

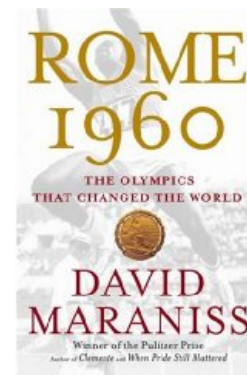
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1960 — The Rome Olympics and the Modern Games

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The modern Olympic Games are barely a century old, but even within that relatively brief span the games have been transformed. Along the way, notions of athletic achievement, nationalism, individual rights, patriotism, gender, and race have been transformed as well.

David Maraniss, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and author, takes us back to the 1960 Olympics where so many of these changes began in *Rome 1960: The Olympics that Changed the World* (Simon and Schuster). Those games started just one week after the espionage trial of Francis Gary Powers ended with his conviction in Moscow. The Cold War was at its height and the old order of the colonial age was breaking up. New ideals of individualism and new ideas of the role of sports in the culture and the economy were coming to the fore. All of these changes were on stage in Rome as the Olympic Games began.



Maraniss offers here a book that surprised me at many turns, and I found that reading *Rome 1960* was a good way to watch the current games in Beijing with greater insight. As Maraniss argues, the shape of the modern games as we know them now was “coming into view” in Rome.

An excerpt:

Television, money, and drugs were bursting onto the scene, altering everything they touched. Old-boy notions of pristine amateurism, created by and for upper-class sportsmen, were crumbling in Rome and could never be taken seriously again. Rome brought the first commercially broadcast Summer Games, the first doping scandal, the first runner paid for wearing a certain brand of track shoes. New nations and constituencies were being heard from, with increasing pressure to provide equal rights for blacks and women as they emerged from generations of discrimination and condescension.

The singular essence of the Olympic Games is that the world takes the same stage at the same time, performing a passion play of nations, races, ideologies, talents, styles, and aspirations that no other venue, not even the United Nations, can match. The 1960 Games came during a notably anxious period in cold war history; almost every action in Rome was viewed through the political lens of those tense times.

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