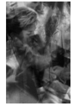

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How to 'Use Your Olympian': The Paradox of Athletic Authenticity and Commercialization in the Contemporary Olympic Games

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Abstract

A paradox between commercialization and the authenticity of the Olympic Games has been identified in the established literature. We add to this discussion but with a specific emphasis on how this paradox is embodied by the athletes involved. We argue that the commercialization of the Games is inevitable in the contemporary media and corporate contexts, whereby the finances available from both are necessary to stage and promote the event. Within these contexts, we suggest it is also inevitable that Olympians become commodities that promote the brand of the Olympics. Representations of their heroism and their modelling of achievement culture provide an authentic credibility for the Games. Moreover, the Olympics add a distinctive dimension to this contemporary authenticity in their appeal to an ancient amateur heritage. We demonstrate, however, that amateurism is a creation of the modern Olympic Movement and is deployed to add another dimension to the general sporting authenticity that is currently invoked to manage the paradox of commercialization.

Keywords

antiquity, athletes, authenticity, commercialization, heroism, Olympics, Olympism

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Introduction

There is an established argument in the literature that the modern Olympics represent a paradox between the authenticity of athletic achievement and the commercialization of the Games through media and corporate finances (Barney, 2007; Barney et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2008a, 2008b; Wenn and Martyn, 2007). The premise of this argument is that the commodification of the event potentially undermines its central purpose, which is to showcase a range of sports wherein the athletes are motivated by the achievement of excellence through supreme physical effort rather than monetary gain. Furthermore, fans' enjoyment of the Olympics is encouraged on the basis of this authentic sporting motivation and is therefore similarly at risk from any overt interpellation of the fans as consumers rather than enthusiasts. The tension between 'authentic' athletic motivation and the potential corrupting influence of financial reward applies to sport in general and has also been discussed in the context of the Olympics (Wenn and Martyn, 2007), but what has been less emphasized is how this tension conditions the cultural understanding of Olympic athletes. Drawing on research on sports celebrity and modern celebrity culture, we discuss how the transformation of the Olympics into a media entertainment event affects the authenticity of the athletes who literally embody the positive aspects of 'Olympism'; the ideals that underpin the event and movement or, in more commercial terms, the meaning of the Olympic brand. The following is an example of the commercial use of Olympic athletes:

> The British Olympic Association is delighted that you have visited the britisholympians site and we hope that you take the next step of making a booking and using one of our Olympians to help you achieve your business objectives … (From *Guidelines on the Use of Olympians*, British Olympic Association)[1]

To illustrate the role of authenticity within this commercialization, we investigate a range of institutional discourses drawn from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), London 2012, the British Olympic Association (BOA), and Lloyds TSB Bank, a major corporate sponsor of the forthcoming Games. Using these examples, we explore the cultural conditions surrounding the representation of sporting heroes and discuss how these differ between the ancient, modern, and contemporary eras. We argue that the tension between authenticity and commercialization is inevitable given that media and corporate finances are necessary to fund the Games, and therefore that this paradox must be managed to emphasize the positive side of this dialectic – the authenticity of motivation and fans' enjoyment of the same. Central to this management is the promotion of Olympic athletes as embodiments of the authentic Olympic ideal, which includes their construction as 'heroic' individuals who participate to excel rather than make money. However, this discourse is contradictory because the representation of athletes occurs within and draws on a celebrity and commodity culture that primarily serves the accumulation strategies of corporations. Moreover, the tacit assumption within this contemporary discourse of sporting heroism is that the Games of antiquity provide a precedent for authentic motivation based on athletic amateurism. We demonstrate, however, that this appeal was driven first by the requirements of legitimizing the modern Games, and subsequently by

the need to manage the paradox of commercialization. The ancient Olympics have therefore become part of the wider discourse of authenticity that is deployed in contemporary times to facilitate the continued commercial and cultural viability of the Games in a mediatized and commodity culture.

The Olympics and Entertainment Culture: Paradoxes in the 'Brand' through Commercialization

Whilst the modern Games began in 1896 in modest fashion, their international impact was established by Stockholm 1912 (Barney, 2007). However, the only media available to these and other pre-Second World War Games were the contemporary forms of radio, press, and cinema newsreel. The subsequent modern Olympic Games developed concurrently with the growth of television and its relationship with sport in general (Smart, 2005; Wenn and Martyn, 2007; Whannel, 2009). Whannel explains that 'The emergence of television in the 1930s enabled a combination of the immediacy and uncertainty of live sport, the domestic context of radio, and the drama and spectacle of newsreel' (2009: 208). He describes how television was first used to broadcast the 1936 Berlin Olympics in local cinemas, and how public broadcast was expanded during the London Olympics of 1948, albeit to a limited audience of those with sets in the London area. In contrast, the London 2012 Olympics will be a global 'mega-event' experienced not only through television but also through other forms of media such as print and websites that will comment on the events and, moreover, create a simultaneous, communal global audience that is increasingly rare in the on-demand and subscription formats of most televised sport (Whannel, 2009). Television media technology is therefore a distinct aspect of the context in which the modern Olympic Games has existed since the mid-20th century (Smart, 2005; Whannel, 2002, 2009).

This mediatization is, however, fundamentally about commercialization, primarily the impact that the availability of media finances has had on the organization of sport. According to Whannel:

> Television transformed sport into a set of commodified global spectacles, producing huge audiences and massive new sources of income. Sport in turn provided television with an endless supply of major spectacular events and an enduring form of pleasurable and popular viewing. (2009: 206)

When a sport is popular enough, guaranteeing a significant audience, the governing bodies can demand huge monies for the broadcast rights both at national levels and internationally for 'mega-events'.[2] In the case of the Olympics, this process began in 1960 when the IOC licensed television rights for both summer and winter Games for the first time, in partnership with the local organizing committees. The IOC took direct control of negotiations starting with Barcelona in 1992, allowing considerations of the Olympic Movement and brand to outweigh specific local or national agendas and local attempts to keep the majority of revenues (Wenn and Martyn, 2007: 311). The current situation is that television provides 47 percent of total revenues from marketing the Games (Olympic.

org, n.d.), derived from huge fees such as the USD$2.1 billion NBC paid to broadcast Vancouver 2010 and London 2012 in the United States (Barney, 2007). What has also become significant is corporate sponsorship, implemented under the Samaranch presidency of the IOC during the 1980s (Wenn and Martyn, 2007), currently accounting for 45 percent of Olympic revenues (see link above). The mediatization and commercialization are linked because the media provide larger audiences who are also potential consumers, not only of the sporting event as media product, but also of associated advertising and branding. This media/commercial equation has clearly influenced the activities of the Olympic Movement, specifically transforming it into a more explicitly corporate operation, as characterized by Wenn and Martyn:

> Fuelled by the revenues generated from television rights, the activities commonly associated with corporate enterprise flourished inside the halls of power of the organisation's Lausanne headquarters. Television matters aside, it was in the areas of product advertising and consumer sales, often identified as *marketing*, that the IOC became linked to what is commonly referred to as *commercialism*. (2007: 315)

This commercialization has been inevitable, largely because of the wider development of sport as a commercialized leisure and entertainment industry that is dependent on both corporate media and commodity corporate finances. Since the latter part of the 20th century, sport has increasingly become a central component of the wider media entertainment industry that consists of globalized transnational and multi-corporate organizations which deploy cross-media and cross-national delivery (Law et al., 2002; Maguire, 1999; Smart, 2005). The Olympic Movement has not only become drawn into these economic structures, but it has also been able to promote its unique identity to capitalize on funding sources: there is clearly a positive 'branding' effect of the Olympic discourse, both in hosting the event and for companies associated with it through sponsorship. In the case of the former, Zhang and Zhao detail the specific and concerted efforts of the Chinese authorities to secure the Games for Beijing and to use them to 'rebrand' the city (2009: 251). Although the authors remain sceptical as to whether economic or rebranding efforts were successful in this case, this example does demonstrate the attraction of the Olympic Games as a globally recognized mega-event that has specific, positive brand associations. Moreover, the IOC is aware of this power and commissioned research to define, refine, and promote its brand, resulting in an advertising campaign in 2000 called 'Celebrate Humanity', which was 'the first fully global marketing campaign to attempt to communicate the values embodied within the Olympic movement' (Maguire et al., 2008a: 70). The researchers comment, however, that:

> … the 'message' becomes embedded in a broader process of commerce whereby the media/marketing/advertising/corporate nexus is concerned less with the values underpinning Olympism *per se* … and more with how such values can help build markets, construct and enhance brand awareness and thus create 'glocal' consumers/identities. (2008a: 74)

No doubt Lloyds TSB is hoping for such positive brand association – which may ultimately bring it more customers – through its financial support of London 2012, which it justifies in emotional rather than commercial terms thus:

> The Games are about more than winning and losing – they're about health, hopes and dreams, friendship, fair play and respect. These values support our mission to help customers on their journeys and let them know that we're with them all the way. (http://www.lloydstsb.careers.com/view/199/london-2012.html)

This form of branding association is an increasingly common strategy for raising the profile of a company and enhancing its brand meanings, something which is particularly important given that Lloyds was taken over by the British Government in the wake of the worldwide financial crisis of 2008.[3] Within the context of this inevitable commercialization, however, remains the perceived 'authenticity' of the Olympics as an athletic event and a brand, one that can therefore be enjoyed primarily for its demonstration of human endeavour rather than as another form of consumption. Broadly speaking, the Olympics are seen to represent a combination of the following: sport for its own sake; the pursuit of achievement and self-improvement through sport but also through associated cultural and educational programmes; and national pride but in a spirit of peace, mutual understanding, and friendship. This discourse of the Olympics is expressed in various ways by the institutions of the movement, primarily through the IOC's mission statements and in the promotion of specific games such as London 2012. Moreover, 'Olympism' underpins associated non-athletic events, such as the cultural programmes which are now a regular feature of the Olympics. For example, London's Cultural Olympiad is framed within the broad Olympic discourse since it will:

> Incorporate the Olympic values of 'excellence, respect and friendship' and the Paralympic vision to 'empower, achieve, inspire' … The Cultural Olympiad is for everyone … Inspiring and involving young people to unlock their creativity. (http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/culturalolympiad)[4]

Ultimately, however, all such specific iterations are derived from the concept of 'Olympism' that is defined in the Olympic Charter thus:

1. Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.
2. The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity. (http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Olympic%20Charter/Charter_en_2010.pdf)

In the context of the Olympics as part of sports media entertainment culture, a paradox exists wherein the commercialization of the Games is potentially undermining its brand power, the meanings of which are antithetical to consumerism. For example, the key messages of the Celebrate Humanity campaign in 2000 mentioned above focus on issues such as 'hope', 'dreams' and inspirations', 'friendship', 'fair play', and 'joy in effort' (Maguire et al., 2008a), echoing the ideals of modern Olympism which emphasize peaceful international relationships, education through sport, and a focus on human

greatness.[5] Indeed, a critical perspective on contemporary IOC marketing efforts would suggest that they are there simply to veil the commercialism behind the Games, or at the very least to justify it as necessary for the Games to exist by providing the funds required to facilitate the rarefied Olympic atmosphere in which such ideals can still be pursued (Maguire et al., 2008a). The literature on the Olympics thus raises this broad question of the paradox, particularly focused on how the commercialization is both promoted and managed by the various institutions of the Olympic Movement, media, and corporations. What is absent is discussion of how this paradox is managed through the athletes who participate in the Games, and without whom the core authenticity of the event would not exist. Ultimately, it is they who are supposed to embody Olympism through their athletic achievements but, as we argue, they inevitably become caught up in the commercialization of the Games.

The Contemporary Context for Sports Stars: Celebrity and Authenticity

We have suggested that the commercialization of the Games is inevitable in the contemporary mediatized and corporate context in which all sports exist as entertainment industries. Sport has increasingly become part of the wider media entertainment structure of globalized transnational and multi-corporate organizations (Law et al., 2002; Maguire, 1999; Smart, 2005). Moreover, the media broadcasts themselves have been joined by commercial sports commodity products, associated with specific individuals, teams and nations, as well wider commodity branding through endorsement and sponsorship deals (Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Smart, 2005). This media-driven commercialization of sport has converged with the emergence of modern celebrity as a historically distinct form of fame, dependent on the development of mass media technologies throughout the 20th century and the significant expansion of mass consumption in late capitalism (Marshall, 1997; Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2004). In his critique of the consumerist and individualist society of the post-war period, Lasch (1979) bemoans the 'degradation of sport' into entertainment show business culture. One consequence of this 'degradation' has been an increasing emphasis on individual 'stars', and so sporting figures have been transformed into sporting celebrities. The status of celebrity beyond their own sport is a distinctive aspect of contemporary sports stars, derived from the transformation of sport from amateur community-based leisure into a globalized and mediatized 'entertainment' industry. Moreover, this industry uses the technologies and strategies of wider celebrity culture to provoke consumption of its own media products, associated sports commodities, and, crucially, wider commodity brands. Thus:

> … commercial corporations have come to recognize that sport and sporting figures offer a rare, if not unique, quality of authenticity from which their brands can derive substantial benefit by association … From the 1980s, sport events and sporting figures have been increasingly valued as the means through which all sorts of products and services, including those not related to sport at all could be marketed to consumers. (Smart, 2005: 144)

However, this branding is potentially a threat to the athletes' cultural resonance because it can make them seem more like corporate functionaries than genuinely motivated

enthusiasts for their sport (Smart, 2005). The premise of the threat is that commercialization is a negative aspect of contemporary sports industries because it renders sport as just another indistinct form of consumerism, removing any enthusiasm from its audience. This argument, however, must be understood in terms of historical scale given that some level of economic burden has always been part of organized sport, both for players requiring equipment and wages if they were professionals, and for fans to buy tickets to events. The issue in contemporary times has become the large-scale finances available in many sports through commercialization and mediatization, requiring an associated increase in economic burdens for fans, and rewarding athletes to the extent that 'Making money is now an important part of sport and professional participants have to work hard at their games because it is their job to do so' (Smart, 2005: 5). Furthermore, the commercialization of teams and sport industries has removed the close identification of traditional fan and team, whereby the latter, collectively and individually, 'were the apotheosis of the culture of their cities, symbolizing not only the heart and soul of the spectators who watched them but the spirit of the associated community' (Rojek, 2006: 684). The separation of fans from their teams through mediatization and the consequent positioning of fan as consumer and athletes as highly paid wage labourers are seen as less genuine than either an emotional identification with a team or sports star, or the athlete as motivated by the opportunity to excel. This tension is managed by emphasizing the genuine basis of emotional attachment in fans, focused on the authenticity of their heroes (Smart, 2005: 194–8). The inevitability of commercialization is therefore alleviated by promoting the authenticity of the sporting event, not only at the level of the event as brand as described in the previous section, but also through its particular sports stars. Authenticity is a key issue here precisely because it serves two symbiotic purposes: its presence is seen to promote brands and products through positive association, and it can also be deployed to manage the potentially disruptive consequences of this commercialization. We suggest that this latter function is more relevant to the Olympics: athletes' 'authenticity' is invoked to emphasize the purity of the event, distracting fans and audiences from their overt interpellation as consumers (Maguire et al., 2008b), and reiterating the actual Games as an arena for human achievement rather than a global media and commercial mega-event (Whannel, 2009).

The construction of the authenticity of sports stars is two fold: first, they are seen to achieve status through their talent and hard work at training that talent, rather than through inherited or class privilege. This resonates with the democratization of fame during the 20th century, whereby media 'stars' have been increasingly drawn from 'ordinary' backgrounds, or at least have celebrity personae that emphasize their ordinary origins (Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2004). This serves to model the idea that 'ordinary' people – from the newly enfranchised masses in democracies – do matter in mass capitalist society, and may even one day become rich, powerful and famous using their talents. As Rojek argues, sporting heroes have become part of the mediatized celebrity elite partly because 'In societies based around the meritocratic ideal, sport is also one of the paradigmatic institutions that articulate and elaborate the meritocratic ideal and reinforce achievement culture' (2006: 680–1). Rojek argues that the 'achievement culture' modelled by sports stars serves social integration by reinforcing the values needed for the discipline of work, but it does so by focusing our attention on heroic or exceptional individuals. Nike's reinvention and global expansion drew precisely on this achievement

culture in both its advertising and branding, and in its sponsorship of athletes who embodied the hard-working and heroic ethos, most notably Michael Jordan (Goldman and Papson, 1998). Moreover, Nike's promotion of athletic celebrity illustrates a central point about celebrity culture: the pivotal affinity between consumer culture and the emergence of contemporary celebrity culture. Sports stars make great 'celebrity-commodities' (Turner, 2004: 34) precisely because they fulfil the function of modelling desire for their fans as consumers: sports celebrities embody both the work ethic of achievement culture *and* luxurious and exceptional lifestyle consumerism.

The second dimension of athletes' authenticity is the potential for heroism that is seen to underpin their professional activities. In his study on footballers in Britain and how they became media stars during the 1990s, Whannel argues that the 20th century saw more emphasis on sports as an arena for heroism (2002). He challenges arguments that describe a gradual erosion of 'authentic' heroism during the 20th century in favour of an emphasis on mass media entertainment stars, exemplified by Daniel Boorstin's (2006) characterization of the decline of heroes in favour of celebrities. Boorstin suggests that the interest in 'greatness' of achievement has gradually been replaced by the media-driven interest in the banalities of celebrities' lives, and hence we no longer have true heroes in our culture. Whannel argues, however, that while sports stars have replaced more traditional 'heroes' such as explorers, adventurers, scientists, and military men, athletes retain some of the authenticity of such extraordinary figures because 'the cultures of sport still depend in part on a constant re-enacting of the heroic' (2002: 46). The unpredictability of sporting contests is a key dimension of this authenticity in that it allows for 'heroic' or extraordinary performances in specific, limited, and never to be repeated time frames, resulting in both urgency and demands on participants to excel beyond expectations, to achieve 'greatness' (Smart, 2005). The 2010 World Cup demonstrates this in full measure, with many favoured teams knocked out at the league stage or surviving only through penalty kick deciders. Spain, a team that had perpetually missed the finals, eventually won the competition, but only through a last-minute goal in extra time, providing dramatic tension and finally matching long-held national expectation. Earlier in 2010 at the Winter Olympics, the Canadian men's hockey team beat their eternal American rivals in the gold medal game, but only after their youthful captain Sidney Crosby scored in overtime, provoking an outpouring of Canadian media stories on these national heroes. Goodman et al. (2002) demonstrate that adverts using Olympians also draw predominantly on narratives of heroism, illustrating that the commercial use of these celebrities relies directly on the perceived authenticity of athletic heroism.

The core dimensions of sports celebrity have inevitably developed within the context of the commercialization of sports over the last few decades, and the specific commercialization and branding of the Olympics has been described above. However, there has been little attempt hitherto to connect commercialization and sports celebrity in the Olympic context. We argue that athletes who participate in the Olympic Games must also become celebrity commodities that promote the Olympic brand, particularly through an embodiment of the values of Olympism that define the modern movement (see Note 3), whether or not they already have promotional and sponsorship deals prior to the Games. Thus, they are portrayed as celebrities whose currency is authentic

achievement, heroism, and inspiration, rather than those who promote consumerism, as illustrated by the following:

> Whether you need an after dinner or motivational speaker, a celebrity for a media or sponsorship event or a personal appearance, choose one of our British Olympians through britisholympians.com. All our Olympians have unique and remarkable stories to tell – stories of success, of strength, of determination and courage, to motivate, inspire and entertain from the greatest sporting event in the world – the Olympic Games. (http://www.britisholympians.com/home.aspx)[6]

Having established the broader context of sporting authenticity and its impact on the Olympics, we want to consider whether there is something specific to the sporting authenticity of the Olympic Games that participating athletes can draw on: namely, is 'Olympism' a discourse of authenticity that exists in a distinct but interrelated way to the key aspects of heroism and achievement culture that general sports authenticity draws on? To answer this question, we excavate the historical emergence and development of the ideals promoted by the Olympics, and in particular consider the appeal to the authenticity of the ancient Games in such ideals.

The Modern Construction of Olympism and the Appeal to Ancient Authenticity

As already discussed, heroism is a dominant discourse in the construction of sport (McKay et al., 2000; Whannel, 2002), but this heroism is often based on archetypes, many of which are drawn from eternal cultural myths (Goodman et al., 2002). In the case of the Olympics, an important archetype has been the ancient amateur athlete and his participation purely for the sake of sport – rather than for economic gain – which is certainly echoed in the contemporary discourses described above. Until recently in the history of the modern Olympic Games (most famously the participation of the American basketball 'Dream Team', consisting entirely of professional players, in 1992; Barney, 2007) the authenticity of the athlete was tied to his or her amateur status. The labelling of ancient athletes as amateurs, however, was based on late 19th and early 20th century scholars' own agendas rather than reality.

Young (1984) traces the roots of his titular 'Olympic Myth', that ancient Greek athletics during the Archaic and Classical periods were the arena of aristocratic amateurs, to the late 19th century CE.[7] It grew out of the development of competitive sport in the first half of the 19th century in England, Scotland, and America, featuring competitions in which any athlete could perform, regardless of class or occupation, and for which athletes were paid and/or won cash prizes and were, therefore, professional. During the 1860s, however, 'amateur' athletics clubs arose, formed by 'gentlemen', with membership requirements that excluded working-class athletes. It was not until the 1880s that the status of amateur was limited to athletes who did not receive monetary rewards for their achievements. Amateurism in athletics, therefore, began as an elitist, aristocratic ideal that only incorporated economics after two decades of existence

(Young, 1984). It is into this socio-economic context that the modern international Olympic Games were 'reborn' in 1896.[8]

The modern Olympics were established under the leadership of Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin, a wealthy French aristocrat. Coubertin's original aim was to reform the French educational system to include athletic training, based on the model of the British public school system. When, however, he was unable to raise interest in this scheme, he turned his attention to establishing the international Olympics. Support for this was sought through an appeal to his fellow aristocrats and their contemporary notion of amateur sport. At a congress held in 1894 in Paris, delegates voted to re-establish the Olympic Games under the leadership of an already-formed IOC, restricting participation to amateurs, defined as those who received absolutely no monetary gain from athletics (and thereby impeding the participation of the working class, who would be discouraged by the expense involved in training and travelling to the games) (Young, 1984). The first Games held in 1896 in Athens were a moderate success, and Coubertin decided that the second should be staged in Paris. The IOC was reformed at this time, including nine new members of the European titled aristocracy. Also at this time, Coubertin began to promote the idea that ancient Greek Olympians were both aristocratic and amateur, and that their competition was based on the ideal of sport for its own sake (Young, 1984: 73). Coubertin was, however, neither Classicist nor ancient historian, so from whom did he adopt this idea?

The first assertion that ancient athletics were amateur contests, and that aristocratic Greeks took pleasure in sport for its own sake, was made by John Mahaffy (1879). This idea was furthered and refined, through the inclusion of the concept that pure, amateur ancient Greek athletics were degraded by the introduction of professionalism, by Percy Gardner (1892). Both of these authors, however, used the idea of ancient Greek amateurism, arrived at through a deliberate misinterpretation of historical evidence, to promote their own Victorian aristocratic values (Young, 1984: 53).[9] There is no direct evidence to prove that Coubertin read either Mahaffy's or Gardner's works, but his aristocratic amateur athlete was more the model Victorian gentleman than ancient Greek, fitting neatly into the contemporary Classical scholarly environment (Crowther, 2007: 3; Young, 1984: 74). Once established, this perception of the ancient Olympians, and their use as authentic models for modern Olympic athletes, was quickly entrenched in the collective athletic consciousness. The aristocratic and amateur status of the Archaic and Classical Olympians, and the later degeneration of the Olympics in the Hellenistic and Roman periods due to the encroachment of professionalism, was codified by E.N. Gardiner (1910), from whose work 'all modern accounts of Greek athletics, popular or scholarly, have descended – with *very* few exceptions' (Young, 1984: 76). Gardiner, however, misinterpreted historical evidence and ignored its chronology 'repeatedly and consistently, misleading readers far worse than ordinary sloppy scholarship' to support his 'encomiums of Victorian amateur ideals' (Young, 1984: 76, 82). Nevertheless, misconceptions about ancient amateurism became so ingrained that as late as 1948 Avery Brundage, then IOC vice-president, appealed to them to defend the decision not to restore the Olympic medals stripped from James Thorpe in 1912, when it was learned that he had once played baseball professionally. Brundage stated that the ancient Olympic Games:

> … were strictly amateur … gradually, however, abuses and excesses developed … what was originally fun, recreation, a diversion, and a pastime became a business … the Games degenerated, lost their purity and high idealism, and were finally abolished … sport must be for sport's sake. (quoted in Young, 1984: 86)

Brundage upheld, vigorously, the notion of Olympic amateurism until his retirement from the IOC presidency in 1972. Like Coubertin, Brundage was not a Classical historian, and must have relied on the scholarly opinions of the day, as stated above based primarily on the earlier work of Gardiner. The simple truth, however, is that Greek athletes who participated in the Olympic Games and other athletic festivals were not amateurs but professionals, at least in the modern sense of the terms.

By modern definition, an 'amateur' gains no economic benefit from an activity, while a 'professional' does. The ancient Greek language, however, has no vocabulary to describe these modern terms. Amateur is a French derivative of the Latin *amator*, lover, or one who does something out of love. Professional is derived from the Latin verb *profiteor*, to declare publicly, which may in modern minds be confused with 'profit', from the Latin verb *proficio*, to gain advantage (Miller, 2004: 212). Based on the modern definition, Greek athletes were professionals, since they competed for prizes with monetary value, and could also be paid to compete.

The Olympics were one of the four great *stephanitic* games of Greek antiquity, meaning that victors received only a symbolic crown as a reward, not a monetary prize.[10] In a sense, therefore, the ancient Olympic *Games* could be considered amateur: ample ancient evidence, however, proves that the Olympic *athletes* cannot, even when that evidence is restricted to the pre-Hellenistic, 'pure' era of the Games. Victorious athletes were lavishly rewarded on their return home, as best demonstrated by evidence from Athens which shows that an Athenian Olympic victor would receive an immediate cash award and free meals for life at public expense (Kyle, 1987: 127, 146–7).[11] There is evidence that other cities took things a step further, paying Olympians to compete for them rather than their own home towns (Young, 1984: 141–2). The acceptance of monetary awards and particularly payment would have made any of these athletes professional, by modern definition, and disqualified all from competing in the pre-1980s Olympics.

The second claim of the early Olympic historians, that the Olympic athletes were members of the aristocracy, is also easily dismissed. There simply is not enough ancient evidence in the vast majority of cases to designate the class affiliations of ancient Olympians. At best, all that can be said is that members of all classes participated (Young, 1984: 163).[12] The emphasis on class was clearly the result of the attitudes of late 19th and early 20th century Classical scholars, with their Victorian ideals, in collusion with early, aristocratic supporters of the modern Olympic Games, like Coubertin and his fellow noble IOC members. Although membership in the upper classes was not established as a requirement for participation in the early modern Olympics, class was intimately tied to contemporary ideas of amateurism, and, as stated earlier, the restrictions placed on the athletes' sources of income would have greatly deterred the ability of working-class athletes to participate. In the post-First World War era, however, Coubertin was forced to introduce a more popular Olympism to combat anti-Olympic movements that had arisen

in protest against the perceived elitism of the earlier modern Games. This reformed Olympism was more democratic and popular, embracing all people from all classes – but it was still amateur (Chatziefstathiou, 2007). The correlation of amateurism and aristocratic privilege in the ancient Games is therefore as dubious a claim as the absence of professionalism from them.

Although professional athletes are now an accepted presence in the modern Olympic Games, the authenticity of amateurism has become so ingrained that it is still, if only tacitly, invoked. If we turn to the example of the Lloyds TSB 'Local Heroes' programme, we can see attempts to emphasize the amateurism central to sporting authenticity that still exists. The programme:

> … is an initiative to support the future stars of Team GB and Paralympics GB in the lead up to London 2012 and beyond. Follow their journey as they pursue their sporting dreams. For every Olympic and Paralympic medalist, there are thousands of genuine hopefuls struggling without recognition or funding. (http://www.facebook.com/lloydstsblocalheroes)

These 'local heroes' need the financial support of the bank's donations to achieve their goals, suggesting that they are not yet established enough to have significant commercial sponsorship and that they are, therefore, amateurs who do not receive direct payment for their athletic activities. The ancient Greek Olympics have been used to legitimize and authenticate ideals of amateurism in the modern Games, but this discourse is based on the misinterpretation and occasional falsification of historic evidence. Nonetheless, the reiterations of amateurism have become a central part of the modern Olympic discourse, and indeed provide a distinctive Olympic dimension to the 'authenticity' that is foregrounded to distract audiences from the commercialization of the Games.

Conclusion

We have argued that the commercialization of the Olympic Games is inevitable in the contemporary contexts of media and corporate financing that permit sports to be global forms of entertainment. Whilst others have established the ways in which the paradox of commercialization and sporting authenticity exists in the Olympics as a movement and institution, we have shown that this paradox also exists in the embodied representation of the Games – the Olympians. We have argued that we must understand participating athletes as inevitably caught up in this commercialization and, therefore, as celebrity commodities that promote the Olympic brand. The representation of the athletes is a key strategy in maintaining the legitimacy of the Games that is so crucial to making them credible with audiences and consumers, and foremost amongst the discourse of representation is sporting authenticity. We have shown how this discourse relies on both heroic feats and the ordinary provenance of athletes to connect to its mass audience. However, we have also suggested that the general authenticity of sports celebrity is enhanced by the specific appeal to supposed ancient amateurism within the Olympic Movement, creating a symbiotic relationship between the authenticity of the Olympic brand and its athletes. 'Using your Olympian' in the ways described above is therefore

an inevitable outcome of the contemporary socio-economic and discursive structures of sport, and within such contexts the appeal to sporting authenticity legitimizes this commercialization.

Notes

1. The British Olympic Association's website http://www.britisholympians.com/guidelines.aspx was accessed on 14 January 2011, but the site has now been folded into the London 2012 preparations and these guidelines deleted.
2. The other major sporting mega-event is, of course, the World Cup. The global television rights in 2002 and 2006 were sold for almost USD$2 billion (Smart, 2005: 90) and, more recently, FIFA completed the worldwide sale of television rights for the 2010 World Cup, 18 months before the tournament began (http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/tv/index.html). No details of the revenue are provided on FIFA's official website, but various media news reports USD$2.7 billion as the price of broadcast rights for South Africa 2010.
3. Lloyds is the official banking partner of London 2012, paying sponsorship fees to the London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Lloyds was taken over by the UK Government in March 2009, increasing a previous bail out to take 65 percent control of the voting shares, at a cost of around GBP 16 billion (http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/mar/07/government-takes-over-lloyds).
4. The quote was accessed on 14 January 2011 but the site has now been updated and this specific quote deleted from the main London 2012 site. However, the regional participants in the cultural Olympiad still use this text on their own sites.
5. All institutions of the Olympic movement are governed by the Olympic Charter and contain many references to promoting the fairness, equality, and friendship of sporting contests, see http://multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/en_report_122.pdf
6. The British Olympic Association's website was accessed on 14 January 2011, but the site has now been folded into the London 2012 preparations.
7. Academics uncritically accepted the notion of the amateur status of ancient Greek athletes until a more accurate perspective emerged in the 1970s which challenged these assumptions. Young's book remains the most thorough discussion of the construction of the modern Olympics and their ties to those of ancient Greece. Although his interpretations of some evidence have been occasionally questioned, no reviews of his work have disagreed with his basic premise, that ancient Greek Olympic athletes cannot be considered amateurs (e.g. Evjen, 1987; Instone, 1986; Poliakoff, 1989).
8. Modern Greeks had, however, held their own revival of the Olympics in 1859, 1870, 1875 and 1889 (Young, 1984).
9. According to Young (1984: 47–8, n. 44, with supporting references) Mahaffy in particular 'was repeatedly judged a poor scholar by his peers'. Kyle (1987: 124–5) further discusses criticisms of 19th and early 20th Classical scholarship on ancient athletics.
10. The other three stephanitic games were the Isthmian, Nemean, and Pythian games. The Olympic prize was a crown of wild olive branches, the Isthmian a pine wreath (later dry celery), the Nemean a crown of wild celery, and the Pythian a laurel wreath. There were, however, countless other games, some of which offered fairly modest prizes, but others prizes of great value: chief among these were the Panathenaic Games of Athens.
11. The intrinsic monetary value of these awards has been debated (e.g. Instone, 1986).
12. The social status of ancient Greek athletes has been highly debated, and in the absence of new evidence will likely continue to be so. For further discussion see Christensen (2007: 63 ff); Kyle (1987: 148 ff.); Young (1984: 147 ff.).

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