

Foreword by the editors

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Since their inception in the late 19th century, the modern Olympic Games have been touted as a celebration of athleticism, internationalism and common humanity. The driving force behind the event was Pierre de Coubertin, a French educator and sports enthusiast, who established the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894. The Olympic Games, which are the most visible expression of the Olympic Movement and aim to “place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind”, have also faced critiques and challenges since their launch two years later. Despite these critiques and challenges, the Olympic Games have grown, as one scholar put it “from a *fin-de-siècle* curiosity into an international culture performance of global proportion”.¹ It could be argued that the latest wave of globalisation has only magnified the prominence of the Olympic Games as an international phenomenon without equal. Indeed, the Games continue to attract the attention of individuals, societies, governments and businesses all over the world. Consider that the global audience for each of the last four editions of the Olympic Games was over three billion people, and that extensive media coverage reaches far and wide.² A crucial factor of the Olympic Games’ allure, which largely explains the attention and recognition they command, can be gleaned from the renowned five interlocking rings. Over time, this symbol has come to represent Olympism—the philosophical vision at the heart of the Olympic Games—and its values.

To provide insight into these and other fundamental characteristics of the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement, a unique institution in human history with formidable symbolic power, the IOC Olympic Studies Centre (OSC) offers *Olympic Knowledge. Essential Readings*, a collection of introductory and comprehensive articles that, by covering the history, current state of affairs and potential horizons for both the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement, collectively map the Olympic ecosystem and its trajectory.

¹ John J. MacAloon, “Double Visions: Olympic Games and American Culture”, *Kenyon Review*, 4 (1982): 98.

² International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Marketing Fact File. 2023 Edition* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2023), 20.

To accomplish this, the OSC invited prominent Olympic scholars to produce 32 articles exploring critical dimensions of the Olympic festival and the organisations related to it. These articles are clustered in four themes, which illustrate the global dimension, complexity and impact not only of the Olympic Games, but also of the IOC and the Olympic Movement:

1. The historical development of the IOC and the Olympic Games,
2. Cultural dimensions of the Olympic Games,
3. The organisation of the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games, and
4. The Olympic Movement and its relevance in contemporary society.

The contributions in *Olympic Knowledge. Essential Readings*, written in an engaging and approachable tone, provide a content area overview, canvass different human and social sciences perspectives, and contribute to a more informed, nuanced, and constructive dialogue on the Olympic phenomenon, past, present and future. In light of its aspiration, it is important to note that this collection of articles is geared towards a broad audience that includes, among other groups, students, educators, researchers, journalists, Olympic Movement stakeholders and Olympic Games aficionados. The editorial board, established by the OSC to coordinate the project, is delighted to present *Olympic Knowledge. Essential Readings*, and thanks the authors for their willingness to share their expertise, for their efforts in crafting these insightful readings, and for their constructive response to comments and suggestions and their collaborative spirit. This group of outstanding colleagues exemplifies the values of Olympism! In addition, this editorial board hopes that readers will enjoy and learn from the articles as much as its members did working on them. Happy reading.



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