

A welcome and overdue return to sporting polemics but predictably it's the same old story; corruption, doping and unaccountable oligarchy. Simon Jenkins does an excellent job in outlining the corrupt relationship between the Russian authorities and the IOC and FIFA. But more than that, he goes on to make the point that it is not only Russian sport that is mired in corruption and cheating. All nations are at it, not least the British, although they like to play the very British game of being holier than thou. What makes Jenkins article stand out from the pack is his ability to get to the root cause of much of this corruption. To cut to the chase, it is national chauvinism, says Jenkins, that is at the heart of all that is rotten with international sport and unless and until this nexus between national chauvinism and sporting excellence is broken, international sport will forever be dragged into the gutter.

On the question of Russia, Jenkins has this to say;

Russia was the IOC's kind of country. It put chauvinism before money, and money before sport. It spent like mad and doped like mad.

He then goes on to outline how this sordid relationship played itself out over the recent years. But then, leaving the particular and moving majestically to the general, Jenkins concludes;

Supranational bodies will go on corrupting sport and enjoying themselves by Swiss lakes as long as they remain unaccountable oligarchies. They will do so as long as members such as Britain and America collude with their

misbehaviour in pursuit of a blind craving for sporting prestige.

Then in a journalistic flourish that, despite some of his more annoying bourgeois proclivities, underlines the claim that Jenkins is one of Britain's best journalists, he tells his readers;

Your country treats your medals as its own, as decorative fodder for the glory of the state. In this respect Britain is among the worst. It tips public money into winning medals that poorer states could never afford, and it punishes athletes who fail to win them by cutting their incomes.

And then in a short sentence that should really hit home to Britain's sports ministers and administrators Jenkins adds, It is reminiscent of the old Soviet bloc. Or, as Jenkins later adds, akin to the sporting chauvinism introduced by Hitler in 1936.

Jenkins is not the first to make this argument. Sporting Polemics has been banging on about this national chauvinism and the cheating and corruption it engenders for many years. It is hardwired into the very fabric of international sport. No sport it seems is immune. We used to think that only boxing was infected. Boxing was once seen as the bad apple in the barrel. Now we know the entire barrel is rotten. Cycling, football, swimming, athletics; all have succumbed to the power of the mega corporate dollars and all have succumbed to the cheap chauvinism of their respective countries. The developing world and the developed world are equally complicit. Each nation seeks to enhance its prestige and placate its citizens with sporting glory in the way that the ancient Greeks and Romans once did. And for a few short weeks it seems to work. Then the cold reality of life kicks back in. The food banks, the soup kitchens, the homelessness and the crippling, life-sapping

debt.

Jenkins hints at a solution; that athletes compete as citizens of the world rather than as representatives of individual countries. And although I fully concur with what Jenkins advocates, in the current climate of renewed nationalism, I would say the chances of nations surrendering their grubby hold on our sporting elites are approximately zero.

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