

Should U.S. Boycott Olympics?; NO -- "The games should be kept free of politics as much as possible"

Interview With Robert J. Kane; President of the U.S. Olympic Committee

(U.S. News & World Report U.S. News & World Report, January 21, 1980)

Q. Mr. Kane, why do you believe it would be a mistake for the U.S. to boycott the Olympic Games?

A. I don't favor the concept of a boycott at all in the Olympic Games. The Olympic Games should be kept free of politics as much as possible, and it's up to those within the movement to protect it from politics. A boycott is an internal device which must be necessarily instituted by the members themselves.

And I don't think it would be conducive to the continuance of the games if boycotts became common practice. There are always differences between nations, and if there were a boycott every time this happened, there would never be Olympic Games.

Q. Do you think that a boycott would have any effect on the Russians' international behavior if it were attempted?

A. I doubt it very much. It would seem to be a minimal kind of response, and I think that there are other means that could be far more discouraging to the Soviets and their desires. It seems to me that a boycott would not do the job its advocates would like to have done.

Q. How about the view of the those who say that a boycott would be one way of demonstrating to the Soviets that actions such as the invasion of Afghanistan are incompatible with detente with the U.S.?

A. I can see why this could be thought of as such a demonstration. But the Olympic Games don't belong to the Soviet Union. They belong to the International Olympic Committee. Moscow is just the site of the games for 1980.

Q. Are the Soviets already making propaganda use -- in other words, political use -- of sponsorship of the games?

A. I wouldn't doubt that. Any nation where the games are held probably uses them for propaganda purposes. That is not worrisome unless it's a pernicious use.

Q. Do you expect it to become pernicious?

A. No, I don't.

Q. Do you have adequate assurances from Moscow on that score?

A. Yes. We do have adequate assurances. But that wouldn't convince me as much as believing that the Soviets would like to look good in the eyes of the world when the focus of the world is on them via television cameras.

Q. Haven't the Olympics already been politicized in many cases? In 1976, for example, several African countries boycotted the Montreal games, and Canada, in effect, barred Taiwan --

A. Yes. It's quite true that politics has been a part of the games. In fact, anything as global as the Olympic Games would have great trouble steering clear of politics. But for the most part, politics has been inflicted on the games by outside forces, as it was in the Montreal games or the Arab terrorist attack on Israeli athletes at the Munich games.

Q. Who could actually initiate an American boycott? Could Congress do it?

A. I would think that Congress could ask the United States Olympic Committee to stay out of the games.

Q. But would the committee be bound to obey?

A. No, it would not be bound to obey, because the U.S. Olympic Committee is a private organization. But we would, of course, be receptive to any admonition from our government.

Q. Under what circumstances would you agree to a boycott?

A. If there's serious problem at the site of the games, then I believe that the United States ought to consider pulling out of the games for that year. In other words, if the situation worsens in the Persian Gulf, and if Moscow becomes

a dangerous place and lives could conceivably be placed in jeopardy, then I think that either the International Olympic Committee ought to call off the games or the United States, for the protection of its own athletes, should consider staying out of the games for that year. That's far different thing from a boycott. That would be a matter of security, not politics.

Q. The U.S. didn't boycott the games in Nazi Germany in 1936. Do you think that was a mistake?

A. It might seem as though we didn't handle that very well. But we came out not only looking good but making the Nazis look bad. Jesse Owens and six other black American athletes won more medals in track and field than the whole German Olympic team.

Q. Could a U.S. boycott of the Moscow games invite counteraction by other countries?

A. That's right, because if we were to stay out of the Moscow games because we disagreed with what the Soviets did in Afghanistan, there could be people who disagree with what we did to, say, Taiwan, and stay out of the winter games in Lake Placid next month or the summer games in Los Angeles in 1984. It becomes a never-ending thing when we use the Olympics as a tool on political issues.

Q. What about the effect it would have on U.S. athletes if they were told they couldn't go to Moscow? Wouldn't that be serious?

A. It certainly would, because an athlete usually has only one chance to take part in the Olympic Games. And many of them have trained all their young lives to get there, and a boycott would snatch away their one opportunity.

Q. When the International Olympic Committee meets in Lake Placid on the 10th of February, do you expect that it will consider this question of boycott?

A. I'm sure that they will discuss it, because it's a very serious consideration for them. The IOC is deeply concerned that there might be some nations that would boycott the games. There would be at least three alternatives: If the situation does not worsen, the games could go on as planned. If the situation worsens, the games could be canceled or they could be awarded to another site in another country. However, it's so late now that a change in site would not be possible until 1981.

Should U.S. Boycott Olympics?; YES -- "Soviet aggression is a violation of the basic precepts of the Olympics"

Interview With Representative Edward J. Derwinski; Republican Of Illinois

(U.S. News & World Report, January 21, 1980)

Q. Representative Derwinski, why do you favor an American boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow?

A. The latest reason is the Soviet aggression in Afghanistan. It is a flagrant violation of the basic precepts of the Olympics, which favor peaceful competition among the peoples of the world. The Soviet Union has been in violation of many international standards in its diplomatic, military, economic activities for years, and there has been a tolerance in the world about it. But this naked aggression may be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

On top of the Afghanistan invasion, you have to look at the Soviets' propaganda role against the U.S. in Iran and throughout the Middle East, the buildup of Soviet military forces and the threat this poses to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the Soviet military buildup in the islands north of Japan. You get a picture of an aggressive, belligerent power. In these circumstances, I don't think the Soviet Union is the proper host for the Olympics.

Q. Do you believe Soviet conduct would really be influenced by a U.S. boycott?

A. The Soviets have grandiose plans for maximum propaganda use of the Olympics. Surely the Soviet Union expects that television coverage will show the good side of life in the Soviet Union. The Soviets are taking elaborate pains to accommodate the spectators who will come to Moscow for the games. And just like Hitler in 1936, they are building up their own athletes to win medals and score maximum propaganda impact.

The fact is that in this age of mass communications, propaganda is the key to many of the actions that governments take. So, if you take away the Soviets' propaganda card, you've done great damage to them.

Q. Do you think the U.S. made a mistake when it participated in the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany?

A. Hindsight is always better than foresight. The answer, I think, would be mixed. It would have been a mistake had not Jesse Owens done surprisingly well.

But there's another aspect this time. Even if there weren't an Afghanistan crisis, I think one could make a very good case against Soviet sponsorship based on their noncompliance with Olympic rules limiting competition to non-professionals.

Unlike the athletes sent to the Olympics by most countries of the Western World, Soviet athletes are not amateurs. They're either given career positions in the military or they are, in effect, career competitors. This includes their hockey team. It includes their track-and-field team. It includes their specialized athletic performers. There's no doubt that by a strict interpretation of the rule, they'd have to be considered professionals.

Q. Many people think the Olympics ought to be kept out of politics in every way --

A. I agree. But that's where we have a failing. We keep politics out of the Olympics. They don't. There's dual standard, and we're on the short end of it. The battle lines should have been drawn a long time ago. They were not. But at this point, given the worldwide reaction to their Afghanistan invasion, we have an issue we can use against the Soviets.

Q. Are there other steps that might be more effective than boycotting the Olympics in exerting pressure on the Russians?

A. Well, if the United Nations could impose proper sanctions against the Soviet Union, that would make the Olympic card less necessary. But the Russians sit there with a veto power that effectively neutralizes the U.N. The Allies of the U.S. are perfectly willing to stand with us when NATO is threatened, but they're not going to do anything to help us develop a more effective front in Asia. Take a look at the other practicalities of the case, and you see that there isn't any immediate and direct major countermove we can make against the Soviets.

Q. What about all of the American athletes who have trained so long and so hard? They are looking forward to the Moscow games --

A. That would be one of the hardest parts of this action. But if our government reached a decision -- in concert with the U.S. Olympic Committee and others, of course -- to institute a boycott of the Olympics, then U.S. public opinion, and therefore the cooperation of our athletes, would obviously follow.

Q. Do you see any possibility of organizing some kind of counter-competition to the games somewhere else?

A. No, not unless it were something dramatic, such as the government of Greece offering to stage a symbolic Olympic event in the land that fathered the Olympic spectacle.

Q. Have you found many in Congress who feel as you do?

A. Well, I think in general we all recognize, and I certainly do, that under our system the U.S. Olympic Committee is independent.

Q. Congress couldn't stop U.S. participation even if it wanted to?

A. Not really. It is up to the Olympic Committee to make the decision.

The Olympic Committee should have been much more militant all along in pointing out the standards the Russians apply or do not apply, and the type of athletic structure that exists in the Soviet Union.

The Olympic Committee should be much more energetic in defending the rights of real amateurs against what I consider the professionals of the Soviet Union, East Germany and a few of the other bloc countries.

NO, the US should NOT boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow	YES, the US SHOULD boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow
What do YOU think the US should have done?	