boxing and wrestling today seem a tad on the brutal side, consider pankration, an ancient Olympic sport that was a model of dirty fighting. A no-holds-barred combination of the two, it allowed choking, scratching, slapping, kicking, punching the genitals, leg tripping, finger bending and flipping an opponent overhead. A judge watched over the two opponents, ready with a stick to strike the perpetrator of fouls like biting and eye-gouging.

The sport, if such it can be called, was added to the Olympic program about 75 years after the Games began, according to historians, in 776 B.C. And it is vividly depicted in

sculptures and vase painting of the era, along with more refined contests like running, chariot racing, discus and javelin throwing, long jumping and others, including the pentathlon, a combination of five events performed in one day.

Three current museum displays, one tangential, are presented in tune with next month's Olympics in Athens, the first to which the Greek city has played host since the Games were revived in the 19th century. The most comprehensive, in terms of exhibits and catalog, is "Games for the Gods: The Greek Athlete and the Olympic Spirit," a splendid survey dealing with the spirit and substance of the Olympics at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

On display are more than 180 objects ranging in date from about 1350 B.C. to the end of the fourth century A.D., when the Games were discontinued. (Their modern revival was largely a result of the efforts of a Frenchman, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, at the end of the 19th century, and they have been held every four years since 1908 except during the world wars.)

The show, billed as the first major American exhibition devoted to Greek athletes, is drawn from Boston's own considerable holdings, with major loans from other institutions and private collectors. It was organized by John J. Herrmann Jr., curator of classical art, and Christine Kondoleon, curator of Greek and Roman art at the museum.

A stunning lineup of painted vessels, sculptures, coins, a mural, ancient sports equipment and other objects, it also presents for contrast a group of photographs and video images of modern-day athletes, from Eadweard Muybridge's 1880's motion studies of boxing and discus throwing to contemporary action shots like Herb Ritts's photo of the track and field champion Jackie Joyner-Kersey and John Huet's glimpse from the rear of the superrunner Michael Johnson.

The original Olympic event was the footrace, run naked and, in contrast to today's races with their high-tech footwear, shoeless. It remained the only event for the first 50 years of the Games. The race was roughly 200 yards, a measure called a stadion (hence stadium). So revered were the winners that the four-year periods after their victories were named for them, the first being Koroibos of Elis in 776 B.C.

Several vase paintings in the show depict runners in action, among them a black-figured amphora from about 540 B.C. showing three bearded, powerfully thighed nude sprinters, arms held high, dashing for the finish line. (Competitors were on their own, there being no such thing as team sports.) Another, dated about 480 B.C., has three younger men almost neck-and-neck, their hair flying and limbs pumping madly as they tear along. Over time, other events were added to the program, with chariot racing, brought in around 680 B.C., the most exciting, not to mention glamorous. A sport in which only the rich could participate, since horses and their care were costly even then, it involved maneuvering a skinny two-wheeled platform fronted by a waist-high guardrail, drawn by two or four steeds speeding over a tough course. Spectacular accidents occurred, as in car

racing today. Owners did not usually participate; the chariots were driven by professionals, much as racehorses today are ridden by hired jockeys.

Visitors to the show are greeted by a reproduction of the famous "Charioteer," a life-size bronze found at Delphi, a noble figure wearing the long white charioteer's tunic that was the only clothing Olympic participants were permitted. Vase paintings of charioteers bent over their railings as they goad their horses are prominent here.

But among them is a different painting, on a tall, ornate vessel for bath water, from about 320 to 310 B.C. It relates to the legend of Pelops, a prince from Asia Minor who fell for Hippodameia and won her hand by beating her overprotective father, Oinomaos, king of Pisa, in a chariot race. Pelops bribed Oinomaos's charioteer to sabotage the king's vehicle by substituting wax fittings for the metal ones, causing it to break apart during the race, throwing the king to his death. On this vase, Pelops is shown seated triumphantly beside his beloved on a more capacious horse-drawn vehicle. The legend is said to establish him as the father of the chariot race.

Highly important to the Games were the preparations and rituals around them. Athletics were prized in ancient Greece; they were part of the requisite cultural training for upper-class youth, and every city worth the name had a sports complex, composed of a gymnasium and a palaistra, where combat sports and long jumping were practiced. The grounds were also sites for training in philosophy and music. Socrates, shown in a Roman copy of a Greek portrait head by Lysippos (fourth century B.C.), probably held cerebral discussions in such complexes.

A section of the exhibition devoted to the training grounds depicts — on vases, sculpture, coins and such — the care athletes gave to their bodies, showing various sports that were practiced to music, as well as the important cleansing process of oiling the skin and scraping it with a curved instrument called a strigil.

A lively Athenian vase painting from about 520 to 515 B.C. portrays two athletes jumping to the rhythms of a flute player who tootles away beside them. The cleansing ritual is vividly shown on a drinking cup from 500 to 475 B.C. depicting athletes in a palaistra setting as they scrape olive oil off their bodies. In another vase painting an athlete presents his strigil to a dog to lick.

Greek women were forbidden not only to participate in the major games but also to watch them. (Exceptions were sometimes made for unmarried girls in the company of male relatives.) But the women held a quadrennial event of their own, called Heraea, starting in the sixth century B.C. A vase dating from 440 to 430 B.C. shows three nude young women clustered around a bath basin in a gymnasium, cleaning the oil from their bodies with strigils, attended by a female slave.

Although Olympic-style games were mentioned earlier in Homer's "Iliad," the festival as we know it began in the eighth century B.C. as a summer event devoted to Zeus in the Peloponnesian city of Olympia, an important center of Zeus-worship. In the sixth century

B.C. three other important athletic festivals were founded along Olympic lines: the Pythian Games at Delphi, the Isthmian Games at Corinth and the Nemean Games at Nemea.

The Olympics remained the top draw, but the four formed a circuit of "crown games," so called because the prizes were monetarily worthless wreaths or crowns of sacred leaves. An additional festival that offered prizes of real value was the Panathenaic Games in Athens, founded in 566 B.C., whose winners were given big amphorae, or vases, filled with 42 quarts of precious olive oil from sacred groves in Attica. The front of each of these vases was traditionally embellished with the image of a fully armed Athena; the back depicted the event for which the vase was awarded. (The winner of the prestigious chariot race received as many as 140 amphorae.)

The Panathenaic Games are highlighted in "The Games in Ancient Athens: A Special Presentation to Celebrate the 2004 Olympics" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The show's stars are nine of the extra-large painted Panathenaic prizes, dating from the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C. and owned by the museum. In lieu of a larger exhibition, the Met — a heavy lender to the Boston display — has showcased the nine vases and additional works in its first-floor Greek galleries. It has also set up a kind of treasure hunt for visitors by marking other Olympic-related art throughout the display.

Among the vases is one from 525 to 500 B.C. attributed to the Kleophrades Painter, credited with the largest number of extant prize amphorae of any Athenian vase painter. It depicts a pankration with one opponent grasping the other's leg as a judge stands by with a stick. Another vase by an unknown but gifted painter, circa 540 to 530 B.C., bears a beautifully stylized version of a two-horse chariot race. The earliest Panathenaic vessel in the Met's collection, dated 566 to 550 B.C., is also anonymous. It shows three sprinters prancing along in a stadion race.

Other Olympic-themed treasures marked in the galleries include a poignant marble funeral monument from around 530 B.C. More than 13 feet tall and topped by a sphinx, it stood at the tomb of one Megakles, a youth of apparently aristocratic family, who is depicted lifesize with an athlete's aryballos, or oil flask, strapped to his wrist and holding a pomegranate, symbolic of both death and fertility, in his hand.

A handsome full-length stone statue — a Roman copy of a Greek bronze circa 430 B.C. by Polykleitos, one of the best-known artists of the ancient world — shows a youth in the act of adorning his head with a wreath after an athletic victory. Polykleitos' brilliance is evident in the rhythmic play between the torso and the thorax, each tilting slightly in opposite directions, and in the lifelike separation of the feet that gives the otherwise placid statue a sense of movement.

The Met's galleries of Greek and Roman art, housing one of the museum world's most important collections, are a treat to visit anyway, but this special treasure-hunting expedition enlivens the experience.

Women, largely left out of these two exhibitions, are given some of their due in a lively show, "The Sporting Woman: The Female Athlete in American Culture," at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum in Massachusetts.

Not exactly pegged to the Olympics (its opening coincided with the 2004 United States Women's Open Championship, held at the college's Orchards Golf Course this summer), it nevertheless touches on Olympic participants like the swimmer Gertrude Ederle, the all-around athlete Babe Didrikson Zaharias and the soccer player Brandi Chastain (here shown in a photograph by Anacleto Rapping as she exuberantly removes her shirt after scoring the winning goal in the 1999 World Cup).

One strong intent of the show, organized by Marianne Doezema, director of the museum, is to point up the difficulties experienced by women in entering the world of traditionally male sports. It fittingly begins with Winslow Homer's painting "Croquet Players" (1865), a leisurely game then regarded, for women, primarily as an opportunity to flirt with men. Horseback riding for pleasure, the show points out in text and images, was the first active sport to become acceptable for women, who were nevertheless restricted to riding sidesaddle to protect their sex organs.

A breakthrough occurred at the turn of the 20th century when the bicycle, which could not be ridden sidesaddle, became popular with both sexes. "Ride a Stearns and Be Content," proclaimed an 1896 poster by Edward Penfield that knowingly touted a bicycle with a specially designed short seat. ("The bicycle has done more for the emancipation of women than anything else in the world," Susan B. Anthony said in 1896.)

The show traces, with actual examples, the slow modernization of women's outfits for swimming, calisthenics, tennis, riding and the like from corsets and long skirts to comfortable garb like that of male athletes. And it describes, through paintings, photographs and objects, the gradual recognition of women's emerging role in some of the most popular spectator sports, like soccer, basketball, softball and track.

Today many of the most widely followed events in world competition include women, the show points out. Although there's plenty of room for more recognition, the Olympics and other competitions make clear that female champions are a fact of life.

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July 24, 2004

OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Greek Myths

By NICHOLAS GAGE

ATHENS

Although the Summer Olympics are still a few weeks away, one event has already started and threatens to dominate all the others - the rush to judgment.

For more than a year now, self-appointed doomsayers and armchair Cassandras have been predicting total disaster for the Olympic Games when they begin on Aug. 13 here, in the country where they were founded in 776 B.C. and where they were revived in 1896.

The gloomy forecasts have come in numerous newspaper articles and television features, first predicting that the venues would never be completed in time and that disaster was inevitable. Now that it is clear that the projects will be ready, there comes an array of warnings that terrorists could be a threat because the structures are being finished too late for security systems to be fully tested.

Athens has been slammed in the American news media in a way that other Olympics hosts never were, even though many failed to complete projects (Barcelona) and had security problems (Atlanta). Athens has been judged and found wanting before the Games have started. That's like anticipating disaster for a movie before it opens, and I need only mention the success of "Titanic" and "The Passion of the Christ" to point out the pitfalls of such premature verdicts.

As for the latest warnings about security at the Olympics, what I can say is this: I was born in Greece and spent my first 10 years living through the waves of war and revolution that engulfed the country in the 1940's. As an investigative reporter for The Times I covered organized crime and drug trafficking and later, as a foreign correspondent for the paper, I reported on conflicts throughout the Middle East. I have some experience in assessing risk, and not only am I going to be in Athens throughout the Olympics, but my wife and daughter are also coming with me.

We are confident we will be safe because we know the measures that are being taken to provide security for the Games. Athens is spending \$1.2 billion on security, four times the amount spent for the Sydney Games. Greece has called together a platoon of experts from the United States, Britain, Israel and several other countries to help Greek authorities plan and direct operations for the Olympics. Biometric identification measures to control access to the Games have been set up at all venues, and 1,320 cameras have been installed throughout the city. While Awacs planes provided by NATO survey the skies over Athens, a force of 70,000 Greek police, military and security personnel will patrol every area connected to the Olympics, including the harbors where cruise ships will be anchored to house the overflow of expected visitors.

Most recently a blackout in parts of southern Greece, including Athens, set off new waves of alarm. But the blackout was caused by human error, not any weakness in the Greek electrical grid. The peak of electricity demands in Greece comes in July, not August. As John Paleocrassas, head of the public power corporation, told me, New York has had much worse blackouts for longer periods, but no one is suggesting that as a result, the Republican convention should not be held there in August.

No one can feel safe anywhere these days. But Greece has not been the target of significant international terrorist threats in recent years.

So cut Greece a little slack, at least for the short time remaining before the Games begin. Greece is the smallest nation ever to hold the Summer Olympics and the one with the fewest financial resources. Yet it has had to build more venues than any previous host country as well as set up the most costly and most extensive security operation in the history of the Olympics.

Despite all that, the venues have been completed. The jewel in the crown - the glass and steel dome over the main Olympic stadium, designed by the renowned Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava - has been fitted into place. It rises majestically over the stadium, a symbol of the new Athens just as the Acropolis signifies the ancient city.

Yes, the Athens organizers got an inexcusably late start, but they picked up steam as the deadline approached. Yes, there have been heart-stopping delays. And yes, work on part of the 26-mile road on which the marathon will be run stopped when the original contractor went bankrupt. (But a new contractor took over and officials say the road will be finished next week.)

It's also true that the swimming center will not have the roof planned for it, but panels have been installed to provide shade from the August sun. It's also true that some of the landscaping around the venues may not be finished in time, but every city holding the Games had problems. The roof of the swimming center in Barcelona was never installed, for example.

It's worth remembering that Athens will offer something no other city ever provided - what Lawrence Durrell called "spirit of place." To have the marathon run over the very route Pheidippides ran in 490 B.C. to bring Athenians news of victory over the Persians, to have athletes throwing the discus and javelin in the shadow of the Acropolis, to have men and women from all over the world competing where democracy was born, will provide some of the most stirring and unforgettable moments Olympic spectators have ever experienced.

Nicholas Gage is the author of "Eleni" and "Greek Fire: The Story of Maria Callas and Aristotle Onassis."

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When the Games Were Everything

By THOMAS CAHILL

The ancient Greeks were the world's first sports fans. They loved games of all kinds, which they called "agones." That's how we came by our words "agony" and "antagonist," which should give us a good idea of how the Greeks viewed their games: as agonies in which antagonist is pitted against antagonist until one comes out on top. A better English

term for what they had in mind might be "contest" or "struggle" or even "power performance."

Ancient Greece was a society of alpha males who took their fun seriously. Whether they were at war with one another (which they often were, and which they got a huge bang out of) or enjoying more peaceful pursuits, they insisted that certain rules be followed and that there always be, right in the middle of everything, an agon.

In war, there was nothing that thrilled them more than a fight to the death, one army's champion pitted against the other's. In peacetime, they couldn't just take in a poetry reading, listen to a concert or watch a play. They had to enliven the proceedings with a poetry contest, a music contest, a drama contest. There always had to be a declared winner on whom the laurels could be heaped and at least one miserable loser. Even their parties, which easily developed into orgies, included contests over which participant could deliver the most eloquent toast or tell the funniest joke or get the farthest with the flute girl. Needless to say, it was the flute girl who lost.

If by sports we mean only a few guys kicking a ball around, the Greeks were not the inventors. Soccer in its simplest form has been with us ever since the invention of animal husbandry, soon after which some playful young shepherd probably kicked an inflated sheep's bladder or a decapitated sheep's head in the direction of another shepherd, who was inspired to kick it back. Certain bloodthirsty Celtic and Mesoamerican tribes - the Irish and the Aztecs, in particular - preferred human heads rather than sheep parts for such diversions, which soon developed into rudimentary team sports.

But if by sports we mean a series of organized contests of physical prowess, conducted according to acknowledged rules in the presence of enthusiastic crowds and scheduled well in advance to encourage participation by all the best athletes available for the sheer glory and fame of winning, we are talking about a purely Greek invention.

Nothing raised Greek spirits more than winning (or even just watching) an agon.

*There is no greater glory for a living man
Than all that he can win by his own feet and hands.
So come, compete, and from your heart cast care away!*

These are the words of the Phaeacian prince Laodamas in Homer's "Odyssey," as he invites the great hero Odysseus to join in the games the Phaeacians have arranged in his honor. Let's see if you're really as good as your reputation, is what Laodamas is thinking, but he is also hoping to be thrilled out of his mind by Odysseus' performance. (He is, after Odysseus effortlessly wings across the field a discus that lesser men cannot lift.) The ancient Greeks knew a lot about the natural highs that strenuous physical exercise can produce and the elevation of mood that spectators can experience just by watching a first-rate athlete perform at his best.

The Greek word for best is "aristos" (from which we derive aristocrat). It was the word the free-born adult male applied to himself and his friends. Everyone else - women, boys who had not reached their majority, slaves, resident aliens, barbarians - belonged to the lesser orders of existence, and most could be treated whimsically, abusively or violently any time an aristos was so inclined.

Though the wedded wife of a male citizen was off-limits in this regard, others were not. Athletes who performed at the Olympics and other Greek games usually belonged to the category of youth, the time between childhood and adulthood, between peach-fuzz pubescence and the appearance of a full beard, the mark of full citizenship. These youths, who always competed nude, attracted spectators of many kinds, but especially older men.

Married women, however, were not permitted to enjoy this feast but were kept at home, where they had to make do with occasional visits from their aging husbands, normally a decade or two older than the wives. Though matrons were banned, girls were invited to ogle and fantasize about future husbands. They were also allowed to compete with one another in a single footrace, clothed in revealingly skimpy undergarments.

If sex - "eros," as the Greeks called it - was never far from these games, neither was death. The Greeks knew perfectly well that the games were a sort of ritualized, theatrical version of death on the battlefield, an imitation of their favorite sport: war. The games taught and reinforced favorite Greek themes of honor and glory, of winning over others, of triumph in combat. But they also underscored a different message altogether: you can't win all the time, and one day you will lose. The poet Archilochus, a sensational athlete of the seventh century B.C. but also a realist, gave himself this advice:

*O heart, my heart, no public leaping when you win;
no solitude nor weeping when you fail to prove.
Rejoice at simple things; and be but vexed by sin
and evil slightly. Know the tides through which we move.*

The last sentence is quietly ominous. The tides through which we move - the highs and the lows, the peaks and the troughs - tell us repeatedly that nothing lasts and that all life ends in death. Let us temper our excitement and agitation, whether for the ecstasy of battle or the ecstasy of sex, whether over great achievement or great loss, and admit to ourselves that all things have their moment and are gone. In such high-minded resignation lie the aristocratic origins of sportsmanship.

Once Rome overwhelmed the Greeks in the second century B.C., the Romans had to be invited to the games. The Emperor Nero, history's most famous spoiled brat, proved himself a very bad sport by insisting that the Olympics be rescheduled so he could attend, and then demanding first prize for every event he entered. The lower orders of Greco-Roman society were never invited to participate in athletic competitions, nor were the unthinkable barbarians who lived their brutish lives beyond the borders of the Empire. But the Olympics and similar Panhellenic games nevertheless always had a heady

internationalism about them, for they welcomed representatives from all over the known world - so long as they could speak Greek.

Once the Christian church came to influence the Roman political establishment, however, Greek paganism - the prayers to the gods, the fierceness of the games, the nudity, the sexual shamelessness - was trounced, and disappeared underground by the sixth century A.D. But as with most human artifices, its spirit never died out completely. It was still there to be resurrected in the Renaissance and exploited once more in the Enlightenment.

It was the outer wave of the Enlightenment that brought the Olympics back to Greek shores when the International Olympic Committee was formed and the modern games were established at Athens in 1896. This was largely thanks to the vision of Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a stylish, relentless, enlightened Frenchman with a profound appreciation for what the ancient Greeks had accomplished, as well as very Judeo-Christian hopes for world peace and international cooperation.

Being a baron and a 19th-century male, Coubertin failed to perceive the perniciousness of European classism and universal sexism, so invitations to participate in the first modern Olympics were issued to "gentlemen" only. But a young Greek shepherd named Spyridon Louis, who was allowed on the Greek team at the last minute, won the first modern marathon. Afterwards, he turned down all honors - gold, cash, jewelry, free meals, free haircuts, free coffee for life - that the ecstatic Greeks pressed on him, even an offer of marriage from an aristocratic beauty, who in offering herself before the race to the winner-to-be had presumed that only a member of her own class could win. The modest winner accepted the olive wreath that was his due, returned to his little village of Marousi, and married his sweetheart.

This startling crack in the class barrier presaged the I.O.C.'s tearing down of other culturally determined barriers, including gender. Nor has Spyridon Louis been forgotten: the new Olympic stadium at Athens is named for him, and "to do a Louis" - to carry the day so unexpectedly - has become part of the Greek language.

We in the West are Greco-Roman Judeo-Christians, the inheritors of a double tradition that has had incalculable effect on the entire world. We are in a position to pick and choose from the abundant variety of our shared past. We hardly need to imitate ancient Greek bellicosity, racism, classism and sexism, or to laud the supreme worth ancient Greece placed on domination. (Actually, there are not a few among us who continue to admire just such things, but our society as a whole no longer pays special lip service to these values.)

But we must remain exceedingly grateful to the Greeks for introducing us to the peaceful uses of competition and the thrilling experiences made possible by organized athletics, not least of which is the sense of human solidarity that comes to bind athletes from so many different places to one another and also gives the immense Olympic audience an abiding feeling for the interconnectedness of the human family.

Finally, there is tremendous ecumenical value in humanity's abandoning its daily preoccupations and spending a couple of weeks riveted on a cooperative world of physical grace and human perfectibility: all that one can win by his own - or her own - feet and hands.

Thomas Cahill is the author of "How the Irish Saved Civilization" and, most recently, "Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter."

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'We've Prepared the Games Our Own Way'

By Sally Jenkins

Thursday, August 12, 2004

ATHENS -- The Greek concept of "preparedness" is plainly different from ours. Here is the Greek way: Just Wednesday on the grounds of the Athens Olympic Sports Complex, you could see 10 construction workers lying on a shady patch of grass, shirtless and dozing with their arms thrown across their eyes, their hardhats resting beside them.

Is Greece ready for the Olympics? As far as they're concerned, yes. In the Olympic Stadium, technicians tested the sound system, playing a taped introduction to the Opening Ceremonies on a repetitive loop. "The Great Moment has arrived," a solemn voice intoned, over and over again.

Yet meanwhile in the broad plaza outside, huge spools of coaxial cable were still stacked together, waiting to be unrolled. Electricians hovered in manholes below the ground, splicing wires. Piles of seats were wrapped in plastic, yet to be installed in some of the venues. The fountains were filled with dust and grit from all the construction, and maintenance workers tried to sweep them out with brooms.

The Greek Olympic effort has been portrayed as disorganized and riven by delays, cost overruns and labor disputes. It's also been portrayed as possibly even dangerous from a security standpoint. But why should Greece have to be judged by a foreign concept of "preparedness?"

What looks to us like a frenzy of disorganization is to Greeks a great national feat. The stadiums are in fact essentially finished -- and they are glorious. White winged roofs lunge into a white-blue sky. "In Greece we've done things our own way, we've prepared the Games our own way," says Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, head of the organizing committee. "If there is a record for underestimating a city, the record is about us."

It's devoutly hoped by organizers that this Olympics will vault Greece from

a second world country into a first world country. The Olympic construction project has provided Athens with badly needed improvements. Despite predictions of horrific smog and traffic and broken streets, visitors have arrived to find Athens clear-skied and newly paved, with a shimmering liquid gem of the Aegean as a backdrop, offering some of the most stunningly clean water in Europe. The cultural festival that runs concurrent with the Games is considered a vital showcase: The Greeks are eager to demonstrate that they can take a place among the leaders of the world in art, architecture, technology and commerce. "It's like we've opened a giant door to our future," says Angelopoulos-Daskalaki.

Have Greeks been unfairly judged by foreign standards of preparedness? Perhaps so. Certainly, they have been forced to assume an unfair burden of security "preparedness."

Greece has been asked to meet a standard of "safety" at these Olympics set by at-risk countries who are scared out of their wits, led by the United States. They've been asked to pay the sum of our fears.

It may well be that billion dollar technology is an effective tool against malevolence, and that eventualities dreamed up by international psychopaths can somehow be forestalled by huge expenditures. But Greece shouldn't have to pick up the tab for it alone. We should pay our part. Seven countries have given Greece "advice" on security. But the convulsive problems of the world since 9/11 are not of Greece's making. At the time Athens won the bid to host these Games in 1997, security was estimated to be just a fractional cost. The bill has grown to \$1.5 billion, organizers say. That's approaching a quarter of the overall cost of \$7 billion for hosting these Games, and it's six times more than was spent on security at the 2000 Games in Sydney. And that debt could well affect just how much of a brilliant future Greece is able to build from these Games.

It's simply not right for a single country to bear the cost. Everyone should split the check, via the International Olympic Committee, which has coffers richer than some multinationals. If security has become a shared concern, and it has, then the price tag and the responsibility for it should also be shared.

"Preparedness" is a virtual obsession at these Olympics: Instead of a stuffed doll, the mascot for the Athens Games ought to be a blimp with an electronic eye. But there is perhaps no sure preventative measure, no way to absolutely guarantee a "safe" Games. And yet Greek organizers have been required to act as if there is. If something goes wrong, there will no doubt be criticism from some quarters of the Greek lack of preparedness. But disaster doesn't run on a time clock. It's a worldwide hazard, and if you want a guarantee, you should never put your shoes on and leave your

house. And you certainly shouldn't go to an Olympics.

"Preparedness" is a reassuring concept because it's about deterrence, and deterrence works. But there's no question that some Greeks view security differently, too. American concerns may seem timorous to them, the relentless preoccupation with safety a bit much. The surveillance blimp, for instance, has been a subject of controversy rather than confidence here, called a Big Brother intrusion.

This is a country where small bombs go off fairly regularly as a form of civic protest. A bang in the middle of the night is accounted as a normal event. What might seem hazardous to an American is not to a Greek, who lives in a country where passionate explosiveness seems to be a birthright, and which is bordered by three seas as well as Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Turkey.

While others have doubted and criticized, Greeks are collectively delighted with themselves. Athens 2004 has a chance to be the most meaningful and triumphant Olympics of our lifetime, as well as one of the most hauntingly beautiful. Greeks can now be proud of not just the shards of their history, those ruined columns leaping out of city sidewalks, but of a new city. This makes these Olympics, for all of their so-called problems, impossible to resist. There is the naïve sense that nothing bad can happen here -- because all this newness is just too marvelous.

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Athletes of the Ancient World

Sunday, August 15, 2004

The Olympics weren't the only games in ancient Greece. There were three other panhellenic games, those at Isthmia and Nemea and the Pythian Games at Delphi, along with the local Panathenaic Games at Athens. In each case, the games were part of a festival dedicated to one of the gods (the Olympics belonged to Zeus himself). In *Games and Sanctuaries in Ancient Greece* (Getty, \$75), Panos Valavanis, associate professor of archaeology at the University of Athens, summarizes what is known about these forerunners to today's Olympics. We learn, for example, that the pentathlon, thought to have been introduced at the 18th Olympiad in 708 B.C., was "the first multiple event in the history of athletics" but that it didn't always extend to the full five matches. If an athlete won the first three events, the other two were considered superfluous, and he was declared the winner. Pentathletes rarely repeated their victories -- the events were too demanding, and age took its toll -- but the record is full of wrestlers who won again and again. "No one ever approached the

achievements and fame of the legendary Milon of Kroton in southern Italy, one of the greatest athletes in the ancient world, who dominated the event for decades," the author writes. "He was winner six times at Olympia (once in the boys' wrestling in 540 B.C., and five times in the men's event), seven times at the Pythian games, nine times at Nemea and ten at Isthmia, and he won countless victories in lesser games." An epigrammatic tribute to his perduring might has come down to us: "This beautiful statue is of beautiful Milon, who won six times without being thrown."

-- Dennis Drabelle

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Magic Circles: There Is Much to Savor From a Ceremonial Journey Into the Ancient Past

By Sally Jenkins

Saturday, August 14, 2004

ATHENS

Fools, fools, all who didn't come to Athens. The return of the Olympic Games to their birthplace was an irresistibly romantic event that pried open the hearts of even confirmed skeptics. These Opening Ceremonies weren't a matter of the usual rote clichés about Olympic spirit, with the rampant cloying presence of children, floats and birds. They were instead a stunning emotional connection and they proved the point of a country: Greece is not just a destination for classics professors and rich ladies looking to buy summer jewelry. It's an ageless capital of the world.

"Who doesn't desire to see Athens is stupid; who sees it without liking it is even more stupid, but the height of stupidity is to see it, like it, and then leave it." Lysippus said that, in the 4th century B.C., and he was, and is, absolutely right.

The Olympic rings, aflame in a pool of water, are the centerpiece for the Opening Ceremonies, which included a light show and about 10,500 athletes from 202 countries gathered in celebration of the start of the Athens Games. (Ruben Sprich -- Reuters)

As the phosphorous sun fell and white-hot Olympic rings burned in a lake on the floor of Athens Olympic Stadium, Athens proved to be not just a piece of archaeology, but a modern marvel. The Olympic stadium was a fabulous piece of theatrical trickery, shot through with lights and floating kite-sculptures. The ceremonies were alternately lovely and ingenious, artful in and of themselves

as they portrayed what Edith Hamilton, author of "The Greek Way," called "that deep impress," left by the Ancients. The theme was the relationship between past and present day, and it was gorgeously stated.

Given the theme of the Opening Ceremonies, it seemed perfectly right and even important to ask how this modern competition resembles the original -- or whether it does at all. The answer is complicated, and not especially appealing to sentimentalists: All we really share with the Ancients are a few of our worst and best traits. For some reason, we like to think that history was more pure, and all traditions are honorable. It wasn't and they weren't. These Opening Ceremonies, for all of their beauty, didn't try to pretty up that fact. They had an emotional truthfulness: There were frightening gods, sex, and a woman with a glowing, pregnant belly. Message: All we really share with ancient Olympians is a humanity.

The truth is that Ancient Greeks competed naked rather than clothed, forbade females from contending for medals as well as watching, and didn't give prizes for second and third place, because all they cared about was winning. Moreover, the sacred truce didn't always work. Not all wars stopped.

Greg Anderson, an associate professor of classics at Wright State who studies games in Greek history, said: "The modern Olympics are essentially one huge invented modern tradition. Almost nothing about them is authentically ancient." Anderson, who has published in scholarly journals on the subject of Greek athletes and the Olympic tradition, does see some parallels between 700 B.C. and 2004, but not the ones you might expect. "The most 'authentic' features of the modern Games are the ruthless political and commercial exploitation that goes with them, the celebrity of leading athletes, and the sheer magnitude of the Olympics," he contends.

We do have that in common. A number of nations here are offering cash prizes to athletes who win medals; China will give about \$24,000 to a gold medalist, while the Philippines is offering \$143,000.

Ancient Greek champions had a huge sense of entitlement, as do our own. It's tempting to call Allen Iverson an example of the decay of the western world, after learning that he has been slapped with more than \$4,000 in fines for parking his Rolls-Royce in a handicapped spot at the Philly airport for a week. But how is Iverson any different from the champion of Prytaneion, who, as reward for winning the Olympics, dined at public expense for the rest of his life?

It's fanciful of us to believe ancient champions only competed for a coveted garland of olive branches. In fact, they had odes written about themselves, and statues erected to their immortal fame, and were enormous celebrities. "But he who in contests or in war achieves the delicate glory is magnified to be given the supreme prize, splendor of speech from citizen and stranger," Pindar

said.

We get a glimpse of the impatience Pindar, the poet of athletes, must have felt at the egotism of his subjects, some of whom dumbly preferred marble and bronze statues to his odes and discounted his art.

I am no maker of images, not one to fashion idols

Standing quiet

On pedestals.

But there is something else that stitches the modern Olympics to the ancient ones. And it's the most important thing. "The Greeks were the first people in the world to play, and they played on a grand scale," Hamilton wrote. "If we had no other knowledge of what the Greeks were like, if nothing were left of Greek art and literature, the fact that they were in love with play and played magnificently would be proof enough of how they lived and how they looked at life."

The Opening Ceremonies exuded that same magnificent love of play. There was the palpable sense that these Olympics have restored something to Athens. The city has been remade into a place in which even the ruined columns seem straighter with pride. According to Athens Mayor Dora Bakoyannis, 750,000 square meters of streets have been repaved, 250,000 square meters of sidewalks have been repaired, 1,400 apartment buildings have been cleaned and repainted, and 10,000 mature trees have been planted. Not even the depressingly slapstick affair of Greek sprinter-hero Kostas Kenteris, or the constant sight of athletes on cell phones when they were supposed to be wallowing in oneness with the world, could seriously detract from the triumphant mood.

A vital element of ancient Greek art is sport, and another vital element of it is nudity. The classic Greek Kouros, or figure, depicts a young man exercising his naked body. The word gymnastics and gymnasium derives from the word gymnos, meaning nude. Sport, therefore, is meant to depict man at his most beautifully naked and truthful. The Athens Opening Ceremonies did just that, and in the process made everyone here feel like an exuberant countryman.

"We are by our spiritual and mental inheritance partly Greek," Hamilton wrote, "and cannot escape if we would that deep influence which worked with power through the centuries, touching with light of reason and grace of beauty."

Let's Give These Games A Gold Medal

By Sally Jenkins

ATHENS

In summing up the Athens Games, the first order of business is to extend a big "sorry" to the Greeks. Nothing blew up and nothing collapsed, and nothing less has been accomplished than the full restoration of Athens as a splendid world capital. The Greeks have proved a very pointed point. There is more than one way to throw an Olympics.

There was a sense of exquisite difference about these Games, from the herbed dust that constituted the city air, blowing straight from the Sahara and mingling with spiced smoke and exhaust, to the tourmaline Aegean waters, and the phosphorous lemon sun illuminating ruins. We were far away from the familiar, down at the end of Europe where you could stand on a beach and stare at white sails on a flat sea that extends to Asia Minor. But if Athens will be remembered as one of the most richly atmospheric Olympics, it also had to be credited as modern and well-organized, which no one would have predicted. We were too busy arching eyebrows and passing remarks about the Greeks' casual unhurriedness, the laziness of their labor, and their indulgence of dangerous anarchists. What did we know?

"The citizens of Greece have proven the doomsayers wrong," said USOC board chairman Peter Ueberroth. "The Olympic family learned a lesson from the people of Greece. History will record these Games as among the greatest, if not the greatest, of all time."

Not everyone cares about the same things, and anyhow the Olympics are hardly supposed to be a celebration of sameness. One of the things they do best is broaden the perspectives of those who attend them. The Greeks did this in their way -- while also humoring the stubborn American fixation on security, our conviction that our personal safety matters most and our definition of danger is the only one that counts. The smallest and grittiest country in the European Union, with a population of 11 million, hosted the largest sports event in the world and kept us all safe, while offering daily instruction in the glories of antiquity. So while the enormous cost, now estimated at \$9 billion, and the emptiness of some stadiums can be counted against them in weighing whether these Games were a success, frankly, that's their business. It's not ours, since we won't be around to split the cost or help shoulder their problems after tomorrow.

"The Olympics are not about money for us," a cab driver said, midway through the Games, "it's about an idea." Then he double charged me. For some reason, I paid without complaint.

(Note from YK: It's quite possible that he double charged her. It's more likely that she did not understand the extra charges. Although less mysterious than cab fare rules in Washington, DC, taxis in Athens are legally charging extra for airport pick-ups, tolls, luggage, and the meter goes to double rate after midnight, as well as outside city limits).

There was no Centennial Park bombing, and no tacky commercialism in Athens. Instead there was a sense that the athletes who won here will, years from now, feel that their medals are the rarest of treasures from an Olympics that stood apart from all others for authenticity, because of the simple fact of where they were held. Nothing seemed to affect that authenticity, not even scoring errors, judging disputes, doping disgraces, rock-throwing protests, international wrangling, the looming specter of terrorism, or that eye-gouging, crotch-kicking election campaign back home.

Towering over the Games each day was the 2,400-year-old Parthenon, the world's most elegant representation of what can happen when thought meets depth of feeling, when clarity and intellect are combined with reverence and the beauty of a clear hot sky. Nothing could make a dent in its image; it dwarfed all the ailments and annoyances of the modern Olympics. The Parthenon and its accompanying temples were a constant corrective, providing a longer and kinder perspective.

What will we remember, for instance, from the competition at Olympia? Irina Korzhanenko got popped for drugs after winning the shot put, but no one will remember that as much as they'll remember the enormity of the moment, walking into that stadium for the first time since A.D. 393. Personally, I won't remember that the bronze medalist in the men's marathon was tackled by a crackpot as much as I'll remember the sweetness of his Olympic spirit as he entered Panathinaiko Stadium and sailed around the track with his arms out like wings.

I won't remember that Marion Jones failed to medal as much as the compassion Jones and her relay teammates showed for each other after their failure in the 4x100-meter relay, looking like moving sculptures as they circled the track with their arms resolutely linked. I'll remember the fresh, sweat-covered expression of Andre Ward with his single gold medal, in contrast to the so carefully media-managed opacity of Michael Phelps, with his six.

Everything here seemed more genuinely Olympic, both the victories and the failures. Why? An interesting argument has arisen in the hot debate over the so-called Elgin Marbles. In 1801, two-thirds of the sculptural adornments of the Parthenon were removed and carted off to England, where they remain on display in the British Museum. The Greeks would like them

back, and the British have so far refused, calling repatriation unfeasible. The best argument for returning them is that they were not meant to be viewed in pieces, in the cold, smoky gray light of England. They were meant to be seen as a complex narrative, and in the radiant luminosity of that white Greek light, with its peculiar lit-from-within effect that can't be duplicated. "The images were executed to be read as a meaningful whole," wrote scholar Jenifer Neils. In other words, if the British love them, they will give them back.

The very same thing could be said of the Olympics. To watch them in Athens was to see them in their original light, and as a meaningful whole. It was to place them in their proper context, and to return them to their original owners. "Whatever we experience in our day, whatever we hope to learn, whatever we most desire, whatever we set out to find, we see that the Greeks have been there before us, and we meet them on their way back," writes Thomas Cahill in "Sailing the Wine Dark Sea." So put me down as a converted philhellene, which means someone who has been utterly seduced by this gorgeous country and culture, and from now on call me Sallyiopolous. As for the debt incurred from the Games, I daresay Athens will survive. After all, it's withstood worse, and it's still standing. "For Athens alone among her contemporaries is found when tested to be greater than her reputation." Pericles said that.

Coffee May Never Be the Same

What I will miss most about Athens is the little coffee shop across from the bus stop. It's called Flower, though I'm not sure if that's because the owner thought "Flower" would be a good name for a coffee shop or because the space once belonged to a florist. (I'm betting the latter because the neighborhood is stocked with hospitals, pharmacies and florists.)

I figured from the start it would be a dicey proposition to stop for coffee because the media bus, which came roughly every half hour, didn't wait for stragglers. So I started out ordering filter coffee, the quickest to prepare. As temperatures soared, I switched to frappe, which is basically Nescafé on ice and slightly more trouble to make. Then I settled on iced cappuccino -- the tastiest jolt by far, but really slow in coming because the coffee guy at Flower insisted on frothing the milk just right.

One morning the bus pulled up when he was midway through my iced cappuccino, so I slapped 2 Euros on the counter and ran out the door without it, figuring that missing the bus was worse than missing my cappuccino.

The next morning, the owner refused to let me pay. He spoke no more English than I spoke Greek, but made clear by wild gestures, smiles and nods that I'd paid without drinking the previous day, and he was going to set things right!

A few mornings later, the bus pulled up just as the coffee guy plopped the last dollop of froth in my Styrofoam cup, so I grabbed it, slapped down the money and ran. As I boarded the bus, the owner came sprinting out the door behind me with a straw and plastic lid and shoved them in my hand as I stepped on board.

Each morning after that, every time I'd stop for coffee, the owner motioned an employee to the door to serve as sentry, keeping an eye out for my bus while my cappuccino was being prepared.

-- Liz Clarke

As an Audience Draw, Athens May Outpace Sydney

By ERIC PFANNER

International Herald Tribune

August 30, 2004

LONDON, Aug. 29 - The Athens Games may set an unofficial Olympic record for empty seats in the stands, but vacancies have been less glaring in the world's Barcaloungers.

The Games' global television audiences, eagerly tracked by the International Olympic Committee, broadcasters and advertisers, are still being tallied. But early snapshots suggest that viewership of the Athens Olympics will stack up favorably against that of the Sydney Games in 2000. Variations in national viewing preferences, different ways of allocating broadcast rights, a lack of standardization in how audiences are measured and the distorting effects of the seven time zones between Athens and Sydney complicate any direct comparisons between 2004 and 2000. The same is true of viewership comparisons between countries.

Still, in several big European and North American markets, Athens appeared to be running ahead of Sydney as the Games drew to the finish.

"The organization has been superb, the time angle helps and there have been a lot of little dramas everywhere," said Nigel Currie, director of the GEM Group, a sports marketing agency in London.

Any increase in ratings will probably be most pronounced in Europe, where audiences tend to prefer live broadcasts rather than the packaged highlights shown during prime time on NBC in the United States. The

one-hour time difference between Athens and much of Western Europe means most events have been shown live during the day or in the early evening, while much of the live programming from Sydney occurred during the wee hours of the European morning.

Proud Country Shows the World 'Great Things Greeks Can Do'

By Craig Whitlock

ATHENS, Aug. 29 -- Under a brilliant full moon and the burning Olympic flame, the Greeks danced. They clapped, they sang, kicked up their legs and celebrated an Olympics that at one point was almost taken away, but in the end left them jumping with national pride.

After sponsoring more than two weeks of competition, and enduring years of ridicule and doubt from the rest of the world about whether the Games deserved to return to their birthplace, the Greeks danced and danced in their modern Olympic Stadium. About 75,000 spectators clapped along as performers served up a giant Greek wedding feast of a Closing Ceremonies, joyful that so much had gone right during the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad, and that so little had gone wrong.

Gone were the fears about terrorist attacks and smoggy traffic jams and unfinished stadiums. The Athens Olympics had come to an end, and for the most part everything worked just fine.

Greece was the smallest nation in 52 years to host the Summer Olympics, determined to recast Athens as a modern European city known for more than its ancient past. In doing so, the country spent at least \$7.2 billion on the Games, including \$1.5 billion to provide security -- an enormous sum that will take many years, if not decades, to pay off.

But complaints about costs were hard to find Sunday night, as Greece proudly handed off the Olympic flame to a nation 125 times its size -- China, host of the 2008 Summer Games -- secure that it had proved itself to the world.

"The Olympics came home and we showed the world the great things Greeks can do," Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, president of the Athens Organizing Committee, told the crowd. "On this stage, the world discovered a new Greece."

"Hellas! Hellas!" the crowd shouted, waving Greek flags and white

hankies.

Organizers flooded the stadium with 250,000 balloons as thousands of fireworks lit up the sky. Under the dazzling light show, a succession of Greek singers and folk musicians kept the audience dancing throughout the Closing Ceremonies. Toward the end, the mood became so infectious that small groups of athletes from Brazil, Britain, France and other nations broke away from the security cordon in the stadium infield and danced around the track.

Despite the festive atmosphere, strict security measures remained in place until the end. Several helicopters and a blimp circled the stadium throughout the ceremonies.

Worries about political disruptions also kept U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell from attending; he canceled a planned trip to Athens after Greek anti-war protesters angry about his visit clashed with police Friday in downtown Athens.

Unlike the Opening Ceremonies, where fans loudly cheered the delegations from Iraq and Afghanistan and gave the silent treatment to U.S. athletes, politics were not on display Sunday night. Athletes from 202 nations entered the stadium at the same time, mixing together on the infield.

The United States led the overall medal standings with 103, capped off by an unexpected silver in the last event of the Games, the men's marathon.

American athletes dominated the competition in track and field, women's team sports and the swimming pool, where Maryland's 19-year-old Michael Phelps won a record eight medals. A major disappointment: the men's basketball team, which lost three games and settled for bronze.

The biggest controversies were athletic ones, thanks to cheaters and judges who shook up several events.

At least 22 competitors were flagged for drug-testing violations, resulting in the revocation of seven medals. Greece in particular was shamed by the expulsion of two national heroes, medal-winning sprinters Kostas Kenteris and Katerina Thanou, who were kicked off the team after missing several drug tests.

Olympic officials said athletes had gotten the message that doping would not be tolerated. "These were the Games where it became increasingly difficult to cheat and where clean athletes were protected," Jacques Rogge, president of the International Olympic Committee, told the audience.

Earlier, Rogge cheered the Greeks in attendance by thanking them for their hospitality. "Dear Greek friends, you have won," he said in their native language, before lapsing into French. "You have won by brilliantly meeting the tough challenge of holding the Games."

Four years earlier, the IOC came close to yanking the Olympics away from Athens. Construction projects and other preparations had barely progressed since the Games were awarded to Greece in 1997. Former IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch revealed recently that Olympic overseers were about three months from making an emergency decision to move the Games to South Korea.

Spurred on by the threat, Greek officials worked feverishly over the next four years to prove that it could get ready on time. The challenges were substantial: Athens needed a new international airport, new highways, an expanded subway system and more than a dozen new athletic arenas.

As the deadline neared -- the roof on the Olympic stadium slid into place just three months ago -- there was little time for testing. Even Olympic officials wondered if things would work when the crowds showed up. By and large, they did.

"At the end of the day, the biggest surprise to everybody is that there were no major issues," Ioannis Spanudakis, managing director for the Athens 2004 organizing committee, said in an interview.

Not everything went exactly as organizers hoped. While the Athens committee met its attendance projections by selling more than 3.5 million tickets, many athletes performed in front of sparse crowds. Television ratings were higher than in Sydney four years earlier, but cameras couldn't conceal the fact that stadiums were often largely empty.

The Closing Ceremonies, however, were a sellout. Even after the music died down, many Greeks lingered in the stadium for more than an hour, posing for pictures and dancing in the aisles.