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Marty Glickman

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The death of Marty Glickman last week brought back a number of memories. In and around the New York area people recalled Glickman as voice of the Knicks and any number of other teams on New York radio sports. Across the nation, and indeed perhaps even across the world, Glickman's death brought back memories of the 1936 Olympic Games and the horror of Hitler's final solution. The latter was without a doubt more significant as it affected sport as well as the course of world history.

Marty Glickman's experiences at the 1936 Olympics is a story that has been told repeatedly by Glickman and others. The most complete rendering of Glickman's story is told in his own autobiography, The Fastest Kid on the Block.

Here Glickman details the circumstances that led to his selection to the U.S. Olympic Team in 1936 and then his exclusion from the 4 X 100 relay race at the games. Although Glickman's claims that Joseph Goebbels ordered USOC President Avery Brundage to keep the Jewish runners off the team have never been documented, it is clear that Brundage himself was anti-Semitic and that he was unhappy with the Jewish presence on the U.S. Olympic team. It may be that Brundage played a role in the decision to keep Glickman and Sam Stoller out of competition, although Allen Guttmann in his biography of Brundage says that the Stoller-Glickman removal was based on the coach's preference for runners from his own university.

Glickman's death then is a reminder of the way in which sport and specifically the Olympic games were politicized in 1936, and a reminder that indeed sport and politics are intimately related in the modern world. At the Olympics, despite the statement of the Olympic ideals, the counting of medals accumulated by each nation participating is done on a daily if not hourly basis, and the results of those counts are taken to mean something about the quality of life in the nations involved.

In 1936 Hitler saw the games as a means of expressing the superiority of the German nation and people, and perhaps more importantly a means of gaining Germany's acceptance back into the family of nations as an equal. The 1936 Olympics were in some sense a validation of the proposition...
that Germany had been unfairly treated at the end of World War I, and now was once again a member of the family of Western nations.

Many times since, both nations and individuals have used the Olympic games and other sporting venues for political statements. And on nearly all of those occasions this has been a distortion of the meaning of sport and competition. The consequences have never matched that associated with Nazi Germany, but there can be no guarantee that it could not happen again.

The other aspect of the remembrance of Marty Glickman has been his role as pioneer in broadcasting, as well as his role as teacher and mentor for many broadcasters who came after him. Clearly Glickman was one of those who defined this profession in its embryonic stage. In and around New York his voice was as well known as the voice of Vince Scully in Los Angeles is today. Young boys growing up in the New York area who heard Glickman describe the games over radio, mimicked both his voice and his style.

In my view however too much was made of Marty Glickman's significance. There were other voices in other locales that were just as important in defining this profession. Ernie Harwell, Bob Elson, Ray Scott, Lindsey Nelson, Harry Caray, and Jack Brickhouse, to mention a few, certainly had as much influence on the young aspiring broadcasters in their region as did Glickman in New York.

Indeed what we see in these tributes to Glickman is the usual tendency for the New York media to exaggerate their own sphere. There is, in fact, no one quite as provincial as a New Yorker, even when in many ways they are among the most sophisticated and worldly of people.

My own recollection of Marty Glickman although it is indeed foggy and based on limited hearings is that he was "too New York" in his style, his voice, and his point of view. This may have had great appeal in Manhattan and on Long Island but it didn't develop a cult following for Glickman in the mid-west. In my memory Glickman got in the way of the games, rather than delivering them to the mind's eye in a congenial and accurate form. I am not one of those who think there was some injustice done to Marty Glickman because he had only a very limited time on the national stage.
Nonetheless Marty Glickman has made a great contribution to the broadcasting profession. His role as mentor for many young broadcasters who came through the Syracuse University Broadcasting Department and his role as broadcasting coach for NBC in recent years where he helped to develop the jocks turned announcer into professional sportscasters, mark his as a distinguished career.

More importantly Marty Glickman's Olympic experience is a story that needs frequent retelling for those within and outside sportsworld.

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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