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The 1940 Tokyo Games: The Missing Olympics—Japan, the Asian Olympics and the Olympic Movement

William W. Kelly

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The 1940 Tokyo Games: The Missing Olympics—Japan, the Asian Olympics and the Olympic Movement. By Sandra Collins. Routledge, London, 2007. xiv, 198 pages. \$130.00, cloth; \$40.00, paper.

Reviewed by

WILLIAM W. KELLY
Yale University

In March of 1930, the city of Tokyo held a “Reconstruction Festival” to highlight its recovery from the Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and the mayor, Nagata Hidejirō, was already eyeing the next opportunity for showcasing the capital city. This was to be a massive national festival ten years hence in 1940, to mark the 2,600th anniversary of Emperor Jimmu’s accession. Much as the current governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintarō, has pushed controversially for a new Tokyo Olympics (failing for 2016 but apparently still determined), Mayor Nagata soon became absorbed with the idea of combining the imperial festival with a bid to host the 1940 Olympic Games. Thus began a decade of domestic and international Olympic politics that is the focus of this fascinating volume.

The 1940 Olympics never took place. Sporting events that are canceled usually fade quickly from memory, but the Olympic Games are different. Indeed, even by the 1930s, they were a singular megaevent at the apex of the world sports calendar for their increasingly global reach and multisport framework, for their unique governance by an International Olympic Committee (IOC) independent of nation-states, for the IOC’s overt and idealistic philosophy of amateurism and world fellowship, and for the long lead-up of bidding and lobbying and planning and building that each Games required. All of these elements were in play during Japan’s decade-long push to be the first non-Western nation to host the Games.

In the beginning, though, Mayor Nagata’s ambition was quixotic. The Japanese members of the IOC were not encouraging, and the Japanese government was hostile. It was already understood in IOC circles that the 1940 Games should be awarded to Rome. But as Collins shows, Japan’s surprising successes at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, juxtaposed with the international criticism it drew from its 1931 invasion of Manchuria, won over official support for what the mayor and others came to package as a “people’s diplomacy” offensive. Waged at the level of the IOC itself, Nagata and other influential Japanese gradually turned the Olympic movement leaders favorably toward Japan. They accomplished this by playing ideologically on the potential hypocrisy of Olympism as a philosophy (founded in a romantic nineteenth-century Western appropriation of classical Greek sentiments but declaring itself to be a universal humanism) and by lobbying assiduously the IOC president (bringing him on a luxury tour of the country) and potential rival heads of state (e.g., gaining a private meeting with Mussolini).

By 1936, Italy stepped aside, and Japan was awarded the 1940 Games at a Berlin meeting on the eve of what would be known as the Nazi Games.

Collins provides a detailed account of the domestic debates and IOC tensions that quickly emerged after the initial euphoria of success. Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the highly charged politics of aesthetic movements in the 1930s, and Collins's book draws attention to the importance of the Olympic Games in this cauldron of heated domestic politics about how to frame and deploy a nationalized Japanese culture. The mounting military operations in China, and subsequent threats of an Olympic boycott, renewed Japanese governmental concerns about the Games, and in mid-1938, Japan informed the IOC in a telegram that it was canceling the Games "owing to protracted hostilities with no prospect immediate peace [sic]." The telegram went on to indicate Japan's determination to apply for the 1944 Games! These too never took place, but Collins concludes her book by showing how many of the themes that played out during the 1930s were transposed in a postwar register and shaped the iteration of the bidding, planning, and hosting of the 1964 Tokyo Games.

This is an absorbing book. Collins develops the decade's story as a chronological narrative, drawing impressively on a wide range of contemporary publications and documents. Ironically, it is one of the most complete studies we have of the full course of a Games cycle; most other works of individual Games are necessarily drawn to the athletic events themselves. Because the events were "missing" in this case, Collins can focus on what is actually of greater scholarly significance—the turbulent lead-up and the lasting legacies. This is not narrow sports history but rather a fine example of a fully situated historical account of a complex sports process.

National History and the World of Nations: Capital, State, and the Rhetoric of History in Japan, France, and the United States. By Christopher L. Hill. Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 2008. xvi, 351 pages. \$89.95, cloth; \$24.95, paper.

Reviewed by
SHELDON GARON
Princeton University

This is an extraordinary book. One of the hottest fields of history recently has been global or transnational history. Scholars are keen to transcend national histories to chart the movements of peoples, ideas, and institutions across national boundaries. For the most part, these efforts have yet to realize their promise. In particular, attempts to insert the United States into global history generally suffer from the unwillingness to master the