

Why Us, Mr. President?: The U.S. Boxing Team and the Boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic
Games

by

Walter C. Webster

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Heather McCrea

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Abstract

This thesis highlights the consequences of the 1980 US boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow from the perspective of the Olympic boxers. Beginning with a review of scholarly work on the Olympics and their surrounding politics, I outline how the White House, under President Jimmy Carter, manipulated the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) into supporting a boycott. I conclude that the political actions of the Carter Administration affected an entire nation's participation in an Olympic event. Exploring the socio-political circumstances surrounding the 1980 US Olympic boycott, my study seeks to answer three questions:

First, what political tactics did the Carter Administration use to implement a boycott designed to pressure Russia to withdraw troops from Afghanistan? Manipulation of the USOC and threats to cut funding pushed compliance with Carter's agenda. As a result, the Carter administration's actions included using US boxer Muhammad Ali as a pawn in an effort to persuade athletes to support a boycott. Few athletes felt comfortable speaking out against such high-level political strategies. Historically, the US denounced any nation's attempt to use the Olympic Games to make a political statement; this was exemplified in the US's decision to send black and Jewish athletes to the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, despite the obvious dangers these athletes faced in the midst of the Nazi regime. As noted in the German press, allowing "wooly-haired niggers with protruding lips" to compete with Aryans was a disgrace.¹

Second, what was the real reason Carter sought a boycott? The Carter Administration saw participation in the Moscow Games as "...signify[ing] an attitude of indifference toward the continuing occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet troops."² One possible explanation of the

¹ David Clay Large, *Nazi Games, The Olympics of 1936* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 58.

² Ibgien Breeskingi to The President, 6 June 1980, Box 10, Folder 4, The White House, Subject: NBC Weekly Report 0144, Plains File Collection, Jimmy Carter Library (hereafter JCL).

boycott, then, was to raise awareness about human rights atrocities within the Soviet Union and beyond during the Moscow Games. Perhaps the boycott was Carter's desperate last effort to revive his presidential reputation after several instances of critical failure as President of the United States, including the Iranian-US hostage outrage (1979), the failed US hostage rescue attempt (1980), and economic inflation so extreme it contributed to a dramatic downward spiral in Carter's re-election poll numbers.³

Third, what was the *real* impact of the 1980 Olympic boycott? How did athletes and coaches become victims of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and the US government? For many of the prospective medalists, a boycott permanently slammed shut the only open window of opportunity and robbed them of potential fame and financial gain. My work shows that the 1980 boycott not only strained international relations, but also significantly altered the lives of the athletes, coaches, and teams beyond the 1980 Olympics.

³ James Roirdan, Olympics' Flame, Yes. But Smudgepot, No., *The New York Times*, June 29, 1980. Sec. E. p. 19

Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
Acknowledgements	xxii
Dedication	xxiv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Heartbreak at Home	5
Chapter 3: Political History of Olympic Nationalism.....	18
Chapter 4: The White House Plays Political Hardball.....	25
Chapter 5: The USOC Plays the Game and the Athletes Pay the Price.....	44
Conclusion: They Already Had Their Minds Made Up.....	61
References and Bibliography	71



JACKIE BEARD

National Golden Gloves Champion
National A.A.U. Champion
Pan American Games Gold Medalist
World Cup Gold Medalist
Olympic Trials Gold Medalist
National A.A.U. Boxer Of The Year



649
D.C. AS

1978 WORLD GAMES

World Boxing Championships

Belgrade, Yugoslavia

May 6-20, 1978

UNITED STATES TEAM

48 kg: Richard Sandovsi, Pomona, Calif.
51 kg: Mike Felde, Missoula, Mont.
54 kg: Rocky Lockridge, Tacoma, Wash.
57 kg: Enoch Sunawan, Wahiawa, Hawaii
60 kg: Melvin Paul, New Orleans, La.
63.5 kg: Lemuel Steeples, St. Louis, Mo.
67 kg: ROOSEVELT CASH, U.S. Marine Corps
71 kg: Wilford Scypion, Galena Park, Tex.
75 kg: Jeff McCracken, U.S. Marine Corps
81 kg: Elmer Martin, U.S. Navy
+81 kg: Tony Tubbs, Pasadena, Calif.



Coach: Pat Nappi, Syracuse, N.Y.

Assistant: Emanuel Steward, Detroit, Mich.

Referee/Judge: Roland Schwartz, Cincinnati, Ohio

Physician: Dr. Robert Lorey, Portland, Ore.

AIBA Vice President: Col. Don Hull, U.S. Army (Ret.),
Cresskill, N.J.

AAU/USA Chairman: Bob Surkein, East Moline, Ill.

Manager: Ed Silverglade, Trenton, N.J.



79 PAN AMERICAN



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Gannetteer

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Rayford Collins – the sole coach at the non-profit Jackson (Tenn.) Boxing Club – and other Gannett employees pitch in to help their communities

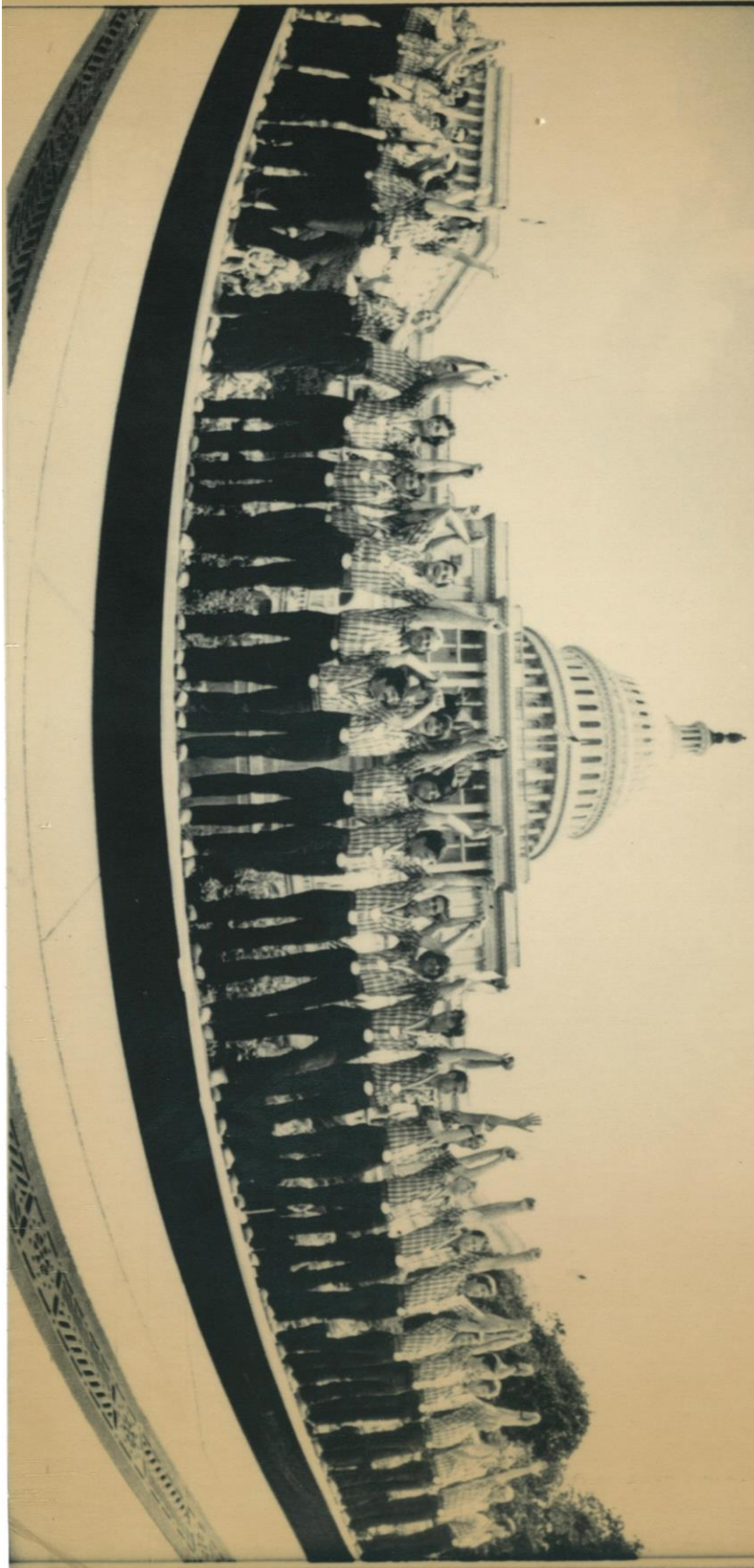
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WASHINGTON, JULY 31--OLYMPIAN HURRAH!-- A group of American Olympic athletes join in a victorious stance in front of the Capitol in Washington Wednesday after they awarded special gold medals recognizing their achievement in having made the 1980 Olympic team. (AP LASERPHOTO) (Jes50500stf/ Ira Schwarz) 1980
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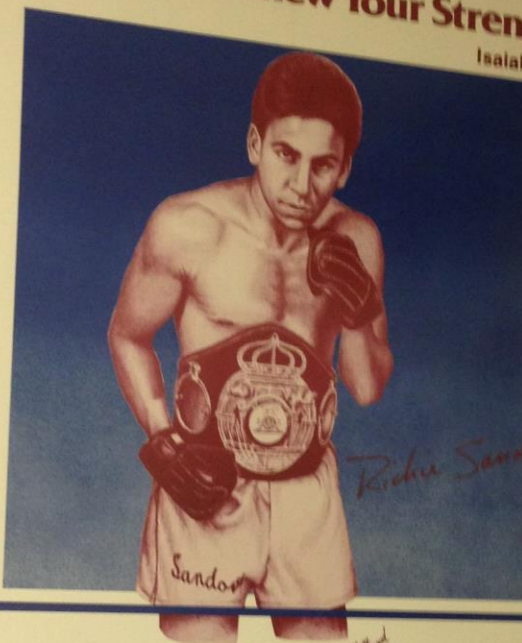






**Wait Upon the Lord
and He Will Renew Your Strength**

Isalah 40:31



RICHARD SANDOVAL

W.B.A. Bantam Weight • Champion of the World



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Acknowledgements

As a man who spent several years as a child through young adulthood training in the discipline of boxing, it is my honor to tell this story about the US Olympic Boxing team of 1980. I have had many coaches and stablemates who helped and encouraged me to believe in myself and my given abilities along with instilling determination—and to never take “no” for an answer. From the moment Mr. Kennedy, boxing coach of the Hazel Green boxing team, introduced this 11-year-old Yankee from Detroit to the world of boxing, I fell in love with the sport. The culmination of my bond with the person that first inspired me as an athlete was his presence, particularly working in my corner one last time when in 1979, at 16, I fought Johnny Bumphus, the number one ranked Light Welterweight in the US.

Mr. Kennedy, when you told me at the end of my fight that it was greatest experience of your life, I wanted to let you to know that our success that day could not have happened without you as my constant through good and bad times. To Val Harvey, who not only finished sculpting me into a national-caliber fighter but also taught me there is more to life than winning and losing--thank you. I will always be deeply grateful to Patsy and W.L. Kennedy, whose encouragement all these years eventually led me to tell this story.

I have a deep appreciation and respect for the hard-work, sacrifices, and time put forth by the men whom I have fought with and against, especially in allowing me to interview them and tell their stories. The personal relationship that developed among Coach Rayford Collins, the fighters, and me, helped me understand these athletes on a deeper level. I thank them for their time and their stories, and for allowing me to tell their story from a fellow boxer’s perspective. I know my questions were sometimes hard to answer in that they rekindled challenging emotions,

but the fighters and coach Rayford Collins were very open with their responses, friendly, and supportive of my work.

To Jackie, just know that you have touched the heart of this retired fighter the same way you did when we first met some 38 years ago. To Obie, this could not have happened without you. For Richie and B.T., your insights have been invaluable and humbling. For that, I will forever be grateful. In the end, I hope my re-telling of the fighters' stories and how the boycott impacted their lives and boxing careers is enough to bring them a sense of closure in some form. Additionally, in some small way, I hope this helps prevent another politician from using athletes as political pawns.

Without the help of my professors, I would have had no idea which structures would best work with my thesis. Heather, thank you for reading over drafts and letting me know what was seriously wrong and right with helping me discover what I really wanted to say. Our periodic meetings helped me in many ways to find a new direction and gain new perspectives for my written work. Albert, thank you for your continued assistance, encouragement, and push towards perfection. Sue, you have changed my life in ways to which I will be forever grateful.

Thank you mom, for never doubting me or my ability to tell this story. You have always understood my love and appreciation of the sport and for these fighters, and you have always believed in me as a fighter, a scholar, and as your son. Thank you for your confidence in me.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the athletes of the US Boxing Team for the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, and to the late coach Rayford Collins, who would have served as coach for those great young men of the US Olympic Boxing Team.



Chapter 1: Introduction

The 1936 Berlin Games set a precedent for future Olympic boycott movements. America faced the choice of either sending its participants, which included many Jewish and Black athletes, onward to competition, or to boycott due to the reported human rights violations led by Hitler's Third Reich. The talk of a boycott produced extensive discourse in the US about race, sport, and international relations. In 1935, US Army General Johnson wrote an article favoring an American boycott of the Olympic Games, arguing that a boycott would draw attention to racial persecution and genocide at the hands of Germany's Nazi Party. Johnson wrote, "[T]he Olympic Games seek to determine who are the best athletes in the world. If a whole race (which is daily revealing some of the best athletes of our time) is excluded, the test is a farce."⁴ The same question would be posed forty-four years later when the United States pursued a boycott of the Moscow Games due to human rights violations linked to the December 25, 1979, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.⁵

Although US newspapers in the 1930s repeatedly denounced Nazi racial and religious policies, Johnson argued the Olympic Games were "a purely sporting event designed, let us not forget, in the interest of international amity." Avery Brundage, President of the American Olympic Association from 1929 to 1953, responded by stating that American teams would be represented in Berlin. He argued the "Olympic Games belong to the athletes and not to the politicians." He assured the public that the American Olympic Committee's acceptance of the invitation to compete in the 1936 Olympics did not endorse the policies of any government. At the time, Germany observed questionable, dogmatic policies; Brundage claimed such policy,

⁴ United States Olympic Committee Archives, "That Proposed Olympic Boycott," December 6, 1935, *Lake Placid News*, May 1, 1980, sec. A4.

⁵ Riordan, "Olympics' Flame."

“within or without [Germany’s] borders, has no bearing on the subject.” More importantly, he pointed out that the AOC had maintained a neutral policy that ignored irrelevant political, racial, and religious affairs for over forty years. Brundage concluded that for one “to get a proper perspective of the boycott proposal,” it would be “necessary to imagine the reaction of Americans if the 1932 Los Angeles games had been boycotted because...this country harbors many injustices repugnant to other nations.”⁶ As such, the longstanding credence of the United States as defender of the purity of the Modern Olympics was lost when the Carter White House asked the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) to withhold sending a boxing team to Moscow shortly after the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan.⁷ The world had rarely been at peace for any extended time since the Berlin Games. If the boycott principle had been applied consistently during this time, strained international relations and differing ideologies between host nations and attendee nations would have quickly spelled the death of the Olympic Games.⁸

Historians and political scientists have shown that the United States-led boycott of the Moscow Olympics in 1980 centered on Carter’s attempt at “punishing” the Soviet Union for human rights violations against the Afghan people.⁹ However, the real victims of the boycott were the athletes and coaches robbed of their shot at Olympic glory. Lost in the heat of politics were the neglected stories of the coaches, like that of Coach Rayford Collins of the Jackson Boxing Club in Jackson, Tennessee. Like many others, Collins spent many years molding boxing participants into world-class athletes, only to have his Olympic dream crushed by the boycott. As a boxer, Collins experienced national recognition, boxing in weight classes between 147 and 160 pounds. He found his true calling when he began his coaching career in Bemis, Tennessee, at the

⁶ USOC Archives, “That Proposed Olympic Boycott.”

⁷ “Tossing the Olympic Javelin,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Jan. 17, 1980, sec. A22.

⁸ Riordan, “Olympics’ Flame.”

⁹ Terence Smith, “The President Said Nyet,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 1980, Sec. “This Day in Sports.”

age of 22. The City of Jackson's mayor approached him to coach a youth recreation-boxing program to provide focus for underprivileged city kids. Thus, in 1965 Collins began his coaching journey, a journey that eventually changed the lives of many in the community. He believed winning in one's weight division in the Golden Gloves, a national amateur boxing tournament held every year in the US, demonstrated talent and hard work. In turn, these wins reflected positively on the athlete and his coach.¹⁰

Within his first year of coaching, Collins confirmed his talent as a coach when a boxer under his tutelage reached the finals in the national Golden Gloves tournament. Another boxer reached the 1970 national finals during Rayford's fourth year with the youth program. After these wins, Collins's efforts put Jackson, Tennessee on both national and international boxing maps. He said his "goal was to specifically work with, train, and mentor the boxers, ranging in age from nine to twelve years old, until they graduated high school."¹¹ He worked for forty-five years at the gym built by the city of Jackson before finally retiring. This placement was critical in allowing him to work with fighters at any time of the day. At the time, it was highly unlikely that he knew exactly what he had done for the group of kids that started boxing at the club in 1969. Over the next nine years, the Jackson Boxing Club, through blood, sweat, and tears, built a team filled with Olympic-caliber boxers; they captured two national and one runner-up titles, which tied the team for the 1978 Golden Gloves tournament. Subsequently, the Amateur Athletic Union

¹⁰ Josh Lemons, "Legendary Boxing Club Coach Rayford Collins Retires", *The Jackson Sun*, January 17, 2015, Sec. A1. I'm not sure if the placement of the comma is a new CMS rule or not, but if it is leave it, if it is not aesthetically speaking the comma seems better placed within the quotation marks.

¹¹ Rayford Collins, personal interview with the author Jackson, Tennessee, May 26, 2012.

named Collins boxing coach of the year.¹² Moreover, one of those young boxers, Jackie Beard, went on to become one of the most decorated boxers in US amateur boxing history.¹³

I have heard many comments over the years from people who view boxing and its participants as barbaric. In fact, having personally participated in over two hundred bouts, quite the opposite is true. The goal of any boxer is to score without being scored upon. I argue that boxing is the truest art form for those of us who live it. The athleticism, dedication, and conditioning set it apart from most other sports.¹⁴ No other description of the sport better depicts the character of Jackie Beard and the boxers who would have represented the United States at the 1980 Moscow Games. Almost all of these boxers are gentle, soft-spoken individuals, Jackie in particular. I first met Jackie, his older brother Ricky, Donald Bowers, and Coach Collins at the Midwest Golden Gloves in 1979. Jackie stood apart from others. He was very low-key and somewhat reclusive, but liked by all. In the spring of 1980, I remember speaking with Jackie at the regional Golden Gloves tournament in Knoxville. He very politely offered advice on my boxing technique. Unfortunately, during my interview with him in 2012, I found myself frequently turning to his brother Obie for answers. Obie's clarification of Jackie's answers was necessary due to his slurred speech, caused by years of head trauma related to the sport. It is indeed a sobering image to consider this man, one of the last great American amateur boxers, whittled away to a mere fragment of his former self from an era when American boxing reigned supreme.

¹² Lemons, "Legendary Boxing Club Coach Rayford Collins Retires", *The Jackson Sun*, January 17, 2015, Sec. A1.

¹³ Personal Interview with Rayford Collins. (is this how AI advised you to format the interviews in footnotes? Just curious.

¹⁴ "Boxing's Knockout Punch," ESPN.com. See <http://www.espn.com/espn/page2/sportSkills>, August 1, 2014.

**Chapter 2: Heartbreak at Home- “He Hath Stripped Me of My Glory and Taken the Crown
from My Head”¹⁵**

To the city of Jackson, Tennessee, Rayford Collins remains much more than a boxing coach. The mere fact that, to date, many boxers still consider Collins a father figure is enough to validate such a claim. For many, he was the only positive male role model they had growing up. Jackie conveyed that Rayford was “like a father to many of us and we didn’t want to disappoint him by not training hard while in the gym.” Collins established an environment essential for young men who were without privilege and a stable home. Obie Beard affirmed, “Fighters were motivated in their training by their respect for Collins.” Raised in a loving home, Beard and his brothers still needed guidance to help navigate challenging socio-economic obstacles. Collins provided an environment that helped by reinforcing the need to make good choices in life and in the ring. His teachings meant, at times, fighters could not travel with the team to tournaments if they had not followed his rules.¹⁶ Richard “Skippy” Hawks clarified that the coach’s encouragement to make “good choices” emphasized hard work to achieve goals and made for a better life. “If it takes \$50,000 to keep a man in prison,” then the city of Jackson and American taxpayers owe Collins a debt of gratitude for saving them millions of dollars. His efforts kept many “young men out of jail by inspiring them to work toward their dreams through dedication and hard work.”¹⁷

During my interview with Jackie, it became clear that he was somewhat uncomfortable talking about his home life as a child. His personality and outlook on life had always been positive; he is an optimistic person who repeatedly conveyed that his grandmother was his

¹⁵ *Unknown: The Jackie Beard Story*. DVD. Directed by William Fain. Derry, NH: Taylor Communications, 2014.

¹⁶ Jackie Beard, Obie Beard personal interview with the author. Personal Interview. Jackson, Tennessee, September 1, 2012.

¹⁷ Lemons, “Legendary Boxing Club Coach Rayford Collins Retires.” Date?

“rock” growing up.”¹⁸ For Jackie, the Jackson Boxing Team offered him what he could not find at home. The team and its coach provided a family on which he relied, even in the most troubled times. It would be an understatement to say that Jackie grew up in a dysfunctional home. His childhood mirrored that of many urban children growing up in 1970s and 1980s urban America. A 2010 study by the Population Reference Bureau shows that children born and raised by low-income, single-mother families rose from five percent in 1960 to forty-one percent in 2010. While only 16 percent of white children and 27 percent of Latino children lived in single-mother households, 52 percent of African American children lived with single mothers.¹⁹

Jackie described his mother as a beautiful, soft-spoken woman who was in a long-term relationship with a married man. This relationship left his mother to raise seven illegitimate children alone. During my interview with Jackie and his youngest brother Obie, they said they believed their biological father took advantage of their mother—who was some thirty years younger than he was—by offering nice cars and money instead of permanent commitment. To a poor woman, the brothers believed such gifts might have enticed her to stay in the relationship. Jackie remembered his biological father as handsome, very articulate, and a successful businessman. Jackie’s biological father was also married to a woman in a neighboring town. Consequently, he had two families, but only one family received his full attention. Obie explained, “You don’t get to choose your parents. You get them. You deal with the hand you’re dealt.” Jackie knew his father while growing up, and during his visits to see his mother, he spent short periods with his biological father. However, a father – son bond never materialized between the two. In fact, the two had more than one “bad experience” as Jackie grew older. By the time Jackie was twelve, not only had he come to resent the actions of his biological father,

¹⁸ Personal interview with Jackie and Obie Beard.

¹⁹ Mark Mather, “U.S. Children in Single-Mother Families,” *Population Reference Bureau*, May 2010.

but he also realized that those same actions provided an example of the kind of man he never wanted to become. Jackie's maternal grandmother served as the one truly stable force in his household. Jackie described his grandmother as "old school hard love whom they could always rely on in hard times." He added that she was their motivator and the backbone of the family, at times administering strict discipline. The dysfunction Jackie's biological father brought into his childhood home meant that Jackie had to turn to men outside his home for a father figure. As a result, Collins became more to Jackie than a coach. Collins was the person he looked to for help in times of need. Jackie saw his coach as the only solid male figure in his life. His grandmother and mother's capacity to raise a young man in Jackson, Tennessee during the 1970's was limited; Collins helped to fill in those gaps.²⁰

At eight years old, Jackie started sneaking off to the Jackson Boxing Club to watch his older brother box. Eventually, Jackie started boxing but kept it a secret from his mother. Collins said that if he had been caught, she would have whipped him. At fourteen, Jackie made it to the National Junior Olympic finals only to lose to a much older, more experienced Richie Sandoval. Sandoval also earned the opportunity to join the Olympiad boxing team in the 1980 Moscow Games. Two years after his loss to Sandoval, Jackie made a name for himself on the national level by defeating Rocky Lockridge. At the time, Lockridge was the number one ranked fighter in the national Amateur Athletic Union. This fight was also Jackie's most memorable. He was "that kid from nowhere Jackson, Tennessee" who had easily bested a much older, seasoned boxer. However, Jackie's victory over Lockridge was bittersweet. He was only a year shy of the minimum age limit to participate at the World Amateur Games as the US National Champion.

²⁰ Personal interview with Jackie and Obie Beard.

Instead, Lockridge went and finished out the medal rounds.²¹ Even so, Lockridge was just the beginning for Jackie. At 17 years old, Jackie went on to win a gold medal at the 1979 Puerto Rican Pan-Am games by defeating the future 1980 Olympic Gold medal winner, Cuban Juan Hernandez.²²

By 1979, Jackie was atop the amateur boxing world after winning his second consecutive AAU National Boxing Championship. Ultimately, Jackie earned the right to represent the US in the 1980 Pan-American Games.²³ More importantly, his second defeat over Lockridge gave him his second national title and proved that his first victory over Lockridge was no fluke. The success of Jackie, Rayford, and the Jackson Boxing Club caught the attention of ABC television (American Broadcasting Company). ABC sent a film crew to the small town of Jackson to spend time with the boxers, hoping to discover the secret to their unprecedented success. The ABC Wide World of Sports crew spent the better part of a week shadowing Jackie and fellow National Golden Gloves champion Donald Bowers. Such interest in two high school students from Jackson, Tennessee by a major television network spurred even more interest. World-renowned sportscaster Keith Jackson admitted to both Collins and Jackie how perplexed he was that a small town in the middle of the American south could have possibly produced such “great fighters.”²⁴ For Collins, the answer was simple: there was more to boxing than just training kids to box. He wanted to build a program that went beyond the sport. The Jackson Boxing program’s focus on fostering mutual respect and integrity held the kids to high standards. Although Jackie saw boxing as a deliverance from poverty, he also felt that boxing taught him the value of teamwork. Such training served the young athletes well later in their lives. For some of the

²¹ Personal interview with Jackie and Obie Beard.

²² *Unknown: The Jackie Beard Story*. Directed by William Fain.

²³ Personal interview with Jackie and Obie Beard.

²⁴ Personal interview with Rayford Collins.

boxers, the Jackson program provided a brotherhood.²⁵ Others viewed the club as a diversion from the harsh realities of poverty.

Richie Sandoval, one of Jackie's former adversaries and a fellow 1980 USA Olympic boxing teammate, also started boxing at the age of sixteen. Sandoval had a similar demeanor to Jackie, but his background was radically different. Sandoval began his boxing career in Los Angeles, California. Early in my interviews with Richie and Jackie, I noted they both are unassuming men, each truly in love with the sport. Richie, like Jackie, also believed boxing could serve as a gateway out of poverty. Raised in a two-parent household, Richie and his siblings experienced a family dynamic different than Jackie's. Richie told me that early in his youth, his parents taught them to never take "no" for an answer. In turn, his parents also instructed Richie and his siblings to surround themselves with likeminded individuals if they expected to succeed in life. These simple recommendations served as a solid foundation that still guides Richie's daily life. Like Jackie, Richie became interested in boxing after tagging along to the neighborhood gym with his older and professionally ranked brother. Richie said he "knew early on that the old man wanted one out of three boys to make something happen in the sport of boxing." He believed early in his amateur career that he was going to make it in boxing. To this day, Richie believes his success in the ring centered on his dedication to the demands of the sport. Despite the self-doubt, he held initially, such convictions eventually led him to capture the 1979 Amateur Athletic Union's National Junior Flyweight prize and the 1980 National Golden Gloves. Richie also placed second at the Pan-American Games before being crowned champion

²⁵ Personal interview with Jackie and Obie Beard.

at the US Olympic trials and earning the opportunity to represent the US at the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games.²⁶

Richie credits his father as the driving force behind his early successes as a boxer. However, paternal dysfunction dominated both Richie and Jackie's home lives. The Sandoval and Beard households had caring women. Both women had relationships with men who could not or would not serve as role models for their children; these men represented "what not to become." Richie said he "felt [like a] prisoner within in own household," as his father was an extreme disciplinarian who "kept him on short leash" in order to prevent him from following in his older brother's footsteps, which included incarceration for rape. Just as Jackie's older brother Rickey served as his boxing idol, Richie's second oldest brother of four siblings, Alberto, also inspired his love for the sport. Alberto Sandoval had a stellar amateur career, winning multiple national and international boxing championships. His amateur boxing accomplishments paralleled Richie's in that each won the AAU National Championship in the junior flyweight division, a boxing weight class with a weight limit of 99 pounds. By 1977, each brother was a top-ranked amateur for his individual weight division. Yet, unlike Jackie, Richie trained with other professional fighters. These professionals provided a sense of community by embracing Richie not only as their little brother, but also eventually as one of their own.²⁷

The world of all those athletes I interviewed came crashing down when in April 1980 the United States Olympic Committee representatives voted to support the White House-led boycott. This decision took a toll on Rayford, Jackie, and Richie. Richie was one of the boxers who traveled to Moscow, against the wishes of the White House, to compete against the "Iron Curtain" countries. He remembers his matches had been set just before Carter's boycott

²⁶ Richie Sandoval personal interview with the author. Las Vegas, Nevada, July 16, 2013.

²⁷ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

announcement. Richie felt that beating a top Russian boxer and winning the tournament ensured his readiness for the upcoming Moscow Games. Accordingly, the boycott announcement hit him “like a sack of bricks.”²⁸ After the boycott announcement, he immediately regrouped and decided to remain an amateur boxer. Richie explained, “From the very beginning, all the preparation; all the tournaments; representing the US during international competitions was to help prepare for the Grand Daddy, which are the Olympics.” He also said, “When you fight for your country, you feel like you are holding a greater responsibility. There’s such a respect when you represent your country. You really want to accomplish something.”²⁹ Although Richie believed representing his country was a great honor, he knew a gold medal provided “boxing credibility which in turn meant ‘real numbers’” in terms of monetary gain.³⁰

Jackie and Rayford received the telephone call about the boycott while training at the Jackson Boxing Club. The call confirmed that USOC delegates had voted to support the White House’s boycott, and they were not going to Moscow. A pained Jackie vividly remembers not going to Moscow meant the gold medal he had hoped to win would go to the boxer he had beaten during the USA versus Cuba competition held in February 1980.³¹ Although Jackie’s pain was obvious to his family and fellow teammates, Coach Collins instructed him to convey to reporters that he was an American first and therefore supported the President and the USOC’s decision.³² Childhood friends and fellow boxers remember they saw a change in Jackie shortly after the announcement. One teammate stated, “[Jackie] never seemed to be the same after receiving the news. It was as if all the air had been let out of his balloon.” The entire club felt the

²⁸ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

²⁹ Robert Cassidy, “A class left behind,” *ESPN*, August 9, 2008. See <http://www.espn.com/sports/boxing/news/story?id=3526059>, Feb. 26, 2015.

³⁰ Cassidy, “A class left behind.”

³¹ Personal interview with Jackie and Obie Beard.

³² Personal interview with Rayford Collins.

pain of Jackie's loss. His fellow Jackson team members had been excited for him, believing that given his Gold Medal win at the 1979 Pan-American Games, he stood a good chance of victory in Moscow. Jackie's younger brother, Obie Beard, "felt the boycott broke Jackie's spirit and he was never the same."³³

Richie conveyed that his reaction to the boycott announcement was similar to Jackie's in that he, too, felt it was all over; it was the end. In June 1980, Jackie, Richie, Rayford, and the other nationally top-ranked boxers from across the US arrived to the USA Olympic Boxing Trials held in Atlanta, GA, fully aware of the USOC's vote to support Carter's boycott. Richie explained that AAU Boxing officials had told them before the Trials began that they were there in order to determine who was going to make the Olympic team. Moreover, the fighters were sold a bill-of-goods by being told, "We're going to let you know that we're not going to the Olympics because the Russians invaded Afghanistan, and those assholes over there think we're bullshitting and that we won't do anything about it. Those guys think they've got us by the balls, but it's the other way around."³⁴

Athletes did not bear the sting of the US-led boycott in 1980 alone; the burden fell just as heavily on the coaches. Jackie's longtime coach, Rayford Collins, dedicated himself to training boxers beginning in 1964. Rayford moved up through the ranks of the Jackson Boxing teams into US amateur boxing, traveling the globe between 1978 and 1980 as the assistant to head Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) boxing coach Pat Nappi.³⁵ His term as assistant to the AAU boxing coach meant that he oversaw domestic and international fights against opponents including Russians, East Germans, and Cubans. Their teams performed extremely well and won the majority of their

³³ *Unknown: The Jackie Beard Story*. Directed by William Fain.

³⁴ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

³⁵ Personal interview with Rayford Collins.

matches. Already a legend in the world of US boxing, Coach Pat Nappi had coached the 1976 United States Olympic boxing team. Under his supervision, the boxers won five gold, one silver, and one bronze medal. It seemed a forgone conclusion that Nappi would coach the 1980 team, but he did not.³⁶ At the time, US amateur boxing ranked Rayford Collins as the number one coach in the country. His stellar reputation and performances while coaching the Jackson Boxing Club, combined with success at the 1980 National Golden Glove tournament, made him the clear choice to coach the Olympic boxing team. During his coaching career, two of his boxers fought in the 1980 US Olympic boxing trials at the Omni hotel in Atlanta, Georgia. During one of Rayford's matches, Nappi summoned Collins to his room, where USA national boxing chairman Robert "Bob" J. Surkein also waited to speak with him. Nappi and Surkein gathered to discuss the coaching opportunity of a lifetime. Shortly after his arrival at the meeting, Surkein informed Collins of the decision to name him as the head coach of the USA Olympic team. There was, however, a catch. He was not to tell anyone, including his own boxers, until after the boxers had arrived at the US Olympic Boxing Training Camp before the Games³⁷

Only a small inner-circle knew Nappi had undergone medical treatment at his local Veteran's hospital for a serious but unspecified illness. As Nappi's health worsened, Surkein and Nappi decided it would be best to publically name Collins as the new coach of the Olympic boxing team for the 1980 Moscow Games. Collins remembered the primary purpose of keeping the announcement secret rested on not jeopardizing the \$80,000 per show ABC paid AAU Boxing to televise the international fights. In late June 1980, Surkein invited Collins to New York City, in his capacity as the head coach, for a meeting with a Russian television network. The Russian network negotiated a payment of up to \$120,000 for the rights to film and broadcast

³⁶ *Unknown: The Jackie Beard Story*. Directed by William Fain.

³⁷ Personal interview with Rayford Collins.

a USA versus USSR post-Olympic match. For Collins, this opportunity seemed to be the next logical step before attending the Games. Yet, in the end, he endured the same fate as the athletes. All the years of training and personal sacrifice crashed down with the announcement of a boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games.³⁸

In an attempt to assuage the disappointment of the would-be Olympians, the US Congress and President Carter honored the newly appointed US Olympians by welcoming each, along with two guests, to spend a few days in Washington D.C. The culmination of the visit was a White House luncheon with the President. Mike Moran described the event for those named to the US Olympic Team on July 30, 1980 as full of pomp and circumstance. The boxers, along with other US Olympic athletes, were “honored on the West steps of the Capital with special medals from the Congress as a nation watched.” Moran wrote the ceremony “will stand as a memorable day in the lives of the athletes.”³⁹

However, not all of the boxers in attendance agreed with this celebratory message. Richie and his immediate family went to Washington D.C. and joined “the whole parade crowd.” He explained his family received a private tour of the D.C. sites by a friend who lived in Washington D.C. and was “married to a senator or something.” The friend took time to “court my parents around Washington while I was doing the Parade Show with the U.S. Team.” Richie recalled the US Olympians “got together when we had the luncheon on the grass and took pictures. Athletes traded numbers and signed autographs,” all while dressed in Western attire, including a cowboy hat. It seemed to Richie as if Levi Strauss sponsored the gala, and it resembled a high school prom; he felt as if the event was something, they “needed to do, not like

³⁸ Personal interview with Rayford Collins.

³⁹ Mike Moran, “Joy and tears as U.S. Olympians are honored by USOC in Washington,” *The Olympian*, September 1980, pgs. 4-8.

something we wanted to do.” The invitation to a luncheon did not make Richie, or the other athletes, feel honored; “It was like we were supposed to be there because our President was there. That’s how it felt to me. It wasn’t, ‘Oh, you should feel honored. You’re having lunch on the lawn.’ It didn’t interest me. Completely. It didn’t interest me. I mean, I could have had lunch at McDonald’s or whatever. It didn’t matter. The thing that mattered most to me was the [Olympic] medal I was hoping to get, which would have transferred in my pro career into bigger dollars.” At the end of the gala, Richie remembered receiving a Congressional Medal, struck by Tiffany and Company, along with a photo album commemorating the weeklong event.⁴⁰

Athletes spent years perfecting their skills in preparation for Olympic competition and Richie concluded that unlike other sports, “the boxer had a choice to stay amateur or pursue professional careers.”⁴¹ In name only, the US Boxing Olympians lacked the credentials of the preceding and succeeding US Olympic boxing squads. A comparison of the 1976 and 1984 USA Olympic boxing teams supports Berger’s argument that those teams before and after the 1980 Olympics set the standard during the “Golden Age of Amateur USA Boxing” by which all future teams would be measured.⁴² Boxers from the 1976 and 1984 US teams won a total of fourteen gold medals, compared to just six medals won during the last seven Olympic Games combined, the last medal being won by Andre Ward in 2004.⁴³

Richie believed that the Moscow Games was his ticket to the pros. If he won a medal of any kind, it would “show his credibility,” and in turn increase his earning power when he turned

⁴⁰ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

⁴¹ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

⁴² Phil Berger, “PHIL BERGER ON BOXING; OLYMPIC GOLD NETS PRO GOLD,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 1986. section H.

⁴³ Olympic Results in 2004. See <http://www.olympic.org/content/results-and-medalists/gamesandsportsummary/?sport=31408&games=2004%2f1&event>, May 31, 2015.

professional.⁴⁴ He believed boycotting the Olympics left him and his fellow teammates with nothing to show for years of training and effort.

This sentiment was not unique to the boxing team. The heartache was shared between all Olympic athletes who trained equally hard to earn the title of Olympian. Al Oerter, a four-time gold medalist in the discus throw, was selected to attend the Olympics at age 42. To Oerter, the 1980 Olympics looked like his last shot at glory. He vehemently opposed Carter's boycott, saying, "The only way to compete against Moscow is to stuff it down their throats in their own backyard."⁴⁵ He believed that the political usage of the Olympic Games would destroy them, stating, "If these games go, probably the Olympics go." In May of 1980, he bested his own world record throw at 227 feet, 11 inches; it was a dagger in the heart that despite being the best in the world, he would not bring home the gold.⁴⁶ Peter Schnugg, an Olympian in water polo, felt the same sense of loss. "For me, though, and for a lot of other people, this is the last shot. This isn't renewable." Many athletes wondered why they were the ones chosen to pay for Carter's political plays. Canoeist Roland Muhlen said, "Only the American athletes are suffering." Debbie Green of the volleyball Olympic team answered his question. "I feel we're being used. Hearing President Carter, it doesn't seem he really cares what the athletes think. Our coach told us to ignore it and keep training...But each morning you go to breakfast, pick up the paper and see two words: Boycott Olympics. Then we're supposed to go work out for eight hours. It's hard to be enthusiastic." Some athletes hung their heads in this defeated stupor, but some were more outspoken about their disagreement with Carter's boycott. Wrestler Lee Kemp stated, "I want to compete in the Olympics...I wouldn't support a boycott. Politically, it's just a

⁴⁴ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

⁴⁵ Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, Jimmy Carter's Disastrous Olympic Boycott, *POLITICO Magazine*, February 9, 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/02/carter-olympic-boycott-1980-103308?o=0>.

⁴⁶ "Al Oerter – Olympian, Artist, Gentleman," *www.aloerter.com*, July 19, 2017.

convenient tool to use. Since it's 1980, an Olympic year, it's a way to get world-wide attention. But it's just hurting a few people, the 600 athletes going to Moscow...[the government hasn't] supported us at all and now they're asking the 600 of us who've made sacrifices to throw it all away for some political move."⁴⁷ No matter the cause, every single athlete would-be Olympian sacrificed years of training, subsequent professional careers, and monetary benefits for a cause they felt had nothing to do with them, for the most part against their will.

To the athletes denied a chance to compete in Moscow, the romanticism and idealism surrounding the Olympics, the notions of brotherhood between athletes and celebration of their talent and commitment, and the ultimate athlete's dream of becoming an Olympian, vanished in the haze of a political firestorm. Through their heartbreaking experience, these boxers unearthed the truth behind the Olympic Games: the athlete is simply a figurehead through which countries display their nationalism.

Chapter 3: Political History of the Olympic Nationalism

⁴⁷ Don Pierson and Skip Myslenski, "The Athletes: Patriotic, puzzled, and divided," *Chicago Tribune*, January 27, 1980.

The Olympic Games have always provided a unique lens through which world events can be viewed.⁴⁸ Designed as a forum in which the world's youth could spar with their international counterparts, the Games provided a venue for peaceful athletic competition. Historian Pierre de Coubertin's true intention when he established the modern Olympic Games in 1896 is a popular subject of debate between scholars. Coubertin claimed that he wanted to bring together individuals in athletic contests. Digging deeper, historians have pondered whether Coubertin specifically intended to create a sphere that separated sports and politics. To this day, the Games provide a platform from which one could not only observe competition between athletes, but also bear witness to the nationalistic tendency for political and social tensions to play out on the world stage. The Games also provide an opportunity for national elites and politicians to wage propaganda campaigns designed to advance their own agenda. As a major global event greatly aided by modern technology, the Games additionally provide a way for both the media and audiences to draw attention to a myriad of political problems. Since 1896, the modern Olympic Games operate in contradiction with Pierre de Coubertin's public, if not private, desire for "pure" athletic contests.

In *Olympic Politics*, historian Christopher Hill argues that politics have been inseparable from the modern Games since their inception in 1896. He credits the foundation of the modern Games to the energy and determination of Coubertin, whose study of classical Greek history inspired him to view the modern Olympic Games as an expression of the elegance of sport, as they had in antiquity. However, Hill argues that one of the primary reasons for Coubertin's enthusiasm about the Games resulted from France's loss in the Franco-Prussian War of 1871;

⁴⁸ Christopher Hill, *Olympic Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 5; John L. Lucas, *Future of the Olympic Games* (Champaign: Human Kinetics Books, 1992), 4-151; Philip D'Agati, *Nationalism on the World Stage*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 2011), 7-8; Mohamed Mzali, "The President of the IOC meets the problems of Olympism," *Olympic Review* 143 (September 1979): 495-499.

Coubertin's hypothesis that a national sports program would bring stratified classes together pointed toward his belief that the Games would strengthen democracy and social equality, therefore uniting France against external forces. The influence of politics on the Olympics, then, was ensured from the very conception of the modern Games. Hill reveals that during the development of the modern Games, they grew in complexity as well as in stature, which in turn included establishing International Federations to administer, manage, and monitor the everyday running of the various sports disciplines. Hill examines two resulting issues that set the tone for today's Games. He first tracks the evolution of the International Olympic Committee (or IOC) from fifteen to over one hundred and thirty committees, which is the equivalent of a major corporation and its funding.⁴⁹ This he balances with the values of Olympism, "a philosophy of life that places sport at the service of humanity which centers on the interaction of the body, will and mind."⁵⁰ In essence, Olympism is expressed through actions linking sport to culture and education. Hence, the games serve to impart a series of values applicable not only on the field of play but in everyday life. According to Hill, one of the primary issues of the International Olympic Committee centers on the election process. The IOC is comprised of a self-elected body and is self-regulated by people from wealthy and/or powerful backgrounds. Acknowledging this selection of members underscores the notion that the entire IOC election process is elitist and organized to ensure its own preservation. Therefore, my study aligns with scholars who argue that the structure and selection of the IOC Executive Board members resembles an oligarchy populated by a group of elites who select their own leader to control daily operations and further their personal agenda.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Hill, *Olympic Politics*.

⁵⁰ Olympic Museum, *Olympism and the Olympic Movement*, 3.

⁵¹ Hill, *Olympic Politics*.

Hill adds the IOC requires that any city bidding to host the Games be capable of turning a profit for both the IOC and the host country. Consequently, Hill contends one of the primary intentions of the IOC is to prevent loss of funds. The IOC's complete authority to stage the Games wherever they deem appropriate is contingent upon a city's potential to meet this requirement.⁵² John L. Lucas' work, *Future of the Olympic Games* (1992), cites the work of Dr. Fr. M. Messerli of Lausanne, the Olympic historiographer, who believed that Coubertin created the Games primarily to foster "the courteous spirit of fair play thus avoiding the display of chauvinism." He adds that Coubertin's 1896 utopian views swayed him into considering the rationale for the Olympic Games through a romantic haze of Olympic fraternity, mutual respect among competitors, and balanced patriotism among the media, athletes, and spectators. His argument underscores that the future of the Games depends on the athletes' mastery of physical skill, personal integrity, and interpersonal relationships. The combination of these traits held the potential to abolish racism and build a bridge welcoming peoples of diverse backgrounds from over one hundred and sixty-five countries, forty-plus international sports federations, and ninety-five permanent IOC members from six continents. Moreover, Lucas affirms that Coubertin's beliefs stood the test of time, but also contends that for the Games to succeed in the twenty-first century, Olympic leaders must rely on enlightened leadership sustained by a significantly higher set of fundamental and unanimously accepted ideas.⁵³

Ultimately, Lucas underscores that the Games always contained varying levels of controversy, ranging from suspending the Games during World War I and World War II to the

⁵² Hill, *Olympic Politics*.

⁵³ Lucas, *Future of the Olympic Games*.

1972 terrorist attack at the Munich Games.⁵⁴ He further argues that any nation can use nationalism to its advantage including propagandizing athlete victories as evidence of a nation's superiority. Similarly, support for the Olympic Games has tended to underscore prevailing notions about racial and ethnic superiority tied to each participating country. Such a nationalist view has drawn sharp criticism about the use of flags and national anthems. In *Nationalism on the World Stage*, Philip D'Agati argues that the Olympics provide a vehicle to bolster nationalism. Within this framework, each actor uses specific strategies to demonstrate superiority of their homeland and people on the world stage.⁵⁵ Lord Killanin, International Olympic Committee President (1950-80), acknowledged that the use of national flags and national anthems at the Olympic Games Opening Ceremony and medal presentation ceremonies holds significant meaning for nation and individual. Killanin stated, "...there have been moves to abolish all flags and certain sports do not have national flags at their world championships. I think they are lucky." Killanin added that the presence of flags encouraged chauvinism or superiority within the majority of National Olympic Committees.⁵⁶

Many athletes take pride in watching the flag of their nation, their Olympic Committee, or their team, fly upon securing victory. Additionally, competing nations measure their athletes' performances by comparing "medal tables," which only serve to ramp up tensions between Olympic victors. Citizens of each participating country wish to see their nation on the medal list. Conversely, spectators often become disheartened if "their" athletes fail to win. Killanin points out that less than one-third of competing teams appear at the medal tables. Such marginalization from the medal tables demonstrates that larger, more powerful, and wealthier countries have the

⁵⁴ Derick L. Hulme, Jr., *The Political Olympics: Moscow, Afghanistan, and the 1980 U.S. Boycott* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 1-2.

⁵⁵ D'Agati, *Nationalism on the World Stage*.

⁵⁶ Mzali, "The President of the IOC meets the problems of Olympism."

means to provide superior facilities for their athletes. Hence, these nations typically send more competitors to the Games and thus have a higher probability of winning medals than smaller countries.⁵⁷ These nationalistic ideals cause obvious friction between nation-states. Lucas therefore stresses that individual athletes must avoid the Machiavellian athletic philosophy, “I will run faster, jump higher, and become physically stronger” that has become embedded in present-day moral and relativistic Olympic motto—*Citius, Altius, Fortius* (Faster, Higher, and Stronger)—as one’s driving force, and instead choose to focus on the enjoyment of the games. In the end, he writes that the modern Olympics suffered dramatic setbacks during the 1980 and 1984 Olympic boycotts; the back-and-forth political tantrums between the US and Soviet Union during the early 1980s resulted in little political change. Instead, this international bickering had a lasting effect on the athletes who earned, but were denied, the right to pursue Olympic glory.⁵⁸

My work expands on the work of Hill and Lucas by concentrating on the buried narratives of those athletes whose careers the 1980 US boycott significantly altered. My analysis of US Olympic boxing teams provides a window through which the multi-dimensional and often strained relations between athletes and the US Government, the IOC, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can be viewed. Such a vantage point exposes severe incongruities and political manipulations accompanied by little consideration of the very athletes these organizations claim to protect.

In the end, amateur boxer Richie Sandoval fought for a mere \$200-\$300 per fight. By comparison, boxers who received gold medal(s) at the Montreal Olympics received between \$30,000 and \$40,000 for their first few professional matches.⁵⁹ Richie was right to believe that

⁵⁷Mzali, “The President of the IOC meets the problems of Olympism.”

⁵⁸ Lucas, *Future of the Olympic Games*.

⁵⁹ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

winning an Olympic gold medal for boxing, coupled with increased television exposure, played an instrumental role in the rise of household names for professional boxers like Sugar Ray Leonard, Howard Davis, Michael and Leon Spinks, and Evander Holyfield. Richie's claim is supported by the fact that the 1976 and 1984 USA Olympic teams' financial successes can be measured by the lucrative individual contracts each Gold medalist received upon entering the professional ranks. In fact, the 1984 gold medal winners "got a substantial signing bonus, which was different in size and form depending on the individual. Ultimately, every bonus was at least six figures, and some of the bonuses were in excess of \$500,000." In addition, match organizers for each of the 1984 Olympic gold medalists guaranteed a minimum number of fights in the first three years of their professional careers, totaling more than one million dollars.⁶⁰

Each Gold medalist received a significantly higher purse as an Olympic boxing champion turned professional than the fighters earned before their Olympic win. Each Olympic fighter also received the royal treatment from promoters and television networks. Overall, being an Olympic boxer provided each Olympian with the ability to demand higher payouts for televised matches. In the case of Olympic champion Howard Davis, for example, he signed a \$1.6 million, 13-fight contract that his co-managers Dennis Rappaport and Mike Jones negotiated with CBS at the start of his professional career. Subsequently, the "Class of 80" turned pro with little to no fanfare at a time when the Golden Age of Amateur boxing, with the help of American Broadcasting Corporation's *Wide World of Sports*, entered mainstream television. ABC's new show televised international amateur bouts, along with top professional and championship matches. However, top matches did not garner enough revenue. Thus, the financial impact of the Moscow boycott contributed to the exclusion, and in some cases, impoverishment, of many members of the 1980

⁶⁰ Berger, *The New York Times*.

USA Olympic boxing team. Many of the boxers prohibited from attending the 1980 Games did not enjoy the same level of fame and notoriety as their predecessors who participated at the Montreal and Los Angeles Games.⁶¹ With nothing to show for their hard work and sacrifice, these boxers suffered. They struggled to make a living after US boxing organizations named them among the best boxers in the US. The boycott robbed them of all future benefits they would have gained had they had been allowed to attend the Olympics. Consequently, because of the 1980 boycott of the Olympic Games, these boxers became entangled in a political power play blind to their needs and desires. Rather than the 1980 boycott effecting any real change at the international level, the athletes alone bore the consequences of national and international political entanglement.

Chapter 4: The White House Plays Political Hardball at Any Cost

The degree of intimidation the White House was willing to use to force AAU Boxing and the USOC into compliance with their boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games was conveyed on January 21, 1980 during a Special Coordination Committee Meeting led by Lloyd

⁶¹ Berger, *The New York Times*.

Cutler, White House Chief of Staff. During this meeting, Cutler explained to the committee that his staff tried and failed many times to contact Mr. Castle of the AAU to communicate that “the President has enunciated our policy on this and it applies to the boxing group,” and they were not to fly to Moscow. Concerns from the White House included the fact that the boxing team's “departure at this point would send a wrong signal.” However, the same internal memo revealed that the White House did not want to attract a great deal of publicity before the Games because they feared team officials might ignore their request; such a response would make the White House seem powerless before the USOC. During the meeting, Cutler clearly reiterated the position of the White House: “they should know that their actions along with ABC television, their financial sponsors, would receive publicity eventually bringing pressure to bear at some point.”⁶² In showing patience, the Carter administration rationalized that the boycott, along with public pressure, would eventually influence other athletic groups that sought to participate in the Moscow Games.

In response, Donald F. Hull, head of the AAU’s boxing team, conveyed to *The New York Times* in a telephone interview on January 20, 1980 that he saw no reason to cancel participation in the pre-Olympic competitions, but he did not take stronger action outside of asking the athletes to stay home. The team’s position was indirectly supported by the US State Department, which acknowledged it would “not seek punitive measures against the US boxing team if travelling to the Soviet Union to participate in the United States-Russian matches to be held on January 26th.”⁶³ When questioned by *The New York Times*, Hull added that he “...couldn’t think of anything more wrong than to boycott a competition for political reasons.” Hull believed the

⁶² Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 21 January 1980, Box 10, Folder 96, WHCF, Correspondence Tracking Collection, JCL.

⁶³ “U.S. Athletes Plan to Compete in Soviet This Week; Decision Left to Each Athlete,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 1980, sec. A13.

“decision would be left to each athlete” as to whether or not he wanted to represent the United States in international competition.⁶⁴

On January 3rd, 1980, a *New York Times* article reported that an AAU spokesperson had mixed emotions about supporting a potential boycott after “having been recently briefed by the White House in which he reiterated the administration’s boycott position made it difficult to go to Russia and feel good about competing under this situation.”⁶⁵ He added, “If we were helping [in going] to support anything Russia was doing, we would have to consider and listen to President Carter.” Ironically, however, the White House’s boycott discussion gained steam before its official announcement when Olympic boxing champion Muhammad Ali and his Boxing and Track Clubs publicly announced that they would not send their boxers to the Moscow Games. The Club’s spokesperson publically stated that the team supported the boycott against the Soviet Union because of its unjust attack of “a very meek and religious country.” The spokesperson further confirmed their support for Ali when on at least two separate occasions Ali directly told athletes, “as a Muslim he had to take a stand because they’re invading Afghanistan’s rights.”⁶⁶ As a Muslim, Ali felt an obligation to defend against the invasion of a Muslim country.

By late January 1980, the White House formed a Special Coordination Committee (SCC) led by White House Chief of Staff Lloyd Cutler. Cutler’s responsibilities included creating a master plan for holding alternate Games for countries in support of the US-led boycott. On February 12, 1980, he chaired an informal meeting at the White House with British, Australian, Canadian, Dutch, Saudi Arabian, and Philippine diplomats to discuss logistics and policy related

⁶⁴ Jane Gross, “Muhammad Ali Club Agrees to a Boycott of Moscow Games; All Cites Unjust Attack Majority of Boxers in Support Athletics Congress to Meet Boycott Set by Ali Club,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 1980, sec. A.

⁶⁵ *Digest of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the USOC Administrative Committee*, 1-25-80, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

⁶⁶ Gross, *The New York Times*.

to setting up an alternative athletic competition to the Olympics. The meeting focused on developing concrete plans for international athletic competitions for countries not wishing to participate in Moscow. To the group, Cutler affirmed the administration wanted to “formulate a realistic alternative Games” and they could “continue to develop world support for our position that Moscow is inappropriate.”⁶⁷ Moreover, the US administration knew it had to move rapidly because it appeared as though the International Olympic Committee intended to proceed with plans to have Moscow host the 1980 Olympic Games. Cutler came away from the six-hour meeting with the conclusion that the United States had a relatively good chance to achieve substantial Eurasian and Australian support for an Olympic boycott, but that the chances of holding successful alternate Games were almost nonexistent. The hope of holding alternative games required the President to “. . . expend a good deal of political capital and risk a blow to his prestige if alternative games do not come off.” Within this context, Cutler worried that success would require the Administration to lobby aggressively for alternative Games; this meant that if key political figures were unwilling to participate, the entire plan could fail. To this end, Cutler recommended President Carter not become personally involved. If he did, it was “likely to be a real can of worms.”⁶⁸

In lieu of placing Carter at the head of the alternative games and boycott movement, the White House secured the services of Muhammad Ali. Ali agreed on February 3, 1980 to travel to Africa to seek support for the US-led boycott. He also sought to secure support from African nation-states in a location for the pending International Good-Will boxing competition, a contest designed as an alternative to the Olympics for those countries supporting the US-led Moscow

⁶⁷ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 12 February 1980, Box 15, Folder 2, Plains File Collection, JCL.

⁶⁸ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 12 February 1980, Box 27, Folder 2, Brzezinski Mat'l: Staff Evening Reports File Collection, JCL.

Games boycott.⁶⁹ Carter sent letters with his envoys for Ali to present to each African head-of-state communicating the inability of the United States to support participation in the summer Olympic Games in Moscow. Carter's letters stated, "[Ali] will also elaborate his own concerns, which, I must add, parallel mine."⁷⁰

Even though Ali and the White House joined forces to advance a pro-boycott agenda, not everyone was as enthusiastic as Carter and Ali about a US-backed boycott. The cold reception Ali received by a US-led delegation to meet with the Tanzanian President, Julius Nyerere, demonstrates the divisiveness of the boycott issue. President Nyerere expressed that he was insulted that the White House sent an athlete instead of a diplomat to discuss matters of state. Within this context, Nyerere accused Ali of being Carter's puppet.⁷¹ Regardless of Nyerere's irritation, the press touted the Ali "mission" as a success. Newspapers reported some of Ali's more colorful comments about the boycott and that Ali "clearly established his credibility with his African interlocutors." The press, therefore, helped to reinforce the notion that "Africa should not attend the Moscow Olympic Games in the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan." Strongly influenced by Ali, senior Tanzanian officials communicated to a White House staff member that Ali ultimately compelled them to seek guidance from the Supreme Council for Sports in Africa (SCSA). Despite the sensitive political situation Ali's mission created, the SCSA expressed within a month of his visit its support for an alternate boxing competition.⁷²

⁶⁹ William Bigelow, "The Failed U.S. Boycott of the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics," *Global Research News*, February 17, 2014. See <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-failed-u-s-boycott-of-the-1980-moscow-summer-olympics/5369121>, July 16, 2015.

⁷⁰ Jimmy Carter to Muhammad Ali, 2 February 1980, Box 105, Folder 3, Brzezinski Mat'l: Cables File Collection, JCL.

⁷¹ Bigelow, *Global Research News*.

⁷² 4 February 1980, Washington, DC, Box 15, Folder 2, Plains File, JCL.

On the surface, the trials and tribulations of Ali's political and religious standpoints draw into question why he agreed to embrace the White House request. Gamal Abdel-Shehid, an Assistant Professor of Kinesiology and Health Science at Yale, argues that Ali, along with other racial minorities, was on the reverse side of a cultural war fueled by racially motivated violence and sporting frenzy. He continues his argument by pointing out that two of the most important American cultural and political roles are athlete and soldier. In the US, to be an athlete is also to be a soldier, and there is a direct correlation between methods and criteria used to select laborers, athletes, and soldiers. He continues that historically, United States athletes and soldiers have come disproportionately from the Black population; he further contends that, "those in the United States seem unconcerned with this state of being as long as those in peril are not White—Black, Latina/o, and now, Arab, Muslim, or those mistaken for them." Hence, this pattern results in what has become the status-quo for foreign and domestic wars and sports in the US—the constant exploitation of Blacks as laborers within its enterprise. Consequently, Abdel-Shehid contends that the sporting-mad United States' quest for athletic glory has exceeded that exhibited by other nations throughout the globe. Thus, he believes Ali's immense athletic achievement is probably why Americans eventually forgave him for his aggressive political stance during the Viet-Nam War.⁷³

The press viewed the Ali mission as a success. The United States Olympic Committee, however, was not as enthusiastic about the boycott. Griffin Boyette, Attorney General to the White House, expressed hesitation in taking on domestic and international Olympic committees. His hesitation stemmed from his fear that not only the USOC, but also other Olympic committees, would find ways to circumvent a boycott and participate in the Moscow Olympics.

⁷³ Gamal Abdel-Shehid, "MUHAMMAD ALI, American's B-Side," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 26, no. 3 (August 2002): 317-325.

White House Chief of Staff Cutler responded by noting that all Olympic Committees had until May 24 to decide whether to officially accept or reject the IOC's invitation to participate in the Moscow Games. In hindsight, Boyette claimed the White House should have taken definitive measures to organize alternative sites for the games.⁷⁴ In response, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski warned, “. . . a U.S. imposition of a boycott on manufactured goods would have an appearance of petty vindictiveness,” unless such products were diverted to the alternate games.⁷⁵

During the US Olympic Committee meeting, Cutler noted opposition to alternative games. Instead, Cutler stated the IOC would rather entertain the organization of some type of national festival in lieu of an alternate Olympics. Such an alternative would also appeal to those countries that remained undecided about the boycott. More importantly, he claimed athletes believed that the real athletic competition remained in the Eastern Bloc. If IOC athletes could not compete with Soviet and East German teams, some athletes might not consider it worthwhile to compete in alternate Games.⁷⁶ However, two of the most important US allies, the United Kingdom and Australia, also expressed a desire for alternative games. These nations reasoned that support for alternative games could help persuade their Olympic Committees to withdraw from Moscow. Cutler advanced the idea that other countries' national committees were legally and financially tied to The International Olympic Movement; thus, such actions might be interpreted as a US attempt to undermine and destroy the modern Olympic movement.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 21 February 1980, Box 10, Folder 7, White House Situation Room, Subject: Iran/Afghanistan, Plains File Collection, JCL.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 12 February 1980, Box 10, Folder 27, White House Situation Room, Subject: USSR/Eastern Europe, Plains File Collection, JCL.

⁷⁷ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, February 21, 1980.

By the end of February 1980, Cutler posited that although Lord Killanin, President of the IOC, agreed to plead openly with the USSR for political compliance, his stance on the boycott was unclear. In other words, Killanin held a politically inferior position to Cutler. On the contrary, Killanin was a master politician; while he agreed to talk publically with the Russians about their invasion of Afghanistan, he also realized it was too early to denounce publicly the US Administration's boycott initiative, which ultimately sought to use athletes as political pawns. Cutler further noted that the USOC would likely attempt to delay its decision until at least April, in turn pitting the USOC and the Carter-led boycott against one another. Cutler stated that he would meet with the officers of the USOC before their February meeting in order "to impress on them the need to take some further action now, rather than putting off a decision until April." Subsequently, Cutler suggested that the Carter Administration might wish to expand Congressional legislation prohibiting USOC participation in the Moscow games. Such legislation would include an option allowing modification of its federal tax-exempt privilege. In addition to the statutory remedy, Mr. Cutler asked the US Attorney General to look into anti-trust features behind the organization of Olympic Committees. However, also worth consideration is that Cutler noted such a move constituted a last resort because removal of such a status could permanently affect the Modern Olympic Games. Furthermore, such a political move could expose the US as a catalyst in the destruction of the Games. Within this context, it is reasonable to argue the White House sought to deliver a crippling blow to the IOC if it did not publicly support the boycott. The possibility, then, of Carter signing an executive order to stop the IOC's flow of revenues from US television broadcasts emerged as potential threat to the IOC. If the US government exercised this power, then the US could potentially subvert 90 percent of the IOC's annual budget.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 14 February 1980, Box 10, Folder 7, White House Situation Room,

By February 21, 1980, it became clear that President Carter would not change his mind regardless of warnings from White House staff. Carter told the committee he “didn’t want any delay on planning for Alternate Athlete Games.” Cutler followed through on President Carter’s directive. He reasoned that the creation of alternative games would apply pressure to other nations to join the boycott. It was Cutler’s hope that in promoting the alternative games, he could allay other nations’ concerns about destruction or conflict within the International Olympic Movement. Moreover, by the end of February, the slow pace of foreign communications heightened concern in the White House, thereby compelling Cutler to respond by contracting foreign relations experts to address concerns connected to the alternate games. Cutler hired Peter Ueberroth, the architect of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games and the Commissioner for Major League Baseball between 1984 and 1989. Ueberroth, along with David Wolper, the Vice-Chairman of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, served as informal consultants in the promotion of the US-led boycott at home and abroad. In order to make a compelling case to Carter, Cutler argued that the advice of experts like Ueberroth was critical in securing foreign financial assistance to pay for and host the alternate games. The newly assembled team of advisors recommended adding another layer of protection by creating a non-profit organization. Sponsored by a private law firm, this non-profit organization’s recommendations would “neither be public nor commit the Administration to a course of action.” The experts were tasked with protecting the US Government from public embarrassment should foreign support for the boycott vanish. Fortunately for the White House, hiring the advisors immediately paid off as it “received offers of financial support from a number of industry and other sources.”⁷⁹

Subject: Iran/Afghanistan/Pakistan, Plains File Collection, JCL.

⁷⁹ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 28 February 1980, Box 10, Folder 7, Plains File Collection, JCL.

The advisors also warned the Carter Administration that promotion of the alternate games could suffer due to a lack of direct control over National Olympic Committees in Western Europe, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Each country's NGOs possessed the ability to override any political maneuvering by their home country to prevent attendance at the Moscow Games. In contrast, however, African governments could order their committees not to participate. Such centralized control in these African nations made it simple to lobby for their support in the boycott. The White House was then able to send Muhammad Ali, a cultural icon in Africa, directly to the African governments rather than working with a multitude of NGOs. Carter's advisors identified that the key to a successful boycott then rested on persuading France, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Kenya, China, Mexico, Japan, and Italy to join their effort. The advisors argued that France played a dominant role in this scheme, primarily because of its historical legacy in the International Olympic movement. The experts also argued that these nations were the most influential in international athletic competition. At a minimum, it was critical to persuade those nations to publically "support the alternative games, even if they will not make a firm commitment to stay away from Moscow," in order to help persuade other international sports federations to follow suit. To this end, the White House stressed that participation in the alternate games would not disqualify athletes from future Olympics.⁸⁰

Taking advantage of this marked political instability, the Soviets did not stand idle. Soviet officials initiated a major effort to forestall the US boycott of the Summer Games. For example, the Soviet Foreign Ministry reportedly instructed Soviet embassies to employ financial incentive programs to reduce the probability of a boycott. Moscow countered by making funds available to teams who needed financial support. In the end, the Moscow Organizing Committee

⁸⁰ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, February 28, 1980.

offered financial aid to nearly sixty developing nations in order to help bring athletes and officials to the Summer Games. Simultaneously, Soviet officials persuaded other non-African National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and their athletes to also offer financial aid to nations committed to attendance at the games *before* the USOC brought the boycott to the April 1980 vote. In an effort to silence US boycott efforts; the Russians launched media attacks against the US, also lobbying for aid to assist African countries and their Olympic teams should they decide to participate in the Moscow Games.⁸¹

Early in March of 1980, the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) advisors again predicted resistance from the International Olympic Committee, saying that it, "...and its national components would fight very hard against the notion of alternative games of any kind." Cutler warned Carter of such a possibility in an internal memorandum stating, "The starch seems to be slowly going out of our boycott effort."⁸² He also indicated the immediacy of the situation given "... time is running out, and unless we are prepared to show determination [by using the IEEPA], there is a high risk that this issue, where the President's prestige is heavily committed, will fall apart."⁸³ In order to gain the support of the IOC, the White House scheduled the alternate games after the Moscow Games. In doing so, the White House sent the message to the international community that they would not undermine the modern Olympic Games. Furthermore, the White House reiterated that their decision would have no impact on US participation in future Olympic Games.

⁸¹ National Security Council, 8 April 1980, Box 16, Folder 77, Brzezinski Mat'l: Brzezinski Cable Files, JCL.

⁸² Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 20 March 1980, Box 30, Folder 97, WHCF, Correspondence Tracking Collection, JCL.

⁸³ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 26 February 1980, Box 10, Folder 7, White House Situation Room, Subject: Iran/Afghanistan, Plains File Collection, JCL.

Cutler noted that more than fifty countries supported the US boycott, including a number of pivotal developing nation-states such as Nigeria and Brazil. Even some stalwart supporters, including the United Kingdom and Australia, found “. . . it increasingly difficult to keep their national Olympic associations from accepting invitations to Moscow. He added, “This, coupled with the unwillingness of the FRG and Japan to work openly with us now, have hurt both our boycott effort and our drive to organize alternative games.”⁸⁴ On March 15, Cutler openly expressed optimism that the USOC Executive Board would draft a resolution in support of the President’s position. Cutler acknowledged that the USOC was considering working directly with the US Government to develop plans for alternative games in August or September of 1980. In turn, the USOC stated it would wait until at least May before sending a letter to Moscow to confirm US non-participation in the Summer Games. It is interesting to note that the USOC shifted its position from one of opposition to the boycott to one in support of the boycott on the same day of their historic vote on April 12, 1980. Such a dramatic change begs the question: what kind of “backroom deal” did the US Administration make with USOC executives in order to win their support? It is possible USOC Executive Committee members decided to support the White House before they communicated with NGOs and athletes. However, the terms of the deal would not become apparent until the USOC House Delegate Meeting, held on April 12 and 13, 1980.

The LAOOC advised the rest of the IOC committee not to pursue organization of alternate games unless the White House could confirm participation commitments from the top five nations including France, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Kenya, and China. In so doing, the IOC argued if the White House could secure participation commitments for the

⁸⁴ Edmund Muskie, Secretary of State, to The President, 3 March 1980, Box 155, Folder 1, Office of The President, Summer Olympics: Early March Update, NSC Institutional Files, 1977-81, JCL.

alternate games from those top five nations, the Russians would cancel their Games. Representatives from the LAOOC warned other Committee members to expect significant political pushback after the imposition of a requirement directing governments to support the boycott and to help with start-up costs for organizing alternate games. With worldwide marketing, the LAOOC reasoned that such an approach emphasized that after an initial startup period; the alternate games would be self-supporting. The LAOOC then identified Japan as a potential host site for volleyball and judo, the United Kingdom for equestrian events, and Kenya for boxing.⁸⁵

By April 1, 1980, it became clear to President Carter that not everyone who received the message about the USOC and the White House supported the boycott. In an internal memorandum, Lloyd communicated to Cutler that the SCC had fostered “serious erosion” among US NGOs. He further “emphasized the vital importance of a major effort over the two weeks to reinvigorate our campaign” before the US House of Delegates vote on April 12, 1980. During negotiations with the White House, the disintegration of US NGOs introduced significant concerns about the viability of holding alternate games. Carter called for Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and US Deputy Secretary of State Mr. Christopher to publicize USSR atrocities in Afghanistan. Circulation of USSR bullying in Afghanistan served to remind the American people that the Carter Administration had a clear rationale to support non-participation in the Moscow Olympics.⁸⁶

Ultimately, Carter justified that the announcement should have the “effect of raising public consciousness of the problem in turn establishing the national security importance”

⁸⁵ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 26 February 1980. The White House felt that gaining public support from the identified countries was the key to fulfilling its desire to widen support for conducting alternate games.

⁸⁶ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 1 April 1980, Box 10, Folder 8, Plains File Collection, JCL.

concerning the White House's boycott of the Moscow Olympics.⁸⁷ Cutler stressed sports officials had to "be made to understand that their opposition to US policy on this issue will harm the 'national interest.'" In response, the US Administration arranged meetings in Washington with NGOs and other leaders that did not support the boycott. The Carter administration showed strong support for "national security" and therein put non-supportive USOC officials on the defensive.⁸⁸ Among the leaders present to represent the US were Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, General David Jones, and Admiral Stansfield Turner, as well as Dr. Brzezinski, Secretary Vance, and Mr. Christopher, as well as many active duty and retired military personnel. The strong presence of military men at the meeting was likely intentional, and served as a means to force the Carter Administration's boycott agenda.⁸⁹

Senator Robert Byrd and other Congressional leaders advanced the pro-boycott campaign by focusing on letter writing and solicitation of signatures from Congress. The campaign also concentrated on identifying vulnerabilities, which Olympic officials came to view as a serious threat to their sovereignty, all in the name of national security. Congressman Byrd then garnered Congressional support to introduce legislation to eliminate, or at a minimum, affect, the NGO's tax exemption status and other benefits. The most profound portions of the campaign invoked the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and a potential amendment to the US Sports Act of 1978 to legally bar US athletes from participation in the Moscow Games.⁹⁰

The White House made an aggressive move to convince non-supporters by sending Ambassador to Afghanistan Robert Neumann, along with three former dissident Soviet athletes

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ National Security Council, 8 April 1980, Box 15, Folder 4, Brzezinski Mat'l: Brzezinski Office File Collection, JCL.

⁸⁹ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 1 April 1980.

⁹⁰ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 1 April 1980.

with considerable credibility, to the USOC headquarters in Colorado Springs to lobby the USOC NGOs on behalf of the US Government.⁹¹ Ultimately, the White House's efforts succeeded in convincing participants who "believed a letter from the White House to all sports-governing bodies urging them to vote for a boycott for reasons of national security" would be important in "tipping the balance toward a favorable outcome" in the USOC's upcoming April 1980 vote.⁹² In the months since January 1980, most Euro-Western governments, including France, Greece, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, and Iceland, found it convenient to duck behind the independent status of their National Olympic Committees. The US administration was therefore surprised when the Germans, Norwegians, Canadians, Japanese, and Turks succeeded in convincing their NGOs to support the US-led boycott of the Moscow Games. Meanwhile, the governments of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Australia, Italy, and Portugal learned, much to their dismay, that they lacked sufficient influence to persuade their NGO's to join the boycott. These pro-boycott European governments angrily condemned the decision of other European countries to attend the Moscow Games; this perceived discrepancy between the decisions of European nations signaled a weakness in political unity against communism. The humiliated pro-boycott nations quickly published a statement supporting the boycott in order "to put the best face on their failed effort."⁹³

In an attempt to cast boycott efforts in a flattering light, by June 1980 the Carter Administration claimed many of the boycott objectives had succeeded. Several other nations seemed to accept Soviet and IOC propaganda outlining how a US absence from the Moscow Olympics constituted a defeat for the United States. In response, the Carter Administration

⁹¹ National Security Council, 8 April 1980.

⁹² Letter from Secretary of State, 3 April 1980, Box 15, Folder 4, Plains File Collection, JCL.

⁹³ Discussion Paper for PRC Meeting, 18 April 1980, Box 42, Folder 2, Donated Historical Material – Mondale, Walter F. Collection, JCL.

stressed non-attendance at the Moscow Games among the four most important nations in the world--the United States, China, Germany, and Japan--as proof of Soviet weakness. Moreover, the Carter Administration underscored that non-attendance at the Games by these four powerful nations outweighed the significance of nations that *did* participate. The Carter Administration also branded the 1980 Games as wholly inferior concerning overall attendance and quality of athletes. As such, the few nations not in attendance at the 1980 Games allegedly far outweighed those many nations scheduled to compete.⁹⁴

The Carter Administration continued to twist its message by highlighting the fact that West Germany, Norway and Liechtenstein were pro-boycott nations in Europe, even though European non-participation at the 1980 Games was disappointing. The White House and the press touted the success of the pro-boycott movement in Asia, which included support from China, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Many of the most important Western allies then sent teams to Moscow, including the United Kingdom and Australia, which had strongly supported the Olympic boycott on a governmental level, but their National Olympic Committees overrode government authority.⁹⁵

Many athletic federations such as the British yachtsman, equestrians, and field hockey players supported the boycott, yet still attended the Moscow Games. Overall, the Carter Administration made the case that participation in the Moscow Olympics did not only “signify an attitude of indifference toward the continuing occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet troops,” but more importantly attempted to raise awareness about human rights atrocities within the Soviet Union and beyond during the Moscow Games.”⁹⁶ Carter’s comments made during a February 13, 1980 news conference spoke to his Administration’s unwillingness to watch

⁹⁴ Ibgignien Breeskingi to The President, 6 June 1980.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibgignien Breeskingi to the President, 6 June 1980.

passively as unconscionable events unfold in Afghanistan while participating in the Olympic Games in the nation responsible for such abuses. For Carter, any nation willing to send its athletes to participate in the Olympic Games in Moscow condoned the violation of another country's sovereignty and its ability to forcibly subjugate innocent people.⁹⁷

During the eighty-four years of modern Olympic history, the world has hardly ever been at peace. Therefore, many scholars contend it was common for other nations to label the host government of a major sporting event as “violating another country's sovereignty or the principle of human rights.” Why, then, did the Carter Administration suddenly focus on Moscow? James Riordan, an English footballer, sports historian, and broadcaster, maintained, “President Carter's sporting lunges had more to do with his presidential ratings and the backlash from Iran's challenge to American ‘virility’ than with the Soviet intrusion into one of its border states.” Moreover, in an election year, Riordan claimed the sequence was plain to see within the context of the Iran crisis, which included outrage over the United States hostage situation, domestic inflation, and the US Administration's boycott of the Moscow Olympics. With Afghanistan still within the Soviet sphere of influence for over a year, President Carter affirmed his commitment to boycott the Moscow Games. The President's stance on human rights abuses in Afghanistan stood in inexplicably sharp contrast to America's complicity toward Latin American dictatorships in Chile, Argentina, and El Salvador.⁹⁸

James Riordan argued that the hypocrisy of the pro-boycott leaders was breathtaking. Coming from the same countries that decided unanimously upon the Soviet Union as the site for the 1980 Olympics, the accusation that the Games displayed the prowess of the Eastern Bloc seemed absurd. Riordan claimed, “the cynical view held in Moscow was that the boycott attempt

⁹⁷ Tom Caraccioli and Jerry Caraccioli, *Boycott, Stolen Dreams of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games*, (USA: New Charter Press, 2007), 65.

⁹⁸ Riordan, “Olympics' Flame.”

by the Carter-Thatcher-Schmidt axis,” contained “more than a hint of sour grapes.” Riordan argues, “as long as the West was winning and could dictate sports policy, there was never a suggestion that the Olympics were too big, political, nationalistic, or unworthy of a particular country (including Nazi Germany in 1936).”⁹⁹ This allusion to the acceptance of the US for the location of the 1976 Olympics despite US occupation of Indochina at the time reinforced the hypocrisy of the US-led boycott. The political spat of the 1980 Olympics aside, every nation is guilty of using the Games as an opportunity to flaunt nationalism under the guise of friendly competition. Dr. D’Agati, a researcher on nationalism and the role of politics in sports, says, “[n]ationalistic displays in the Olympics are a deliberate attempt by the organizers to demonstrate specific facets of an identity. Therefore, the organizers are goal-seeking individuals, or groups of individuals, who construct the performance of identity...that suits their short-term and/or long-term interests.”¹⁰⁰ This inherent political nature of the Olympics is detrimental to the athletes as the supposed focus of the Games. For the athletes due to compete in the 1980 Moscow Games, the blame fell on Western media for running a largely devious and unscrupulous Anti-Soviet campaign and thus creating hysteria, depicting “the menacing specter of the abominable Russian snowman haunting the Hindu Kush and Khyber Pass.”¹⁰¹ Fulminating about Moscow, the media branded any athletes who wished to compete at the Moscow Games as traitors to the US.

From the perspective of the media and its consumers, the athletes had no choice but to boycott the games. If the athletes failed to boycott the games, they risked categorization as communist sympathizers. It added insult to injury, then, to have a fellow boxer and Olympian pressure them into compliance. The same Muhammad Ali who refused to support the White

⁹⁹ Riordan, “Olympics’ Flame.”

¹⁰⁰ D’Agati, *Nationalism on the World Stage*.

¹⁰¹ Riordan, “Olympics’ Flame.”

House during Viet-Nam War by declaring, “*I ain't got no quarrel with them Viet Cong,*”¹⁰² took a staunch religious and patriotic position in justifying his support of the boycott, baffling many athletes. The AAU Club’s Executive support for the boycott received further reinforcement from the AAU’s director, Harold Smith, who stated, “Our kids are going to do what Muhammad Ali wants them to do. It’s just that cut and dried. None of them would put themselves in a position to say Muhammad Ali is wrong.” Smith added, “What Ali says is right, and these kids know he’s right,” finishing his position stating, “whether individual athletes were missing or there, they go along with it,” because “if it weren’t for this program, none of them would have had a chance.”¹⁰³ Therefore, it is clear Muhammad Ali used his position as an internationally idolized hero not only to compel athletes to announce public support for the boycott, but subsequently to coerce athletes into supporting his own religious and political agenda.

Riordan’s conclusions underscored how few opportunities mankind had left to bring people together throughout the globe, in peace and concord, to compete, and to cooperate in honest friendship.¹⁰⁴ In reality, such idealism is a façade. The combination of the hypocrisy of the boycott and its ultimate failure, the damaging statements from Carter about the worthiness (or lack thereof) of the athletes who chose to attend the games, and the influences of media, peer pressure, and slander give rise to one conclusion alone: the aftermath of an Olympic boycott lies solely on the athletes.

¹⁰² Riordan, “Olympics’ Flame.”

¹⁰³ Gross, *The New York Times*.

¹⁰⁴ Riordan, “Olympics’ Flame.”

Chapter 5: The USOC Plays the Game and the Athletes Pay the Price

On January 3, 1980, the United States Olympic Committee sent a telegram to President Carter expressing concern about the Olympic movement unfolding in an area surrounded by NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) nations. The telegram requested him to prevent the abuse of the Olympic movement by international politics. Carter did not reply to the telegram. However, the day *after* the USOC sent its message, Carter appeared on a national telecast, announcing consideration of an Olympic boycott. In the telecast, Carter emphasized the idea of a boycott had emerged from within his administration as a potential and powerful response to Soviet aggression in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁵ *The New York Times* conducted a telephone interview with USOC President Robert J. Kane. During the interview, Kane remarked that he was a “little bit shocked” by the president’s announcement. Moreover, Kane wondered if the president completely “understood all the implications” associated with such a proposal. He specified “an Olympic boycott used as an ‘internal device’ could possibly destroy the Olympic movement.”

¹⁰⁵ *Digest of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the USOC Administrative Committee, 1-25-80.*

Despite Kane's position, he chose to leave the door open for potential compromise with the president. To this effect, Kane stated, "if the Persian Gulf became an endangered area and lives would be placed in jeopardy by going to Moscow, no one in the Olympic movement would be capable of staging the Games." He added that he "hated to see the games used as a ploy." Later, however, Kane sought to boycott the Moscow Games; his ability to play both sides of the boycott issue simultaneously highlighted his position as a savvy politician.¹⁰⁶

Ironically, the USOC's "unspoken" boycott position might have been revealed by Robert Surkein, Chairman of the Amateur Athletic Union Boxing Committee and Vice President of the International Boxing Federation, during an interview with a local reporter while attending the Georgia State Golden Gloves on February 6, 1980. He stated that he supported President Carter's proposed boycott should Russia fail to pull its troops out of Afghanistan by February 20, 1980. He asserted that he could not see the Russians agreeing to the withdrawal of their troops from Afghanistan before the White House's deadline. As such, he clearly reiterated the position of the AAU not to participate in the Moscow Games should Congress and the president pass such a mandate. This being said, he also affirmed the continuance of the US Boxing Olympic Trials despite the boycott. Trials took place to name a US Olympic boxing team, supposedly to assuage the emotions of amateur fighters who trained for years in hopes of making it to the Olympics.¹⁰⁷

Don Miller, the Olympic Committee's executive director, shared Kane's sentiment during the same interview when he, too, recognized the "gravity of the international situation," but he believed that a boycott by the United States and other Western nations would be "counterproductive." He added that with the possible exception of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the boycott would be "the first time that the [United States] Government has tried to interject itself in

¹⁰⁶ Neil Amdur, "Officials Decry Idea of Olympic Boycott," *The New York Times*, January 6, 1980, sec. L8.

¹⁰⁷ AP Atlanta, "Boxing Trials Still Set," *The Victoria Advocate*, February 6, 1980, Sports, sec. C3.

the Olympic movement.” He added, “. . .if the situation [with the Soviet Union] became grave with armed confrontation breaking out, everyone would have to reassess the position relative to the Olympic Games.” He continued by asserting that if the Olympic Games were to survive, “they must be apolitical and remain in the private sector.” He further reasoned that the long and serious commitment by athletes to prepare and participate in the Olympic Games should take precedence over political issues and that, “neither President Carter nor Congress had any constitutional authority to order an Olympic boycott.” His concern centered on the US State Department’s ability to deny visas and passports to US athletes being employed as a device to “keep an American team out of the Olympics.” Miller argued that although Congress and the President lacked constitutional authority to prevent US athletes from participating in the Moscow Games, the president could direct the State Department to withhold issuance of visas to US athletes who wished to travel to the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Miller and the USOC were deeply concerned about losing the requested 16 million dollars in congressionally appropriated funds to pay for new US Olympic training facilities.¹⁰⁸

On January 20, President Carter sent a telegram to USOC President Robert Kane informing him he could not support US participation in the summer Olympic Games in Moscow. Carter argued that such action called upon all nations to join in supporting a permanent site for both the summer and winter Olympic Games. Kane added that the US-led boycott might eventually be necessary “in order to help secure peace of the world at such a critical time in which the most important tasks of world leaders, public and private, was to deter aggression and prevent war.” He reasoned that Soviet aggression, including its invasion of Afghanistan, would destroy the international good will the Olympic movement sought to foster. He concluded by

¹⁰⁸ Amdur, *The New York Times*.

outlining the steps necessary to advance the White House boycott movement if other world powers were to prevent the expansion of an aggressive Soviet Union to its sovereign neighbors.¹⁰⁹

US Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher testified during a House Foreign Affairs Committee meeting on January 23, 1980. Christopher confirmed that the White House fully appreciated the efforts put forth by the International Olympic Committee; however, the national Olympic committee, and most importantly, the athletes themselves were “firmly opposed to participation by U.S. athletes in the Moscow Olympics if the Soviet Troops were not withdrawn from Afghanistan within the next month.” For this reason, the White House held firm to their intent to explore, with other governments, the power of their NGOs to form a like-minded boycott coalition to force Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. In addition, the White House entertained the possibility of forcing the IOC to postpone the Olympics in order to allow adequate time to organize alternative Games. Later, Lord Killanin chastised the White House, calling the president’s actions “ignorant of policies and procedures surrounding the IOC and Olympic Games.”¹¹⁰

Kane’s political aptitude became apparent during his testimony at a House Committee hearing when asked by New York Representative Benjamin S. Rosenthal if he would have participated in the 1936 Olympics. Kane responded, “American participation in the Berlin Olympics during the rise of Nazism had not constituted a Nazi victory, as had been suggested by those who had ‘rewritten history.’” He furthered that, in fact, Jesse Owens’s victory as a four-time gold medalist at the Berlin Games “translated into a propaganda victory for black athletes in

¹⁰⁹ Carter to Kane Letter, *The New York Times*, January 21, 1980, sec A.

¹¹⁰ Statement by Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, January 23, 1980.

the United States”; this destroyed the notion of Aryan supremacy in the 1936 Games. Owens’s participation and eventual victories further proved that minority athletes worldwide could successfully compete at future Olympic Games. Kane’s political brilliance continued to shine as he guaranteed legislators that the USOC would follow Congressional action by assuring the Committee that “with the national interest involved, the United States Olympic Committee would never be in a position other than in accord with the Congress of the United States.” Kane assured those in attendance that the USOC would abide by the wishes of Congress despite his personal dissatisfaction with the ideas behind the boycott. In fact, he stalled in hopes that the issue would be resolved before the Moscow Games. He concluded his testimony by stating that in two days, the IOC’s executive committee was scheduled to meet to consider President Carter’s request.¹¹¹

The USOC Administrative Committee Meeting in Colorado Springs on January 25, 1980 demonstrated the pervasive nature of politics in the planning of the Olympic Games. President Kane delivered a cleverly scripted agenda designed to solicit board members’ commitment, proving Kane worked in tandem with Miller in a classic “good guy/bad guy” routine. An assertive Kane stated that the USOC had a duty to protect the Olympic Games and the international alliance they represented. He communicated he would “deal through proper channels, but would not boycott the Games because such would be an act of hostility towards the Games themselves, and towards the IOC.” Kane further articulated that he believed the Carter Administration betrayed the USOC because the White House only brought the USOC into the discussion *after* Carter had manipulated the emotions of American citizens. His lecture continued, “...the USOC had been neutralized as a leader against the introduction of racial,

¹¹¹ Martin Tolchin, “House Unit Backs Carter’s Call for Olympic Boycott,” *The New York Times*, January 23, 1980. Sec. A.

religious, and political considerations into the Olympic Games because the US government had never previously injected itself into the conduct of USOC affairs.” Kane sensed that the USOC could not comply with President Carter’s urgings for the USOC and “other nations to support a shifting of the Games, cancelling the Games, or remaining ‘out’ of the Games due to the IOC mandate,” which required NOCs to remain absent from governmental affairs.¹¹²

Subsequently, Miller explained, “if President Carter only issued an appeal, it would be incumbent on the USOC to enter the Olympic Games and let the athletes make their own decisions whether or not to participate.” Such action then would be in line with the USOC Constitution that only allowed handpicked US athletes to serve on the USOC House of Delegates and vote for a boycott. Perhaps in an effort to ease tensions, Miller assured, “nobody in the USOC had implied that the USOC was going to defy the President of the United States.” In response, hardliner Kane mentioned, “. . .if the President of the United States wanted the athletes to stay home, he must then direct them to do so in the national interest of their country.”¹¹³ To the Committee, Miller voiced they had the option to wait until May 24, 1980 to reach a firm decision. Kane told members of the USOC that any definitive action before the May deadline would deny USOC flexibility and diminish their ability to lobby on behalf of the organization’s financial interests.

To entice USOC members and athletes to vote in favor of holding alternate games, Miller reported that President Carter had appropriated 4 million dollars from his supplementary budget to Congress for alternate Games. Clearly, the White House tried to win favor with the USOC by offering financial incentives in exchange for its support in an Olympic boycott. Once again, Kane demonstrated his political acumen when he interjected during the meeting that any action

¹¹² Digest of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the USOC Administrative Committee, 1-25-80.

¹¹³ Ibid.

regarding the future of the Games must also consider time constraints and sensitive political circumstances. It is clear that Kane did not want to reveal all possible options regarding the boycott at the meeting. Withholding certain key pieces of information allowed him time to allay a discussion of USOC financial concerns. It is reasonable to envision a public sparring match led by Kane and Miller during the USOC Executive Committee against one representative, then another, in order to gauge Committee member willingness to support a boycott.¹¹⁴

Kane closed the discussion with fear-laden remarks that a US boycott of the Moscow Games could unintentionally damage or compromise the entire modern Olympic movement. He added that the State Department could legally revoke federal funding to prohibit any cultural exchange, including the prohibition of any private exchanges between the USOC and athletic teams who planned to attend the Moscow Games. At the conclusion of the meeting, USOC members reached a consensus. If the President did not “direct” the USOC otherwise, the USOC would send a team to the Moscow Games, provided the lives of the athletes would not be in danger. The pressure exerted by the US State Department on the USOC to support the Carter Administration’s boycott agenda was simply monetary blackmail to force compliance.¹¹⁵

Surkein’s previous statement to the AP in February 1980 supports the claim made by Bernard Taylor, A.A.U. boxing delegate, who believed “they had it [their minds] made up three or four years before we even got there.” As a voting member of the United States Olympic Committee House of Delegates, Taylor and an alternate ultimately voted on April 12, 1980 to support the boycott. During our interview, Taylor conveyed that in hindsight, he never believed the White House provided adequate reasons for a boycott. He continued, “. . .the whole thing was nothing more than a power struggle between the governments who were doing nothing more than

¹¹⁴ Digest of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the USOC Administrative Committee, 1-25-80.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

going nose to nose with each other.”¹¹⁶ Further support for this idea came from Taylor’s desperate support for a final meeting in late March held in the East Room of the White House. Before the president’s arrival at the White House, USOC executives noted the need to send a clear message to athletes in order to win support for Carter’s foreign policy agenda. Senior White House officials privately urged the President to accomplish all maneuvering soon in order to execute the administration’s Olympic boycott. The potential US Olympians made their boycott position clear when they all refused to stand or applaud, as is customary, when the President of the United States enters the room. In response, President Carter spoke, “I can’t say at this moment what other nations will not go to the Summer Olympics in Moscow. Ours will not go. I say that without any equivocation; the decision has been made, it’s not a pleasant time for me. You occupy a special place in American life.”¹¹⁷

On the morning of the historic USOC House of Delegates’ vote, USOC President Robert Kane made a misleading public statement from his Lake Placid home. He declared that “...since the boycott issue was first broached on January 4, Miller always clarified the USOC position...that the USOC would not participate if the President of the United States said it affected national security.” He added, “...the question before the delegates was whether we participate in the Moscow Games. We have rejected from the start all references to the word ‘boycott.’ And ‘non-participation’ would mean that we would notify the proper parties that we would not participate.” Because Carter made clear that participation in the Games would affect

¹¹⁶ Bernard Taylor Interview with the author, telephone interview, August 23, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Bigelow, *Global Research News*.

national security, Kane and the USOC could not condone it; Kane, however, simply refused to use the term “boycott” so that he did not lose support from either side.¹¹⁸

On the afternoon of April 12, 1980, the White House sent Vice President Mondale along with William E. Simon, USOC Treasurer, and former Secretary of the Treasury, to make one final plea directly to the delegates to support President Carter’s boycott. Later that evening, delegates cast their final ballots. Mondale opened the session by thanking the USOC and the “[Olympic] leaders for stating that the Committee would be guided by the President’s decision on the best interests of the nation.” He stressed the high stakes, including the future security of the civilized world. He emphasized that the US must use every peaceful means available to preserve world peace. He concluded by declaring their vote a “test of our will, our confidence, our values, and our power to keep the peace through nonviolent means.” He also pointed out that their decision stood as “a referendum on freedom.”¹¹⁹ Mondale created a façade behind which he hid in order to employ pressure in the form of guilt upon the delegates to accept the White House’s boycott. He pleaded that they not break America’s noble tradition of keeping leaders of tyrannical countries in check. He appealed to the pathos of the delegates, depicting the weight of their decision as intimately tied to American people’s hearts. Mondale told the delegates they should know prior to casting their votes that the American people deeply respected the sacrifice asked of them, effectively pinning the delegates into a stance they could not in good conscience defy—acceptance of the boycott.

Simon then pursued a hard patriotic stance, declaring, “it was somewhat incredulous that a group of mature persons considered to be among the most patriotic of Americans, our

¹¹⁸ Digest of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the USOC Administrative Committee, 12-13 April 1980, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Olympians, could seriously discuss defying the President of the United States on a national security issue.” Simon continued to play on Cold War rhetoric by expressing to those in attendance that failure to support the boycott stood as an act of defiance against the highest office in the land. In such a scenario, Simon predicted Russian leadership would pounce on any opportunity to undermine the power of the US presidency and thereby weaken the position of the US on the world stage. He maintained that support for the boycott would show Russia, that its people, and its leaders that the USOC was “capable of moral courage.”¹²⁰ Simon stressed to those in attendance that they had an opportunity to vote with an eye toward the long-term “preservation of all the things held dear,” as opposed to acting on short-term, counterproductive emotionalism. He prayed, “for the sake of future generations of Olympic athletes that we would make this decision wisely, and make it well.”¹²¹

Filled with half-truths, Kane’s comments in April during the USOC Executive Board meeting exposed his lies. Had the House of Delegates’ representatives known of Kane’s comments before casting their votes in support of or opposition to of the boycott, circumstances may have ended differently. Regardless of Kane’s carefully orchestrated political flip-flopping, the cherry-picking of the delegates further ensured a vote in favor of the boycott. For example, the boxing delegate, David Armstrong, was a member of Muhammad Ali’s boxing club; his subsequent ties to the politics behind the boycott prevented him from serving as an unbiased delegate.¹²² The House of Delegates, consisting of representatives from thirty-three national sports federations, twelve multi-sport organizations, the USOC State chairman, and officials of the USOC, all cast their votes on the evening of April 12, 1980. The result was astounding; with

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ C. Robert Paul, “Historic decision at Colorado Springs means USA will not participate at Moscow,” *The Olympian*, May/June 1980: 4-7.

¹²² Gross, *The New York Times*.

1,704 “yes” votes, 697 ‘no’ votes, and two abstentions. The delegates in favor of boycotting the XXII Olympiad Games won.¹²³ The underhanded private and public jockeying for votes clearly paid off.¹²⁴

Drawing his patriotism into question, a vocal opposition capitalized on the political nature of the boycott to undermine Miller. In front of the US Subcommittees on State, Justice, Commerce, the Judiciary Committee on Appropriations, the US Senate, and the USOC, Miller skillfully maintained that the United States’ participation in the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow was a political tactic rather than a demonstration of patriotism. Miller stated it was necessary to delay his response to the US Subcommittee until after the annual House of Delegates meeting in order to comply with the USOC constitution. His rationale drew attention to the USOC Constitution, in turn placing sole responsibility for non-participation in the Games on the House of Delegates while diverting attention away from USOC executives. Miller concluded by mentioning, “The USOC understood that the House of Delegates voted to participate in the Games of the XXII Olympiad, and it would be difficult to expect any financial support from the Congress in favor of participation.” Miller implied the USOC knew if it did not accept the President’s agenda, all government funding of the USOC would end.¹²⁵

It is arguable the White House vote eventually tipped when, White House Press Secretary Jody Powell conveyed, to the President, on the day of the USOC boycott vote, that “the strong vote of the United States Olympic Committee House of Delegates not to send a United States team to the Moscow Olympics in light of his advice that sending a team would be contrary to our

¹²³ Digest of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the USOC Administrative Committee, 12-13 April 1980.

¹²⁴ Plains File, JCL, Box 15/Folder Olympics-Boycott, 4/80-6/80.

¹²⁵ F. Don Miller letter to Senator Hollings, dated April 15, 1980.

national interest.”¹²⁶ According to Powell, the USOC clearly stated no US athletes would participate in the Moscow games. If US athletes did participate, they were “confident that other leading nations of the free world would join in this demonstration that no nation is entitled to serve as host for an Olympic festival of peace while it persists in invading and subjugating another nation.” Powell added the President’s advice would neither change by May 20 or any time thereafter. Powell reminded Vice President Mondale and President Carter of their commitment to strengthen the USOC’s financial stance in return for boycott support, including giving appropriate honor and recognition to the American athletes who sacrificed their opportunity in Moscow.¹²⁷

President Kane, with the assistance of Col. Miller and Treasurer Simon, briefly reviewed the potential financial impact if the USOC failed to support the boycott; they worried about the effect such a decision could have on fundraising and USOC activities. USOC Treasurer Simon reported that because of the uncertainty surrounding the boycott, contributions and other revenues ran well behind projections. He underscored, though, that expenditures were only approximates based on the budget adopted in November. Hence, the USOC faced a future fraught with a declining income and an operating deficit between 5.5 and 6 million dollars for the calendar year. In turn, the USOC needed to seriously consider closing the winter training facility in Squaw Valley along with its administrative offices in New York City.¹²⁸

Subsequently, multiple conversations with the Carter Administration transpired in which Kane emphasized that the USOC served as the coordinating body for amateur sports in the United States. He underscored that the USOC also provided “financial support to two-thirds of U.S. amateur sports governing bodies to assist them in enhancing the development of the

¹²⁶ Digest of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the USOC Administrative Committee, 12-13 April 1980.

¹²⁷ White House Press Secretary Statement, Jody Powell, 12 April 1980.

¹²⁸ President Kane letter to President Carter, 19 April 1980.

grassroots-level of amateur sports in the United States.” Kane said, “The United States Olympic Committee operates national training centers, sports medicine programs, and annually sponsors a National Sports Festival in which thousands of our finest amateur athletes participate.” Kane wrote that although supporting the President was enormously disappointing to the athletes who trained vigorously for this important quadrennial event, the athletes did so in the interest of the nation’s security. He indicated that the nation should publically recognize and honor the athletes and their sacrifices.¹²⁹

In response, President Carter drafted a letter indicating his support for the USOC program, ensuring that the intent of the US Administration was to pursue a program consisting of both private and government funds. In securing Carter’s aid, Kane’s political mastery came full circle. In what seemed to everyone but Kane a surprising twist of fate, the USOC’s prayers for new training facilities were partially answered; however, their prayers were answered by a local, not national, source, and occurred on the same day of the House of Delegates’ vote to support the boycott. Simon noted the “‘in-kind’ contributions had exceeded projections” because a parcel of land valued at 1.8 million dollars was transferred to the USOC at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs by the Colorado Spring Industrial Foundation (CSIF). It is worth noting the gifted parcel of land just so happened to be part of a 1974 decommissioned Ent Air Force base, gifted to the Colorado Spring Industrial Foundation in 1976. The validity of the transfer of land and the fact that the handover transpired during the most critical timeframe in boycott negotiations between the White House and the USOC calls into question what actually transpired between the Carter Administration, the USOC, and the CSIF before the vote.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ President Kane letter to President Carter, 19 April 1980.

¹³⁰ Digest of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the USOC Administrative Committee, 12-13 April 1980.

On April 22, 1980, Lord Killanin, President of the International Olympic Committee, received a telegram from President Carter finalizing the United States' opposition to sending athletes to Moscow. The telegram explained the President's Administration and USOC reached their decision based "solely on the adverse impact of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on the standards of international law, and on the preservation of human rights, and on the national security of the United States and many other free-world nations."¹³¹ Carter made clear that the United States intended to financially support both the International and National Olympic Committees in exchange for their support of the US-led boycott.

Carter also acknowledged his preference that private bodies, not governments, administer national and international amateur sports. Such sentiments seemed strange considering the use of the games to apply political pressure and facilitate White House backdoor maneuvering to gain support for the boycott. Killanin then declared, "the U.S.' position does not detract in any way from our belief in the value of the Olympic movement." Carter closed the telegram by stating that the U.S. would "welcome the IOC and athletes from all eligible Olympic nations to the Los Angeles," as it did at the Lake Placid Games.¹³² In contrast, during the IOC meeting on April 2, 1980 in Lausanne, many International Olympic Federations openly criticized the vote in favor of the US boycott. The IOC stated that it "energetically protested" any pressure outside governments exercised on global National Olympic Committees to support a boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. The IOC concluded that it was the "duty of the affiliated national federations to take all legitimate actions in their power within their National Olympic Committees to see that the competitors whom they represent should have the opportunity to

¹³¹ Jimmy Carter, Meeting of the International Olympic Federations in Lausanne, Press Release, Lausanne, 22 April 1980.

¹³² Ibid.

compete in the forthcoming and in future Olympic Games.”¹³³ At the Lake Placid declaration, the IOC affirmed its position that boycotting a sporting event constituted an inappropriate means to obtain a political advantage over the USSR. The competing sportsmen and sportswomen fell victim, then, to the political machinations of the boycott.

The honoring of US Olympic athletes took place in Washington, D. C. in July 1980. Mike Moran, the chief spokesman for the US Olympic Committee, described the United States Olympic team as a diverse group of athletes from every corner of the country who gathered “to be honored by the nation and the United States Olympic Committee for what it had accomplished.” The USOC Olympic Honors Program allowed some of the 500 athletes and their families, coaches, and managers a way to move beyond the reality of the 1980 boycott. Moran declared the creation of the USOC Olympic Honors Program to honor the athletes, demonstrating US awareness, and appreciation of their sacrifices. At the ceremony in D.C., athletes had fun, laughed, “got to know each other, cried a river of tears, finished careers, started new ones, and then returned to their homes knowing that they were indeed Olympians in the finest sense.” Furthermore, he argued, never before had an Olympic Team been assembled in one spot with so much fanfare and celebration, in turn allowing for the assertion, “the 1980 Olympic Team will go down in history as the Olympic Team that didn’t go, and its sacrifice at the call of the Congress and the President made them heroes, one and all.”¹³⁴

The most somber moment during the five-day event came on the morning of July 30 shortly before the medal ceremony on the West steps of the Capitol, when President Jimmy Carter arrived to the melody of “Hail to the Chief.” When Carter told those in attendance, “If our Olympic Team had been in Moscow these past days, with all the pageantry and spectacle, it will

¹³³ Lausanne, 22 April 1980, (Boycott), Communique De Presse, Press Release.

¹³⁴ Moran, *The Olympian*.

have been impossible for us to credibly maintain our continuing effort to seek freedom in Afghanistan.” Carter also noted, “No matter what else we had done, no matter what other steps we had taken, our participation would have sent an unmistakable message to the Soviet government, to the Soviet people and the people all of the world.” The message conveyed, “the U.S. may not like the idea of aggression, but when it comes down to it we are willing to join the parade as if nothing had happened.” Carter concluded that by the end of the gala, it was obvious the athletes knew the curtain had come down on their performance. For many of them, a life-long dream ended before it began. For others, talk circulated of the 1984 Olympics and the Olympic Summer Games in Los Angeles; the athletes were concerned with preparation and honing their skills before wearing “the Red, White and Blue on Opening Day in the L.A. Memorial Coliseum.”¹³⁵

Dissatisfaction surrounding the event was evident in a letter to the editor of *The New York Times*, condemning the use of the athlete’s “Honor Program” as a propaganda campaign. James Hanrahan stated it “appeared that Congress, with great generosity,” spent \$50,000 to strike gold-plated medals to present to the athletes.¹³⁶ A *New York Times* article also stated that Congress and the president behaved unethically “after using extortion and intimidation to force the teams to stay home.” Hanrahan continued to argue that the government hoped to appease its guilt by minting medals, which, at that price, would hardly be more than costume jewelry. Thoughtful Congressional representatives added insult to injury by stating that the “United States Olympic Committee, assured of its corporate donations, collecting the admissions at the Olympic

¹³⁵ Moran, *The Olympian*.

¹³⁶ James F. Hanrahan, “Chance of Another Boycott,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 1980. Sec. Opinion.

trials, spared the expense of sending a team to Moscow or striking the medals, [and] was certain to hail the gesture in another show of communal courage.”¹³⁷

In the end, President Carter grinned, secure in the knowledge that he placated those in favor of a boycott; more importantly, he struck a presumptive, non-violent blow against the USSR. In retrospect, the author of *The New York Times* editorial tapped into US citizens’ pervasive feeling about the US government’s incompetence, stating that Carter added “...to a long list of incompetent programs and bungled opportunities...”¹³⁸ Moran did note, however, that no American Olympic Team had ever been so honored by the nation. Moran simply failed to appreciate the personal and psychological damage to US athletes caused by Carter’s boycott, and the dissatisfaction felt by several members of the US Olympic boxing team. Many of the boxers felt they had been used as political pawns. In the end, Richie, Jackie, Collins, and Taylor left Washington feeling not only let down by their government, but specifically disregarded by their own president. It was no surprise, then, when Carter lost the 1980 presidential election by a landslide. Carter received only 49 electoral votes compared to Ronald Reagan’s 489 electoral votes.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Real Clear Politics, 1980 Electoral College:

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/1980/president/1980_elections_electoral_college_map.html.

Conclusion – They Already Had Their Minds Made Up

The countries that boycotted the Moscow Games did hold Alternate Games at various locations across the globe. The Liberty Bell Track and Field Classic in Philadelphia held its competition on July 16-17, 1980 and allowed more than 400 athletes from thirty pro-boycott countries the chance to display their individual talents.¹⁴⁰ Nairobi, Kenya hosted the post-Olympic boxing tournament from September 8-14, 1980; the Carter White House praised the post-Olympic Boxing Tournament in Kenya as one of the most widely attended post-Olympic sports projects in the history of Nairobi. Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi opened the tournament with a speech reaffirming Kenya's decision to boycott the Moscow Games and praising the US for helping Kenya to organize the event.¹⁴¹ Some 120 boxers from twenty-five countries participated, making the Kenyan competition larger than the boxing event in Moscow¹⁴² However, none of the 1980 US Olympic boxing team participated in the event.¹⁴³ Craig Virgin, the world record-holder in the 10,000 meters in 1980, still holds the same boycott resentment as Richie Sandoval. Virgin conveyed, "I may forgive, but I'll never forget." To him, "it was just sad, because running was booming, and if I could have brought home a medal that

¹⁴⁰ Craig Nelson, ...AND MEANWHILE IN PHILADELPHIA, *Sports Illustrated*, July 28, 1980, 18-19.

¹⁴¹ National Security Council, 8 September 1980, Box 15, Folder 9, Plains File, JCL.

¹⁴² Edmund Muskie, Secretary of State to The President, September 11, 1980.

¹⁴³ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

year I would have been on a par with the top professional athletes in the country at the time.”¹⁴⁴ Peter Ueberroth, one of the leading advisors for Carter’s boycott and President of the LA Games organization committee in 1981 through 1984, said, “boycotts do one thing very well and only one thing: they punish athletes.”¹⁴⁵

Anthony Austin of *The New York Times* noted the absence of the US, West German, Japanese, and other teams as painfully obvious in the opening procession of the 1980 Games. Nonetheless, the quality of the competition was high. Athletes competing at the Moscow Games broke thirty-six world records. Austin argued that the White House misplaced their hope if officials expected the boycott to reduce the Moscow games to a second-class sporting event. He added that the games ended on a colorful note even with the sparse attendance of countries at the closing ceremony.¹⁴⁶

Although the Moscow Games lacked the overall glamor of previous Olympic Games, the 1980 Games were a success for the USSR on many levels. In just a five-year period, the Soviets built more than ninety Olympic facilities, including the Olimpiysky Sports Centre, a rowing canal, and a velodrome in Krylatskoye, as well as the Sheremetyevo-2 airport terminal, the Cosmos hotel, the Olympic village, and a new building at the Ostankino TV center.¹⁴⁷ To house the RI Novosti news agency, the USSR constructed a new Olympic press center. The newly constructed Izmailovo hotel complex made it into the Guinness Book of Records as Europe’s largest hotel, capable of housing 10,000 guests. Originally, the Soviets contracted to use American technology to broadcast the Games. Given the breakdown in relations between the US

¹⁴⁴ Ronald Smothers, “Olympics; Bitterness Lingering Over Carter’s Boycott,” *The New York Times*, July 19, 1996, sec. K.

¹⁴⁵ Harvey Araton, “Boycott Tarnishes Gold Medal Dreams,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 2008, sec. D1.

¹⁴⁶ Anthony Austin, “Games End on Colorful Note,” *The New York Times*, August 4, 1980, C1 & 4.

¹⁴⁷ Vasily Andreyev, “Moscow-80: The model Olympic Games,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, November 27, 2013. Sec. Arts & Living, 1-2.

and the Soviets, though, the USSR needed to find alternative technologies to ensure success of the broadcasts. To resolve the issue, the Soviet Government built manufacturing facilities to produce all necessary technical equipment for its television studios. In doing so, their efforts won “high marks from their foreign colleagues” who experienced the broadcast of the Games abroad.¹⁴⁸

Richie still felt robbed when he was denied the opportunity to represent the USA at the Moscow Games. He felt let down by the president’s decision, adding, “he doesn’t want get into it anymore” when asked about that day. In the end, Richie walked away from the entire boycott experience feeling completely disheartened. He was still angry in 2013 when I interviewed him in July. He regretted that he and others waited too long to turn professional. Richie emphasized that “staying too long in the amateurs is going to take a lot out of you;” as elite amateur boxers, body and weight maintenance took “too much out of your body.”¹⁴⁹ The grueling training brought difficulties in transitioning a young man’s body into that of a mature athlete. Richie argued daily dieting and workout regimens took a considerable toll on his body, as well as those of other USA Olympians, in turn shortening their overall professional careers.

The boycott hurt Richie and created what he called the “forgotten class.” In ways not then tangible to a young athlete in the prime of his life, Richie now reflects on his prime years as an athlete with sadness and anger. The ESPN article *A Class Left Behind* reported that the four-year wait leading up to the 1980 Olympics robbed many athletes of a chance to turn professional and secure potentially lucrative paydays. Several named to the USA 1980 Olympic boxing team “fought an awful lot of amateur bouts.” In turn, successive amateur fights probably contributed to burnout. USA Boxing National chairman Robert “Bob” J. Surkein convinced several boxers to

¹⁴⁸ Andreyev, “Moscow-80: The model Olympic Games.”

¹⁴⁹ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

continue their careers as amateurs. Surkein expressed to each athlete that they were all talented enough to qualify for the 1980 Olympic team. In the end, Surkein was right; each boxer did win the right to represent the USA in the Olympics. In the long-run each boxer may have been better served if they had gone professional instead of waiting for an opportunity to earn a gold medal at the Moscow Games. To date, Richie and Jackie feel a level of “disappointment every time the Olympics approach” because they know that each one of them had a chance at winning Olympic gold.¹⁵⁰

Runner Craig Virgin, the world record-holder in the 10,000 meters in 1980, feels this same resentment. Virgin conveyed, “I may forgive, but I’ll never forget.” To him, “it was just sad, because running was booming, and if I could have brought home a medal that year I would have been on a par with the top professional athletes in the country at the time.”¹⁵¹ Peter Ueberroth, one the leading advisors for Carter’s boycott and President of the LA Games organizing committee in 1981-84, said, “boycotts do one thing very well and only one thing: they punish athletes.”¹⁵²

Ultimately, backdoor collaborative maneuvering between the White House and the Executive Board of the US Olympic Committee meant the 1980 Olympians never stood a chance to compete in the Moscow Games. The internal briefing memorandum written by a staff member to the Secretary of State on March 8, 1980 provides evidence that “the Executive Board of the Committee will convene on March 15th to draft a resolution supporting the President’s position on non-participation in Moscow.” More shockingly, the memorandum proves, “[t]his resolution

¹⁵⁰ Robert Cassidy, “A class left behind”, August 9, 2008.

<http://www.espn.com/sports/boxing/news/story?id=3526059>, January 4, 2014.

¹⁵¹ Ronald Smothers, “Olympics; Bitterness Lingering Over Carter’s Boycott,” *The New York Times*, July 19, 1996, sec. K.

¹⁵² Araton, *The New York Times*.

will be confirmed by the USOC at its scheduled House of Delegates meeting in mid-April.¹⁵³

The USOC already agreed to a delay, at least until May, sending a letter to Moscow to confirm that the US team would not compete in the Summer Games. This memorandum proves that the White House and the USOC had already secretly agreed upon the script, language, and timing prior to the April 12, 1980 vote. It is clear, then, that Bernard Taylor was correct; “They already had their minds made up before any vote.”

Richie’s worst financial fears came to fruition when, while wearing the same trunks his mother made for him in the amateurs, he grossed just four-hundred dollars for his first fight held at the Silver Slipper in Las Vegas in the fall of 1980.¹⁵⁴ After the fight, he remembered thinking, “I’m an Olympian who would have better money shining someone’s shoes.”¹⁵⁵ Fortunately for Richie, a representative from Top Rank, a promotion company for fighters, saw him fight shortly after turning professional and signed him to a contract “making \$1,000 a fight, right off the top.” Additionally, his promoters paid increases of \$2,500 per fight the second year, and \$3,500 to \$4,000 the third year as long as he remained unbeaten. He remembered feeling amazed and somewhat surprised that the Top Rank representative offered him such a deal. Moreover, Richie was astonished his promoter “didn’t need me; he could have signed somebody else.” As it turned out, the relationship between Richie and Bob Arum, President of Top Rank Boxing, grew throughout his career. Richie felt loyal to Mr. Arum, stating, “being disciplined and devoted to him, I stuck around knowing full well that Don King and these other guys wanted me.” Richie said, “Top Rank got me from the beginning, and they’re willing to hang onto me, and as long as they’re pushing me the right way, I’m standing still.” Unfortunately, though, Richie’s last bout

¹⁵³ Edmund Muskie, Secretary of State to The President, 3 March 1980.

¹⁵⁴ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

¹⁵⁵ Cassidy, “A class left behind.”

tested their relationship. On March 3, 1986, Richie suffered a career-ending brain injury that left him in a coma for several days. He remembers waking shortly after the match to hear Mr. Arum tell him, “as long as he never fights again, he’ll always have a job with Top Rank.” Fortunately, Richie took Arum’s advice and retired from boxing later that year. He still serves as a trainer for Top Rank Boxing in Los Angeles.¹⁵⁶

Jackie also turned professional in the fall of 1980 with little fanfare. Although his longtime coach Rayford Collins guided Jackie during his first few professional bouts, Jackie’s professional boxing career officially began at a dinner. At this meeting, Jackie joined the US Olympic Committee President, Bob Surkein, and Bob Arum, Top Rank Boxing CEO, to negotiate the terms of his professional contract. One could dismiss such a meeting as a casual introduction between the powerhouses of amateur and professional boxing. Further analysis, however, begs the question as to why the President of the US Olympic Committee wanted to arrange and attend such a meeting in the first place.¹⁵⁷

Although Jackie wanted to go with a higher-paying contract offered by Arum, he followed the advice of Coach Rayford and signed with Emanuel Steward from Detroit’s Kronk Boxing in March 1981.¹⁵⁸ The terms of the contract guaranteed Jackie four fights per year over a four-year period, situating him at a 12-0 record before he suffered his first loss by judge’s scorecard decision.¹⁵⁹ As a true professional, though, Jackie quickly rebounded, winning fifteen consecutive fights that propelled him to rank as the number one Bantamweight contender in the world.¹⁶⁰ Victory aside, Jackie had to wait ten months before Steward allowed him to compete

¹⁵⁶ Personal interview with Richie Sandoval.

¹⁵⁷ Personal interview with Jackie and Obie Beard.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ *Unknown: The Jackie Beard Story*. Directed by William Fain.

¹⁶⁰ Personal interview with Jackie and Obie Beard.

again. By then, Jackie believed that his relationship with Steward had soured. One reason for the fissure between Jackie and Steward emerged when Steward focused on bigger-named Champions like Thomas Hearns and Hilmer Kenty.

Consequently, Jackie said his contract decision fostered contention with Collins. The two argued; eventually their friendship ended. A poorly-advised Jackie made the decision to manage and promote his own career, signing up to fight his old Kronk stable mate after only two fights as a self-promoter. The fight ended with a loss by split decision. Those who knew Jackie felt that this loss in particular marked the moment Jackie lost his love for the sport; Obie “saw the spark leave Jackie’s eyes when he talked about his life-long passion.”¹⁶¹

Three years later, an unwise, self-trained, and self-managed Jackie signed for a chance at his first title against Brian Mitchell, reigning champion, in July 1989, Ezio Scida Stadium, Crotona, Calabria, Italy. According to the scorecards from the title fight, he was behind at the beginning of the eighth round. However, Jackie made a comeback, landing blow after blow on his opponent. He opened a large gash over his opponent’s right eye; midway through the eighth round, the referee paused the fight to consult with the ringside physician. The physician determined that the opponent was not fit to continue and the referee halted the contest. At the time, official rules called for awarding the championship to the challenger if the champion was unable to continue. The officials declared the fight a “no contest,” due to a head-butt, which had not been declared by the referee. Those at ringside and watching the fight from around the world, including Collins, believed he would have won the fight if Jackie had proper management to argue on his behalf. Jackie’s loss demonstrates that circumstances such as a “no contest” call are

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

why all fighters should have reputable legal and managerial representation. Without access to representation, the athlete cannot negotiate or pursue legal action. Eventually, Jackie squared the score in a title fight rematch in March 1990 at the Palazzetto dello Sport, Grosseto, Toscana, Italy, but Jackie lost by the judges' unanimous decision.¹⁶²

After my own eleven years of boxing, I have learned the nature of blood sports like boxing is to prevent and absorb the opponent's blows while simultaneously and strategically delivering more damaging hits in order to emerge victorious. The breaking point in many blood sports can lead to permanent injury or death. It is impossible to tell where exactly this breaking point is. Therefore, coaches and ring officials hold the responsibility to always look out for the health and protection of the athletes. Obie Beard, Jackie's youngest brother, shared an excellent point during our interview that "normal" spectators only view a boxing match for a set four, six, or twelve rounds. "Therefore," Obie argued, "the actual matches are in fact much less damaging to the fighter than the training gym sparring sessions that are required to ensure every fighter perfects conditioning and positioning, in order to ensure he receives the maximum benefit from delivering that perfect punch to his opponent."¹⁶³ If this is the case, then nothing could be more disheartening than meeting one of your childhood idols, some thirty years later, only to realize he had not fared any better than the other boxers who came before him.

Jackie walked with a gait and struggled to formulate responses to my questions throughout our interview. He often turned to his younger brother Obie to answer questions during the conversation. When I asked him how he felt about his career, he consistently responded, "everything that happened to me was God's plan for me."¹⁶⁴ When I asked him to

¹⁶² *Unknown: The Jackie Beard Story*. Directed by William Fain.

¹⁶³ Personal interview with Jackie and Obie Beard.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

clarify, he added, “everything that’s happened was meant to happen, but we wait to see what the end is going to be.”¹⁶⁵ Jackie likely reasoned that it “must be God’s will,” after modern medicine and technology failed to identify any specific abnormalities in his brain despite several MRI and CT scans. Unfortunately for Jackie, a physician with the Olympic training center conceded that his slurred speech and struggle to find the right words were the results of repeated “head trauma.” People close to Jackie believe his neurological disorder was a direct result of long-term exposure to blows to the head during boxing matches and training. His younger brother Obie, a former fighter himself, said Jackie “just stuck around too long,” facing the consequence of those taxing training sessions and in turn taking a greater toll on his body. Boxers are notorious for wanting just one more fight, one more paycheck, and one more taste of glory.¹⁶⁶ The pain and insult of being robbed of the ultimate glory, the chance at an Olympic medal, only added to this desperation to keep fighting far beyond the usual stopping point.

I reached out to both Jackie and Richie on the fourth day of the 2016 Olympic Games. I sent a simple text message asking each athlete, “please tell me what you are feeling today as you watch the Brazil Games.” Richie was the first to respond, “Well you can’t hide disappointment. But as time goes, so does the thought, move on I guess.” He followed up with a phone call the next day just to chat about life, boxing, and the loss he still feels for not being able to represent his country in the 1980 Olympic Games and have a shot at winning Olympic glory. Obie responded for Jackie in a message stating, “Jackie didn’t care to watch them,” to which I replied, “it breaks my heart that our brother still feels the pain from 1980.” The most gut-wrenching part of Jackie’s, Richie’s, and Collins’s stories is the fact that each of these former selected US Olympians still feels the pain of having their moment in time stolen away. Every four years, with

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ *Unknown: The Jackie Beard Story*. Directed by William Fain.

the coming of the Olympic Games, they are reminded that their glory was taken away at the hands of their own government, their own president, and their own Olympic agencies.

Ultimately, the athletes were used, reduced from the mighty stature of Olympians to insignificant pawns in a scheme of nationalistic display, forced to bear witness to the subsequent destruction of the romantic idealism surrounding the modern Olympic movement.¹⁶⁷

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¹⁶⁷ Telephone interview with Richie Sandoval.

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