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Rio 2016

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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It's beginning to appear that the Russians will be the big winners at the Olympic Games opening next week in Rio. You may wonder how this could be given the fact that large numbers of Russian athletes, including all the track and field team, have been banned from participation in the Games of 2016. That of course is precisely the point.

The big winners will avoid being part of, and perhaps even victims of, this fiasco in Rio. Let's start with Zika. A large number of athletes have chosen to withdraw from the games because of the health threat posed by the virus that has spread rapidly through the host country. Avoiding exposure to the virus could save the athletes from the consequences of Zika, the least of which would involve becoming an unwitting carrier of the virus and assisting in its spread across the globe.

Given the dire consequences of the virus involving its impact on the unborn, it is remarkable that anyone would expose themselves to it. Athletes and the young in general believe that they are nearly invincible and that nothing of this nature could happen to them so they will go to Rio to pursue the medals.

Even more remarkable is the fact that world health authorities and those charged with preventing the spread of disease haven't done everything possible to stop this gathering of would be virus hosts. Many Russian athletes have been saved from this particular set of dangers by the anti-doping patrol. They should be forever grateful to WADA and to the Russian doping conspirators.

Zika of course is only one of the many hazards from which many Russian athletes have been rescued. The waters of Brazil and particularly Guanabara Bay in Rio are filthy beyond the worst imaginable levels. Floating in the Bay over the past year have been dead bodies, endless amounts of garbage, a cascade of human feces, and other forms of

sewage. The Bay has become the center of a bacteria convention hosting those bacteria that can cause diarrhea and vomiting as well as super-bacteria that can kill. It has become a carnival of disease with potentially deadly consequences.

Denying that anything is serious enough to postpone, cancel, or move the games, Rio officials have nonetheless warned anyone participating in sports in the Bay or on lakes and streams to avoid opening their mouth. Apparently breathing will still be encouraged.

There have been attempts to remove the major items of trash from the water and these efforts have produced a remarkable yield of television sets, dead dogs, a sofa, dead dolphins, and the occasional human corpse. This activity has removed the worst eye sores, but the water quality itself remains a source of sore eyes.

Always a concern at any Olympics is the Olympic Village that serves as home for the vast majority of athletes participating in the games. In Rio, as in many previous cities, the Village was not ready when it was time for the athletes to move into their quarters. Poor wiring, leaking pipes, and other infrastructure problems were reported from a significant number of athletes from across the world.

It was the Australian delegation that first filed complaints over their accommodations. Problems with electricity, plumbing, and gas, as well as dirty rooms were among the complaints. One hopes that it was not a measure of the concern of Brazilian authorities when the Mayor of Rio responded by promising the Aussies a kangaroo. It is unclear what other delegations were promised but one would hope that carcasses from the Bay were not among the gifts.

All of this is occurring against a backdrop of political turmoil and the impending impeachment trial of the President of Brazil. Add to the political crisis the dire economic situation and you have an atmosphere that is rife with potential political violence and a place uniquely unqualified to host the Olympics.

This ugly reality seems to matter little to the authorities in the country, the leaders of the Olympic movement, and power brokers of world sport, or anyone else that may be able to profit from Rio '16. Protests have been frequent and strong on the streets of Brazil and the Olympic torch came under attack several times during the torch run. Ordinary Brazilians have watched massive sums of money being spent on bread and circuses while the people of Brazil remain victims of a government unable to meet the basic needs of its population.

If you are an athlete looking for an excuse to avoid Rio, try putting some foreign substances like steroids in your drug tests.

This will give you an out and I don't think that would be considered cheating unless it was done by the Russians.

As they say in the Olympic Movement, the Games must go on. So get your TV ready, your snack supply well stocked, and sit back and watch one of the most disgraceful exhibitions of sport since Nero held court at the Coliseum in Rome.

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.

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