


7-29-1992

## Olympics in Barcelona: Up Close and Personal

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, [richard.crepeau@ucf.edu](mailto:richard.crepeau@ucf.edu)

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Public History at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in On Sport and Society by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Olympics in Barcelona: Up Close and Personal" (1992). *On Sport and Society*. 351. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/351>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE  
July 29, 1992

The 1992 Summer Olympics from Barcelona is less than a week old and already I am irritated by any number of things, but especially by NBC. Those who chart such things tell us that NBC will provide 161 hours of mostly taped coverage of the XXVth Olympiad. What they don't tell us is that of these 161 hours, approximately 10 minutes of each hour contains actual event coverage. The other 50 minutes of the hour are filled with commercials from every major U.S. corporation featuring Olympic athletes past and present; promotional spots for NBC programming; endless carping about the personal hardships of the athletes and the sacrifices of their families; and banal analysis and commentary by sportscasters who, in the past, seemed to have some sense.

Perhaps this is a concerted effort by NBC to sell their Olympic Triplecast, the financial flop of the games, with NBC losing an estimated \$100M on this experiment in pay-per-view. If you really want to watch the games, you should have the triplecast, which gives you live access to all events. But at \$29.95 per day, or even the bargain rate of \$125 for the whole package, this is prohibitive for most people who can't spend that kind of money, and then stay home from work to watch the games. But if you could afford it, how nice it would be to watch the events, rather than all the excess baggage NBC is putting out. Roone Arledge created the "Up Close and Personal" concept to add excitement to the games. Unfortunately in the hands of those at NBC these portraits have become the centerpiece of the telecast, with the events thrown in to add to the excitement.

Have you heard enough about the cyclist Inga Thompson whose boyfriend had an accelerated heartbeat? The hammering of Kim Zemeskel for slipping off the balance beam was brutal. I thought at one point late Sunday or early Monday that Kim would be taken before a firing squad. This would be shown on tape delay by NBC, only after replaying the slip on the beam from twelve different angles, and recounting the sacrifices made by her family and her coach. And speaking of Bella Karoli he should forever be remembered as the gymnastic defector who understood the true dollar value of freedom before most others behind the iron curtain.

And that brings up something else. What is it about these commentators that leads them to think that anything other than winning the gold medal is a defeat? Certainly those who were

Olympic athletes understand the notion of giving all you have in the competition, and if you win fine, if you finish second, fine. But to hear interviewers asking people who just won a silver or bronze medal what went wrong is more than a little irritating.

To be second or third best in the world isn't exactly a colossal failure. If you finish second or third it doesn't mean you did something wrong. To suggest otherwise is to demean and degrade the achievements of the other athletes in the competition. Doesn't anyone understand that athletes from places other than the United States have some ability, that they too trained hard, that their families made sacrifices, that they overcame personal obstacles? Why can't it be accepted that on a given day the athlete from Surinam or Rumania was simply better than anyone else?

In some ways the most troubling aspect of these Olympics is the presence of the Dream Team, the U.S. basketball team of NBA superstars. Last fall when the decision to send the best of the NBA to the Olympics was made I was one of those who criticized the move. I did so because to me it was being done for all the wrong reasons, namely revenge and chauvinism. Americans had not learned how to handle losing, and so they would send a team that would demolish the opposition, and this would show the world that the United States still is a great and powerful nation. This is a violation of the spirit of the Olympics, as well as any spirit of sportsmanship. It is the spirit of virulent nationalism. It is the Desert Storm mentality come to sport.

But now that the Dream Team is in Barcelona and the slaughter has begun, there are at least some redeeming features to this study in chauvinism. First, it would seem that at least a few of the players understand that this is more than revenge on the world. It is a chance to display basketball at its very best, in a forum where the best should be put on display. Second, it would appear that many of the victims of the Dream Team do not resent the process, but rather are honored to be on the same court with the best in the world. Third, and maybe most importantly, the Dream Team will instruct the other players of the world about how far they still must come in developing their game. Longtime Russian Basketball Coach Aleksandr Gomelski, who so cleverly outcoached John Thompson at Seoul in 1988, says that the coming of the Dream Team to Barcelona is "the best thing for basketball all over the world." The lesson to be learned, is the same lesson that Gomelski and the Russians learned from the U.S. team in 1956: Namely, how to play the game at the very highest

level. As the Russians did in the 50s, 60s, and 70s, the rest of the world will leave Barcelona knowing how the game is to be played, and try to learn to play it at that level. Someday they will, and then who will the U.S. send?

In the meantime the real drama surrounding the Dream Team is whether Michael will wear the official U.S. clothing for the gold medal ceremonies. These are made by Reebok, who paid big bucks for this exclusive advertising. Michael of course is exclusively a Nike man. He says he will wear only Nike. The tension is building. Let's go up close and personal on this one.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

Copyright 1992 by Richard C. Crepeau