

THE OLYMPICS IN POLITICAL CONTEXT: FROM THE MURDER OF ISRAELIS TO “TAKING THE KNEE”

by Howard Rotberg



A moment of silence was held during the Tokyo Olympics opening ceremony Friday July 23rd for the Israeli athletes killed at the 1972 Munich games. This memorial some 49 years after the murders, was requested, but never given until now. It was in fact the first time those victims were formally honored at the global event.

The International Olympic Committee had many times turned down requests to hold a moment of silence to remember the massacre. Despite pleas from the victims' families and Jewish organizations, there was a strange reluctance to do so; for example, in 2012, then-IOC President Jacques Rogge even called the idea of honoring them “inappropriate.”

However, times have changed, especially as sports authorities

are facing numerous acts of “taking the knee” by Black athletes and their supporters, who seek to use such symbols to reflect the growing critical race theory movement in the West. These symbols, unfortunately, are not used, or understood, the same way by proponents. For example, do the acts express a moderate attempt for an end to racial discrimination or do they express a hatred of white males who supposedly fit in the group of “oppressors” in the world of “intersectionality”? As we see in the United States, acts of “equity” (special treatment for those asserting redress and compensation for racist acts many years ago) are replacing the traditional “equality of opportunity” – which has been a cornerstone of the Olympic movement since American Black runner embarrassed Adolph Hitler by winning gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

Two American Black athletes in 1968, wore black gloves and stared downwards in a “Black Power” salute and were ejected from the Olympic site.

American sport fans and teams have tolerated politicization of sporting events by allowing sitting during the playing of the national anthem or taking the knee. There are rumours that certain National Football League teams will allow a special Black national anthem along with the American national anthem.

The American Black Lives Matter movement has led to the politicization of sport. BLM in the U.S. uses violent tactics, supports Palestinian terrorism, and has a Marxist ideology. It also is alleged that there is a rampant misuse of corporate donations (the Black woman who co-founded the movement apparently now has four houses) and thus is problematic as an American contribution to peaceful global sporting events.

John Branch, writing recently in *The New York Times*, gives some perspective on the problems below the surface of the parades, fancy buildings and culture of the Olympics:

“The Games are presented as apolitical, but this is impossible

and untrue. The honor of holding them has faded; the Olympics strain to attract host cities, which are often left staggering in the aftermath. Climate change is shrinking the map for viable locations, especially for the Winter Games...

"More and more democratic countries are skeptical of the Olympics. Activist groups like Human Rights Watch and NolympicsLA have found voices and audiences"

Doping issues and sexual abuse of young athletes are endemic. What will happen in the next winter games, held in an increasingly aggressive and tyrannical China, with its contempt for liberal values and its threats against Taiwan, its oppression of Muslims and other minorities, its disrespect of international law concerning fishing rights of the Philippines, and its take-over of Hong Kong? How can Canada partake in a Games when two of its citizens are being held without charges and due process in an apparent act of revenge as Canada follows the rule of law about extraditing a Chinese businesswoman to the U.S. where she faces charges?

In the face of political activism of the athletes, the IOC has struggled to adapt the long-standing Rule 50 of its Olympic Charter.

It states: "No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas."

Obviously, adhering to Rule 50 would pose a problem since political, religious and racial propaganda, are increasing quickly.

Black athletes, spoiled by the uncritical support internationally for Black Lives Matter didn't hesitate to voice their objections to Rule 50. In fact, there have been several amendments made in order to placate what is now seen as a powerful moral force, despite its lack of transparency and democracy and the fact that most athletes still want no

symbolic acts on the podium or in general any acts of hate.

A consultation overseen by the athlete representative on the IOC's executive board, Olympic champion swimmer Kirsty Coventry of Zimbabwe, concluded athletes wanted the field of play and podiums protected. The process had talked mostly to athlete groups from officially recognized channels such as national teams and sports governing bodies.

As an example of the policy quagmire for the IOC, one IOC concession was that athletes could wear apparel displaying words like "peace," "respect," "solidarity," "inclusion" and "equality," but slogans such as "Black Lives Matter" would not be accepted.

On the first day of competition, the British and Chilean teams kneeled before the opening games and were followed by the United States, Sweden and New Zealand players in later kickoffs. The Australia team posed with a flag of Australia's indigenous people.

It was obvious that the IOC was conflicted about this because photos of that were excluded from the official Tokyo Olympic highlights package provided by the IOC to media that could not broadcast the games live. Again, when opposition was expressed, the IOC gave in, and said it would post such images.

It was unclear if the IOC would distribute images of an athlete raising a fist at the start line, as United States sprinter Noah Lyles has done before his 200-meter races in the past year.

Two reviews of Rule 50 in the previous 18 months by the IOC's own athletes commission had concluded Olympic competitors did not want distractions on their field of play.

The new guidance allows taking a knee or raising a fist in pre-game or pre-race introductions but not on medal ceremony

podiums. The IOC will still discipline athletes who protest on the podium.

Sports governing bodies still have a veto, and swimming's FINA has said its athletes are prohibited on the pool deck from any gesture interpreted as protest.

In order to have some insight on where all this will go in the future, it is important that we understand the facts of what has happened in the past.

Let us examine the historical context of the murder of the Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Eight Palestinians from a terrorist organization called Black September, a group within Yasser Arafat's Fatah and PLO, took Israeli athletes hostage at the Munich Olympics, and, in the course of the attack, 11 Israelis and one German police officer were killed.

While terrorist attacks have become very common, we must remember that the Munich massacre was something much more unique at the time. Author Steven Reeve, who did a 2001 study of the attack and its aftermath, writes that Munich was one of the most significant terror attacks of recent times, in that it "thrust the Palestinian cause into the world spotlight, set the tone for decades of conflict in the Middle East, and launched a new era of international terrorism." And as Arab Muslims continued to find terrorism useful to attain the support of Europeans and the United Nations, then it was sure to follow that terrorism would be used against the West.

Accordingly, it must be understood how incompetent was the response of the German authorities and how mild was the response of the International Olympic movement.

Two of the Israelis were killed immediately upon the hostage-taking. The hostage-takers then demanded the release and transfer to Egypt of a large number of Palestinians and others jailed in Israel. Israel's response was absolute – no

negotiations with terrorist murderers. Israel offered to send a special forces unit to Germany to try to free the hostages, but Germany refused. Instead Germany undertook an operation which was so incompetent that it would be laughable if the consequences hadn't been so tragic. (We must credit the Germans, however, with the moral step of offering to the Palestinians a substitution of some high-ranking Germans in place of the Israelis, which the Palestinians refused.)

First, the Germans dispatched to the Olympic village some members of the border-police, completely untrained in any sort of counter-terrorist response, and without any plan of attack. They took up positions, awaiting orders that never came. Second, German television camera crews starting filming the police squad on the roof of a building, and once the terrorists saw the footage on television, and showed they knew where the police were, the operation was abandoned.

The German authorities pretended to give in to the terrorists' demand for transportation to Cairo; but instead of taking them to the international airport, the Germans transported them to a military airbase, where they planned to attack them.

The Germans selected five snipers, but none of them had any special training and were only chosen because they shot competitively on weekends. A Boeing jet was positioned on the tarmac, and the Germans placed five or six armed police, dressed as flight crew, in the plane. They were to overpower the terrorists who would be inspecting the plane, and the other snipers were to kill the remainder of the terrorists who would be in the helicopters which delivered them from the Olympic site. The armed police, however, again had no counter-terrorism training, and at the last moment just as the helicopters arrived, the police panicked and voted among themselves to abandon their mission, which they did, without even contacting their central command. When the terrorist leaders inspected the empty jet, they knew they had been duped, and a chaotic scene ensued. But the German snipers,

who had no radio contact with each other, and hence no coordination of their efforts, were not even equipped with steel helmets or bullet-proof vests. In the end all of the hostages were killed, and all but three of the terrorists.

After a one-day suspension, the Games continued. At a memorial service, IOC President Avery Brundage spoke about the strength of the Olympic movement, but chose not to refer to the slain Israeli athletes! And the Arab nations objected to a plan to fly flags at half mast!

The bodies of the five Palestinians who were killed were, for some reason, delivered to Libya, where they received heroes' funerals with full military honors. The three surviving terrorists were jailed, but less than two months later, a German Lufthansa jet was hijacked and the Germans quickly traded two of the terrorists for release of the hijacked plane.

And so, in the new world of Olympic political correctness, after 49 years of inaction, the IOC finally realized that it was time to honour the Israeli athletes. I think the moment of silence was a good idea; a still better idea than silence would be to have educated voices explain this story and how it provides some context for today's events.

Howard Rotberg is the author of four books, including *The Second Catastrophe: A Novel About a Book and its Author*, *Tolerism: The ideology Revealed*, and most recently *The Ideological Path to Submission... and what we can do about it*. He writes for Israel National News, Frontpage Magazine and New English Review, among others. He is president of Mantua Books.