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From the New York Times-bestselling author of *Clemente* and *When Pride Still Mattered* comes the blockbuster story of the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome--17 days that helped define the modern world.

Rome 1960: The Olympics That Changed the World Details

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From Reader Review Rome 1960: The Olympics That Changed the World for online ebook

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

A very interesting, and sometimes very funny, read.

In 1960, the Olympics were at a cusp, between "amateur" and "shamateur," colonialism and the new states of Africa and Asia, assumptions and achievements. The stars of the show? Wilma Rudolph, Rafer Johnson, Cassius Clay. Would-be defectors, egomaniac athletes, east-west competition, paranoid ex-spies, and the gross hypocrisy of Avery Brundage.

Track and field gets the most time, but swimming, diving, boxing, cycling, basketball, and weightlifting all get a decent amount of coverage.

I did find it odd that gymnastics were the reason the Soviet Union won the medal race - and yet gymnastics got minor coverage in this book.

Robert Lowry says

A good if, at times, tedious read. The thesis is interesting and the research evidently high quality. The prose is occasionally stale.

Michael Griswold says

David Maraniss billed the Rome 1960 Olympics as “The Olympics That Stirred The World”, I echo the sentiments of another reviewer who argued that it was in fact the world that changed around an Olympics. That is a rather minor quibble with an otherwise excellent overview of the Rome Olympics. For Olympics nerds like myself, there’s all the sports action that one could want from track and field to swimming and basketball. Yet, one gets the discernible impression that sports itself changed within the context of these Olympics.

Sports became a political vehicle in the jousting between the two great Cold War leaders Eisenhower and Khrushchev in a battle between superpowers that proceeded unabated until the end of the Cold War. Sports also became entangled in the conflict between China and Taiwan that became a struggle of national identities, race relations in South Africa, not to mention race relations within our own “United” States. Politics burst through the dam of amateurism that Avery Brundage had tried to erect and for better or worse became a part of the Olympic Games down to present day.

I thought some of the most interesting sections were the sections on the evolution of television coverage of the Olympic Games. Having never known an era when the Olympic Games were not the subject of wall to wall coverage, one finds the descriptions of how they got the tapes back to the CBS studios for the half hour or hour recap show fascinating. This would change too, as the IOC would get wise to the television world in the ensuing Olympic Games.

While nothing in the victories of Wilma Rudolph and The Tigerbelles or Rafer Johnson by themselves changed the volatile race relations within this country, politics became more pronounced during these seventeen days. Whether in the form of Cold War tensions or race relations, politics was here to stay and the notion of Brundage's amateurism slowly began to crumble. After 17 days in 1960, these Olympics would never be the same.

This is the story Maraniss tells in lively, engaging, prose. A first class read that is my favorite book of 2014 so far.

Jerry Smith says

I may come back and re-rate this book if, after the passage of time, 2 stars seems a little harsh. However the categorization of 2 stars: "It was OK" seems to sum this up for me. There is nothing offensive about the book, I just found it a little ho-hum and so I had better explain what I mean. I was still glad I read it, but overall I was disappointed.

First of all, the overall tenet of the book seems to me, to be something of a reach. I don't think that the case for this Olympics necessarily changing the world is really made. I certainly think that, as a whole, it can be argued that these Olympics were the first truly modern games (with TV coverage, the cold war getting going, the end of innocence as it relates to drugs and politics in sport etc.) but I am not sure they were pivotal. I think the case could also be made for Mexico City in 68 and Munich in 72 (for all the wrong reasons).

Having said that, the games of 1960 had memorable performances including Cassius Clay, Wilma Rudolph, Rafer Johnson and many others and these are well described. However the narrative reads more like a detailed reportage on the games themselves and the opportunities to truly relate them to the world changing aspects that are mentioned in the title don't quite work for me. For example, the tragic death of Danish cyclist Knud Jensen is not developed as much from a PED standpoint as I would have thought it demanded. I would argue that this, if truly a drug induced death was the start of what we see today. However if we are talking about pivotal, world changing moments, then Ben Johnson in 88 was much the more impactful in terms of the drug issue.

The issue of racism in sports and society is well covered, as is the propaganda war between the East and West in these games. However, again, I didn't feel that the case was made for the two weeks of these games being the watershed after which things changed. The book covers the reign of IOC president Avery Brundage and it seems to me that, his stance on amateurism was unchanged to the extent that he was still excluding athletes on this basis in 1972.

So, apart from the case not being convincingly made that things changed after Rome (in my opinion) I found that the book was heavily US centered. Not a problem in itself but I would have liked to see more unbiased reporting on other countries, rather than the somewhat cursory coverage given to most others outside the cold war narrative. The rise of the African nations is certainly covered, in reference to Abebe Bikila, but again, lacks depth and context to me.

As I say, I am glad I read it as I am a great fan of the Olympics in general, and there were many performances and characters in this games that made them noteworthy - however that is true of any Olympic games that one cares to study.

Conor O'mahony says

Well put together book detailing the athletics wart between the USA and USSR from 1958 to the 1960 Olympics. Really interesting to remember how much the cold war was influencing every aspect of life for people, to remember how prevalent racism was and the losing battle to keep the games amateur.

Judy says

The author sees the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome as the games that provided the transition to the modern games with their multitude of problems--doping, political tensions reflected in the scoring, corporate sponsorship, and the debate about what being an amateur athlete really means. At its best, the book profiles the leading athletes from around the world and vividly recreates the tensions of a variety of events. At the other end of the spectrum, the book drags somewhat when discussing the politics of the International Olympic Committee. I highly recommend this book especially when it places the Olympic experience into the political context of the period and reminds the reader that athletes do not compete in a vacuum. A fascinating read.

James says

Maraniss has illuminated an era of the Olympics and of world history that I could always stand to read about: the Cold War, race relations in the United States, WW2 European recovery, and the rise of African long-distance runners as ushered in by a barefoot Ethiopian Abebe Bikila.

Maraniss has structured the book into a chronological telling of the Rome 1960 Games, from the top brass to the sprinters and shot putters, with a young, brash Cassius Clay leading the way along with Rafer Johnson and Wilma Rudolph burning it up on the track. The interviews and the research done on this first televised Olympics is staggering, and as a wide scope, it works for this book. My only criticism is that its focus is so scattered and shifting that it feels like we could use more time with everyone: Clay, Rudolph, Johnson, Rime, etc...

In short, a book I recommend for historians, anyone who loves Track and Field as we gear up for Rio later this summer, and a nice view into a world that has radically changed.

Dan says

I was really into track & field in 1960 and still somewhat in to swimming (having been bounced out of the Santa Clara Swim Club at age 10 for insubordination), so I knew many of the players here and thoroughly enjoyed the descriptions of the events. Maraniss recounts these well, and I was caught up in the drama of cliff-hanging competition even when I already knew the results. He is far less successful with the historical context (pop history of the Cold War, ponderous history of the Olympic Movement) and the individual athletes' backstories (wooden versions of TV's "up close and personal"). But just having the chance to spend

a few hours with Wilma Rudolph and Rafer Johnson is worth the price of admission. They were gods to me then, and this book reminds me why.

Elizabeth K. says

I must still have lingering Olympic fever from this summer. The author goes through the Rome Olympics, pretty much day by day, and highlights the significant events and puts them in the context of what was going on in the world at large ... so for the most part, the Cold War. Headlines include decathlete Rafer Johnson, the first African-American athlete to be the flagbearer during the opening ceremonies and Wilma Rudolph getting gold medals; the first big Olympic drug scandal when Danish cyclist Knud Jensen dies after heat exhaustion is escalated by drug use; the Republic of China marches as Formosa for the first time (and I'm not really clear why they still compete as Formosa and not Taiwan), and Ethiopian Abebe Bikila wins the mens' marathon running barefoot. And more!

The funny thing about this book was that it wasn't ... *great* sportswriting, and if you are a sports fan, you are hoping, of course, that a book about the Rome Olympics is going to be so full of awesome sports that you choke on your own enthusiasm. Because so much of the book is spent explaining the nuances of the political climate, particularly the Cold War but also apartheid, civil rights in the US, and the role of women in athletics, you are trading some of the edgy excitement for fairly substantial insight. Which seems fine in the end, you can always go google up a storm later and cry your sporty tears while watching poor quality youtube clips of Rafer Johnson lighting the torch at Los Angeles. Did you know that Johnson was one of the guys that tackled Sirhan Sirhan at the Ambassador Hotel?

Also, I am one of those people who has mixed feelings about gymnastics as an Olympic sport, in part because the age of the girls in particular somewhat unsettling, but mostly because I'm not crazy about judged competitions, but whatever, I'm not rabid about the issue or anything. It seems that in Rome, the organizers held two events at landmark sites, gymnastics at the Baths of Caracalla and wrestling at the Basilica of Maxentius. I think this is such a fabulous idea that I would be completely on board with a requirement that all Olympic cities must hold gymnastics and wrestling at out-of-doors ancient landmarks.

Grade: Very strong B+

Recommended: Anyone who enjoys sports and the Olympics would enjoy this, even if only to browse though it. People who don't care for sports won't have much interest *unless* they have a particular interest in Cold War social history.

Viji says

Though I am not familiar and regular follower of sports, I liked this book very much. It is a detailed narrative account of the Olympic events and participants and all those connected with the Games. The narration is very fluid and lucid. The coverage easily arouses the interest of the readers. It details about how the participants struggled to reach the Olympic stage, their expectations and actual performance at the Olympics as well the lives of many of the medallists after the conclusion of the games.

Great names like Wilma Rudolph, Armin Hary, Lance Larson. Otis Davis, Herb Elliott, Cassius Clay, Rafer Johnson, C.K. Yang, Abebe Bikila, Al Oerter, the Tigerbelles and their coach Ed Temple appear in the

various chapters of the book giving an insight into their efforts and feats. The author has also deftly handled the political climate prevailing at the time of the games. A lot of firsts in the Olympian history like Rafer Johnson being the first black flag bearer for USA at the Opening Ceremony, first African conquest in the marathon, substantial participation of the women in the Olympics, the television coverage etc. have been highlighted.

The inclusion of a special segment of rare photographs from the Rome Olympics, medal tally and a list of Host Cities of Olympics from 1896 to 2008 give an impressive authentication for the narration.

Douglas Graney says

David Maraniss is a great writer. He keeps things moving on every page. He is able to make you care about people you never heard of and those you have. I'll say this, the Olympics were more interesting during the Cold War to this partisan reviewer. Even if you were not around in 1960 as I wasn't, you'll be enthralled with sports, politics, race, individual stories and so many more topics Maraniss writes so skillfully about.

Alden says

When David Maraniss finished his much-praised biography of baseball superstar Roberto Clemente (Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero), he was "determined not to write another sports book anytime soon." He had previously written a highly regarded biography of perhaps the greatest football coach of all time, Vince Lombardi (When Pride Still Mattered), so his feeling was: been there, done that.

Besides, during a 30-year career at the Washington Post, Maraniss had developed a reputation as a great observer of the American political scene. In 1993, he won the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting for his series on the early days of Bill Clinton's presidency. (He also shared in the 2008 Pulitzer given to the Washington Post team that covered the Virginia Tech shooting.) He published an astonishing account of the 1960s (They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967). He wrote a seminal biography of Bill Clinton (First in His Class). And, as Maraniss finished his work on the Clemente biography, the preliminary jockeying for position in that other great American contact sport—the run for the presidency—was already beginning.

Unfortunately for Maraniss—but not, it turns out, for readers—Roberto Clemente and the Pittsburgh Pirates were on their way to the World Series at the same time that the world was traveling to Rome for the 1960 Olympics.

...more of my interview with Maraniss here:

http://bookpage.com/0807bp/david_mara...

Socraticgadfly says

A very good book about this Olympics. With so much to cover.

The hypocrisy of Avery Brundage, first on display toward overlooking the Nazis' anti-Semitism at Berlin in

1936, now overlooks question about whether Soviet-bloc state-sponsored sport violates the spirit, or even the letter, of amateurism.

First, and already known to me ...

Ethopian Abebe Bikela winning the marathon in the capital city of the nation that conquered his 25 years before.

One of the greatest decathlon duels ever.

The atmosphere in la dolce vita.

Second, and not known to me before ...

The first "doping scandal" — a Danish cyclist died, apparently in part due to the heat, but primarily to taking a blood circulation drug, already rumored to be fairly common among top cyclists.

Other doping rumors, most notably of steroids by Soviet weight lifters and a few others.

The first shoe switch-a-roo, with 100m champ Armin Hary playing Puma and Adidas (started by brothers, which I didn't know) off against each other.

The rise in sports prowess of the USSR.

Anyway, I've not given away everything in this book by any means.

It's a legitimate 4.5 stars, and I gave it the bump because of the number of low reviews.

Lance says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book that covered nearly every sport in this book on a watershed Olympic year. While most remember these games for Cassius Clay, I felt the best writing was on Wilma Rudolph and the U.S. Women's track and field team. Excellent book.

Bookmarks Magazine says

David Maraniss has demonstrated great range throughout his writing career. His latest effort is a timely and, for the most part, a well executed look at the 1960 Rome Olympics. Although the book's subtitle may be a bit of a reach, Maraniss has much to say about the implications of the Rome Games as a microcosm of the political, financial, and humanitarian forces shaping the world at the time. Only the *New York Times Book Review* opined that the event's obscurity today suggests that nothing was, in fact, world-changing about it. *Rome 1960* combines the author's passion for sports with his keen eye for sociopolitical connections to offer a compelling portrait of the "Olympics that changed the world."

This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Jim says

Entertaining and informative

I think that this Olympics took place at a time when things were changing in the world but I don't think the author makes a good case that the 1960 Olympics changed the world

still very informative and detailed description of all the people involved in the Rome Olympics including Mohammed Ali/Wilma Rudolph

total TV money paid for rights to broadcast 1960 Rome Olympics

\$60K - that's it.

Tyler says

Synopsis: The Rome Olympics of 1960 were held when the world was in a transitory state. The Cold War was at its height, it was the first time that many of the Olympic competitions allowed women to compete and the United States (and much of the world) was in the midst of a racial revolution. While many of the athletes representing the United States were African Americans who were celebrated when they won, there were many restaurants and other places where they were prohibited due to the color of their skin. In addition, the 1960 Olympics were the first Olympics that were really televised and broadcast throughout the world. Clips had been shown during previous Olympics, but this was the first time that prime-time viewers were able to watch much of the competitions. These were the Olympics of sprinter Wilma Rudolph, decathlete Rafer Johnson and boxer Cassius Clay.

My Review: I loved reading the stories of the competitions. There always seemed to be an underlying political theme during every event. The Americans vs. the Soviets, the West Germans and the East Germans competing on a unified German team. The South Africans swearing that no racism was involved in selecting their team yet not a single black was good enough to compete. The inspiring stories of the decathlon, the track events and many others were also very enjoyable. The book did get a little wordy, but all in all was quite an interesting read.

Diane says

As something of a serious Olympics follower, I really enjoyed this book. The author makes a good case in that the '60 Olympics were something of a watershed in civil rights (at least in bringing the inequalities of the races to light more clearly), the cold war, the beginning of steroid use and doping in a systematic way, as well as the beginning of the recognition by athletes that being amateur in the US was very different than elsewhere. I enjoyed learning about various competitors as well though you might want to be a big fan of track and field as that is where most of the focus lies.

Molly says

"...by the third round Shatkov realized that he would be unable to penetrate Clay's defenses and did not have the power to mount an attack. 'I lost like a middleweight to an excellent light heavyweight,' he said. 'I shook Clay's hand. It was no disgrace to lose to a fighter like that.'

Here was an athlete who seemed to have a wiser perspective on losing than most sportswriters. Shatkov's defeat was no different than John Thomas' in the high jump, or David Sime's and Ray Norton's in the 100-meter dash. It would be hard for outsiders to accept, but athletes understood. Usually you lose because someone else is better that day." ~ Pg. 199, Chapter 10 - Black Thursday

I am a bit of an Olympics nut. I have been hooked since I was a little girl in the 70's trying to be like Dorothy Hammil, failing miserably at emulating both her skating moves and her hairdo. Then I was awed by the Miracle on Ice at Lake Placid - I knew it was more important than just advancing to the medal round - it was our college guys against Russia. Then I was smitten by the gazillion grand pianos performing Rhapsody in Blue at the Los Angeles opening ceremonies of the 1984 summer Olympics. Those same games that gave me Mary Decker's painful result at the bare feet of Zola Budd, along with the amazing dominance of Carl Lewis - specifically in the long jump that I loved more than any other event in my unimpressive high school track and field efforts.

Since my youth the Olympics have continued to amaze me, impress me, and leave me in awe. No matter how old I become, I still sit on my couch and think that maybe if I just tried hard enough, I could be competing for my country next go-'round. This thought extremely insults the quality of effort, skill and devotion these determined REAL athletes have burning inside them, as strong as that Olympic flame. But hey - a girl can dream.

And so, I learned from Rome 1960, that I owe my dreams to the Tigerbelles. A fleet group of women sprinters from segregated Tennessee, punctuated by the gazelle Wilma Rudolph, who overcame our country's racist reality, sexist barriers, and an economic disadvantage that plagued minorities and amateur athletes in general. The success of the US women sprinters in that Olympics paved the way for future female athletes. They didn't open the door, but they advanced it. And they literally, ran with it. Gold medals have a way of doing that for you.

I also learned about the antiquated and silly struggle that the IOC battled on behalf of amateurism in its games. This vision of purity of sport was unrealistic and unfair. Athletes were being penalized or banned for perceived financial advantages that allowed them to survive while wanting to represent their countries. Some governments subsidized them anyway on the sly. It was the beginning of shoe sponsorships and lucrative endorsements. Television was on the scene for the first time and fame became expedited. (I wonder if the NCAA has ever studied the Olympic evolution???)

And politics in the 1960 games could never truly take a back seat. Even when countries played nice, the propaganda wars waged were fierce. Spies were sent to lure defectors. Boycotts were debated. Human rights and race were swept under the rug. New countries born onto the scene participated for the first time against others who had ravaged their land in the not too distant past. And strikingly, the gap in world dominance was diminishing - the rest of the world was catching up to the US both on the field and in political theory strongholds.

Amidst the story lines of minorities, amateurism and politics, Rome 1960 sprinkles in recaps of some of Olympic history's most impressive competitions. When things were on the verge of exploding positively through advanced technology, and negatively through doping. I knew very little of any of these athletes and their stories. Aside from Cassius Clay and Wilma Rudolph, Oscar Robertson and Jerry West, the names were all new to me. I loved learning about them all and author Maraniss did an excellent job covering major and less known stories with equal attention and love.

I do wish more was spent on their stories and less on the major threads of the IOC and politics. I felt the emphasis was on the latter instead of the former. But I appreciate it is hard to mesh it all together in a way that is both interesting and informative.

In the end, I learned a lot, but not in a very entertaining way. The book had more of a text book feel to me than of an engaging historical non-fiction work that informed facts with flair. This lack of literary style makes me less likely to recommend this to someone who is not already infected with the Olympic spirit. I am, and still found it an effort to complete, but find it is certainly something I've learned from. Not all that different from what my imaginary experience in the Olympics' closing marathon event would be.

Charlie Newfell says

A whole book on one Olympics? An one that wasn't memorable? Excuse my ignorance, as this beautifully written book delves into what was truly the first "modern" Olympics. It was the first one televised in the USA, even if it was videotape sent overnight on commercial airliners. Jim McKay's first one also, who sat typing his own script in NYC to accompany those videotapes. The first one where doping was a major concern. It mostly, however, was a product of its time. The Cold War was at its height and the constant intrigue between the USA and the USSR put supreme importance on the "medal count". Who were the heroes for the USA? The team captain was the ultimate athlete, the dignified Rafer Johnson (the first black captain). Other stars were Wilma Rudolph and a 18 year old Cassius Clay. Also a product of the times, and a disgrace to our country, was that these heroes hailed in the press couldn't eat or stay at many places in their own hometowns in the South. Ultimately, an interesting look not only at the Olympics, but the world as it was in 1960.
