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## Reflexivity in the Apologetic Aeon: NZOC's *Return to Moscow*

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### Abstract

There has been an emergent trend among governments, and within sports organizations, to engage in public apologies. These politically orchestrated attempts to recall, forgive (and potentially forget) are typically orientated toward smoothing past injustices and advocating reconciliation. Such remembering, reflexivity, and criticality are not typically characteristic of Olympic organizations and/or sport museums. However, New Zealand's Olympic Committee (NZOC) has caught the apology bug. As part of its impending centennial celebrations, NZOC is reflecting on the consequences of its past (in)actions. Accordingly, this study analyses and evaluates the recent launch of NZOC museum's 1980 Moscow exhibition and its 'apology' to athletes excluded from the 1980 Olympic team. I question NZOC's desire to apologize. I then argue the exhibit and apology established a new, and needed, connection between NZOC and its colourful past. Within this public history exemplar are promising signs of the critically-framed histories academics encourage.

**Key words:** Reflexivity, apology, Olympic history

### Introduction

The New Zealand Olympic Committee (NZOC) has, over the past three years, been involved in developing several projects that will commemorate the history of their organization and its athletes. NZOC's initiatives have included establishing a more prominent headquarters in the centre of Wellington (which enabled the creation of a substantially larger and more publically accessible museum space), undertaking the exhaustive process of numbering the country's 1100 or so Olympians, promoting national Olympic history via the internet, developing exhibits and events to honour various Olympic milestones, and commissioning me to author their centennial history. One of NZOC's latest enterprises was the construction of a critically-orientated temporary exhibit that was accompanied by a reunion event to mark the thirtieth anniversary of NZOC's contentious (non)participation in the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games.

The decision to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the event was, however, somewhat arbitrary. Events celebrating anniversary milestones of Olympic teams in New Zealand are uncommon, and sport reunion occasions rarely have received as much publicity and interest. In contrast, this reunion made prime time news coverage and was the subject of various features in several national papers (Hurdall 2010; Leggat 2010; Romanos 2010). The *Return to Moscow* was initially encouraged by members of the New Zealand Olympians Club, led by this organization's president, Selwyn Maister, a former hockey player selected for the 1980 Olympic Games, and brother of then NZOC Secretary General, Barry Maister. Backed by NZOC, the reunion was a collaborative effort between the Olympians club, NZOC Museum Director Charles Callis, and Olympic Studies Centre Coordinator, Stephen Donnell.

The combined reunion and exhibit launch, held on Friday 3 September 2010, was more than just an opportunity for NZOC, its members, athletes, and stakeholders to imbibe in wine-induced nostalgic revelry. The moment offered an appropriate opportunity for NZOC to exorcise its ghosts, engage in self-reflection (a characteristic missing from previous administrations and most sport museums), and, (re)establish positive athlete relations. Consequently, this was more than just a party for, and about, the past. By foregrounding their own administrative flaws,

the personal narratives of athletes, and a collegial sense of collective identity, the event was a carefully engineered attempt to showcase NZOC's newly found sensitivities and sensibilities. The main message was that NZOC is a progressive, athlete-orientated, reflexive organization that is better attuned to the historical conditions and broader social and cultural contexts that have come to bear on its current role as well as its previous actions. Despite my own academic and historical interests in, and work with, NZOC, I was not involved in the creation of the exhibit. Viewing the exhibition did, however, motivate and allow me to have informal discussions with the museum director about the impetus for the exhibit, its structure, and significance to the organization. These insights into the exhibit and museum's development inspired this paper and form the basis for its primary considerations, criticality and the ethics of apologies.

My intention in writing this paper was to illustrate the ways cultural and social institutions – in this case sport organizations – might find better ways of dealing with their pasts in the present. The paper builds on the trends of new museological thought that emphasize the necessity of more sensible and sensitive practices guided by more rigorous moral and ethical principles, and simply, more respectful engagement with the communities, histories, ideas, and stories that they represent (Anderson 2004; Bonnell and Simon 2007). Accordingly, a key aim of this paper is to understand how a particular institution (such as a sport body like NZOC) might employ sensitive and sensible museological practices in order to confront moral and ethical injustices. The reflexive museum project was bolstered by NZOC's decision to provide a public apology at the exhibit's launch. In tandem, the exhibit and apology were powerful mechanisms for redressing athletes' concerns, and for showing how progressive the organization could be in regard to its representation of its past actions. In summary, this paper examines NZOC's approach in the hope that it might set a precedent for other similar organizations, and/or, at least encourages the directors and scholars of specialist and non-mainstream museums to be cognisant of the utility of critically-inspired museum projects.

I attend first to NZOC's Moscow exhibit, which I read as the organization's initial exercise in reflection. Second, I analyse NZOC's and the Government's related 'apology' during the Moscow reunion/exhibit launch, which I interpret as the organization's continuation of this critical dialogue between itself and its stakeholders. By publically addressing this particularly controversial political injustice, I argue that NZOC has shown a capacity (if albeit as yet small) to craft their histories *anew*; that is, to embrace alternate narratives which challenge their own authority and power, disrupt our understanding of the country's Olympic past, and foster fresh appreciations and respect for the previously silenced and forgotten. Taking cues from apology scholars and sport museum critics, it is possible to conceive NZOC's *Return to Moscow* (both the reunion and exhibit events) as an exemplar of a new, exciting, and I think, welcome direction in popular (sport) history.

### **Museums and Reinvention**

Museums take many forms, serve many functions, and elicit a diverse range of reactions. They are more than aesthetically interesting spaces and repositories of cultural and social 'things', but also are mechanisms for narrative making, nostalgic recollection, pedagogical processes, identity formation, and collective expression. These purposes extend to sport and Olympic museums. Not all countries have dedicated Olympic museums, and not all Olympic museums are located under the auspices of their national Olympic committees. NZOC and its Olympic museum are an exception. Although historical awareness and professional museological practice has not been at the forefront of NZOC's agendas, over the last decade or so the organization had made efforts to support an Olympic Museum and associated Olympic Studies Centre. In addition, NZOC has also utilized the work of the museum in its policies, administration, athlete-relations and Games preparations. Working in collaboration with administrative staff and executive board members, the museum has played a key role in guiding NZOC's historical thinking. For example, the Museum has been heavily involved in developing historical material to inform the cultural and historical ethos of Olympic and Commonwealth games teams. The day after the Moscow event, for instance, the Museum hosted the launch of the '29028' (the height of Mount Everest in feet) campaign – inspired by the achievements and attitude of the country's renowned mountain pioneer, the late Sir Edmund Hilary and his Nepalese Sherpa, the

late Tenzing Norgay – with the aim of engendering a distinct team culture in the lead up to the 2010 Commonwealth games in Delhi. Prior to the Athen's Olympic Games, the Museum's director also forged ties with the country's Hellenic community and developed activities abroad with the Olympic team in order to honour the historical (political, military, and sporting) connections between New Zealand and Greece. When and where possible, the museum and its staff have played a role in ensuring the historical legacy, imagery, and ideology of the Olympic movement and the nation's Olympic past is frequently utilized, and accurately employed, in NZOC's marketing material (which becomes typically important before each Olympic games).

Despite these positive efforts, museums are tormented entities; oft applauded and appreciated, but, also frequently berated and abhorred. Over the last 20 years or so, museums around the world have been confronted by existential crises, and the contemporary context in which museums operate continues to be contoured by a variety of cultural, social, economical, political, and historiographical, demands (Anderson 2004). As Harrison notes, over the last few decades, museums have been forced to reconsider their purpose due to economical and political imperatives and shifting consumer 'tastes'. Noting the challenges curators and directors have faced, Harrison asserts that

... the staff of the post-modern museum or at least the museum that exists in the post-modern world, can no longer avoid confronting questions about the reasons for its existence – although many are assiduously, or possibly blindly, assuming that they can' (Harrison 2005: 40).

These challenges have led museums to become more pedagogically-minded and to take invariably radical departures from past practice. This is, of course, not to say that pedagogy is not already a function of museums, but rather, that institutions have started to take educational dissemination more seriously and, certainly, in conjunction with aesthetic presentation and cultural preservation agendas.

For the most part, museums remain dedicated to their core business of preservation, presentation and interpretation. Indeed, this is obvious at NZOC's Olympic museum. However, these are contentious tasks and debates that rage about how best museums should go about their work. As Skramstad (2004 [1999]) adds, museums are furtively working out ways to negotiate competing twenty-first century forces. For instance, concerns have been raised over the 'academic soundness' of museums and the license and authority shown by curators and directors in their interpretation and presentation of historical knowledge. Across the wide genre of museums, calls have been made for these institutions to engender better, more positive and productive relationships with the individuals and communities they seek to represent. During the late 1990s, and arguably into the last decade, 'vulnerability', 'self-reflection', 'critical thinking', 'accountability' and 'social responsibility' have become imperatives behind many museum redevelopments as curators seek to transform their conventional identities and reengage audiences through meaningful experiences (Harrison 2005: 47). This is not to say museums have discontinued their part in fostering 'identity, tradition, history and individual expression', which Harrison reminds us, 'are all part of the process of invention, construction and structural reproduction' (2005: 40). Rather, museums need to think continually about their work and its consequences; part of this task essentially involves disrupting the public's conventional perceptions of museums as 'purveyors of truth'.

The desires for, designs on, and disruptions of, museums predominately focus on the need to promote more actively a proliferation of voices. In so doing, museums, as pervasive and powerful public entities, aim to embrace a new ontology that requires a reconsideration of what can be known, who can it be known by, and whose history is it to know (Šola 1987a; Macdonald and Fyfe 1996; Anderson 2004; Harrison 2005). 'The emphasis upon museums as projections of identity, together with the idea of museums as "contested terrains",' Macdonald notes, 'has become increasingly salient over the past decade as museum orthodoxies have been challenged by, or on behalf of, many minorities which have previously been ignored or marginalized' (1996: 9). The lengthy criticisms museums have endured, especially in regard to the historical absence of any plurality of voice in collections and exhibitions, have 'led to a new wave of critical, self-reflexive scrutiny' (Macdonald and Fyfe 1996: 7). Essentially, museums are

starting to 'open themselves up'; to better respond to, represent and engage with the communities, individuals and groups whose interests, identities and experiences they seek to share. Invariably, as Corsane (2005) warns, these redirections may necessitate difficult decisions as museums tackle new ground and embrace fresh perspectives. 'Heritage, museum and gallery outputs need to be prepared to engage with topical and sometimes difficult issues', he notes, 'where risks are taken in order to produce outputs and public programmes that will be challenging and stimulating, there is always the potential for controversy' (Corsane 2005: 10).

The increasing emphasis by many museums on criticality and reflexivity takes on particular significance, and is indeed best highlighted, when these institutions address contested, controversial and uncomfortable topics and issues. There has, Bonnell and Simon argue, been an increased willingness by museums to take on, what they coin, 'difficult subject matter' (2007: 65). In such museums, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests, traditional museological celebration has been joined by a new level of honesty, reflexivity and criticality as institutions attend to 'the darker side of human society' (2000: 9). What some museums seem to have realized, Bonnell and Simon contend, is the importance of engaging with the past in ways that are 'both inspiring and despairing' (2007: 65, emphasis in original). From death, disease, destruction, discontent, hurt, suffering, controversy and oppression, there appears to be no hallowed ground unable to be touched by museum representation. The Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum's (Washington) controversial 'Enola Gay' exhibit (first displayed between 1995-1998), the Museum of World Cultures' (Gothenburg) 'No Name Fever: Aids in the age of Globalization' exhibit (2004), and The Jewish Museum's (New York) 'Mirroring Evil: Nazi imagery/Recent art', an exhibition at (2002), are just some exemplars of museum's attempts to deal with society's mess and misery. Importantly, Bonnell and Simon (2007) point out that there is, however, a difference between 'difficult' and 'controversial'. The former generally involves a heightened sense of anxiety and arguably more negative emotional reactions among viewers, while the latter is defined more by disagreements among the public over the adequacy and accuracy of narrative content and the modes of presentation. To this I would, however, like to add that there are also, of course, a spectrum of what constitutes 'difficult' and 'controversial'. That is, these are subjective classifications whose power and legitimacy can only be assessed by those whose causes, identities, and experiences are most affected.

Understanding the scope and subjectivity of the 'term' difficult is useful for evaluating NZOC's *Return to Moscow*, and the related exhibit's ability to portray adequately, appropriately and effectively, the organization's own difficult and controversial past. I do recognize that NZOC's *Return to Moscow* was not as extreme as some of the aforementioned provocative examples. Indeed, in the difficult/controversial pool it would occupy the shallow-end. Yet, for those affected parties – in particular the athletes, who experienced intense political pressure, suffered the hurt of non-participation and were relegated to the footnotes of the country's Olympic narrative – this exhibit mattered. In NZOC's 100-year-plus history, this exhibit was, I believe, the organization's most considerate attempt to address one of its most significant 'dark' times. It stimulated a new critical dialogue with the past, foregrounded the alternate voices, challenged the authority of knowledge, assuaged historical guilt, pushed uncomfortable boundaries, prompted self-reflection and generated meaningful stakeholder engagement (actions encouraged by Macdonald and Fyfe (1996), Corsane (2005) and Simon and Bonnell (2007)). Their efforts were innovative because criticality, reflexivity, plurality and decentring have not generally been characteristics of Olympic organizations and/or sport museums.

Sport museums are institutions designed to celebrate and reflect the cultural and social significance of the nation's athletes and their sports. The sport museum is a multifarious space that attempts to capture the evocative nature of sporting memories and the dynamism of the sporting spectacle. They typically focus on myth, memorialization, heritage, tradition, romanticism and remembrance. In their various guises sport museums are, as scholars Kidd (1996), Moore (1997), Johnes and Mason (2003) and Phillips and Tinning (2011) all note, spaces intended to elicit affective, meaningful and memorable experiences for public consumers. Be these experiences educational, nostalgic and/or enjoyable, the general intent of the sport museum is to foster positive feelings and encourage visitors to contemplate the wider significance of sport and its influence on their own lives. Some contemporary sport museums (such as the IOC's

Olympic Museum in Lausanne and spectacular hyper-sensory, National Sports Museum of America in New York) employ innovative technologies to maximize consumer experience and drive commercial revenue. In these spaces, while still perhaps trying to engender nostalgic affectations, the maxims of infotainment, fun and excitement prevail. Generally, however, most sport museums have not pursued their intellectual craftsmanship with the same vigour. Johnes and Mason describe the approach of British club football museums as too often being celebratory and selective – overlooking by and large, the 'controversial, the distasteful and the political' (2003: 120). Their comments certainly apply to many other sport museums, including New Zealand sport history museums such as the Sport Hall of Fame in Dunedin, the Rugby Museum in Palmerston North and (prior to the *Return to Moscow*) NZOC's Olympic museum in Wellington.

Sport museums have not been exempt from the criticisms attracted by other museums. Academics' discontent for sport museums is varied and complex (for an overview see West (1978), Pope (1996), Rosenzweig and Leon (1998), Vamplew (1998), Johnes and Mason (2003) and Phillips and Tinning (2011)). Key strands of the debates have highlighted the roles such institutions play in interpreting, constructing, and representing sport history, and have focused on the position of authority these institutions exert over official knowledge, as well as how effectively they engage/disengage with academic sport history. According to Phillips and Tinning (2011), the 'failure' of sport museums has been an assessment made by academics who have evaluated these spaces according to a methodological matrix more comfortably associated with written history products. Academic evaluations of this type typically do not recognize or acknowledge the point that narrative representation, critical engagement and meaningful contextualization can take many forms beyond the literary. In contrast (and rightly, in my opinion), Phillips and Tinning (2011) suggest that some other criticisms about sport museums – about the simplicity of information and avoidance of any substantive critical historical argument, for instance – are valid, and can be applied to the majority of New Zealand's sport museums.

Small and new though NZOC's Olympic museum is, this particular site attempts to appease stakeholders, attend to institutional responsibilities and engender public interest. It may even exemplify Macdonald's claim (1996: 1) that 'museums occupy an intriguingly paradoxical space'. Ames agrees too, that paradoxical spaces sometimes reflect popular opinion and at other times guide it, 'sometimes reaffirming dominant ideas and at other times opposing them' (2004 [1992]: 81). The Olympic museum is, Macdonald might recognize, bound up in the processes of (re)producing collective national histories, yet, at the same time, forced to confront new consumer sensibilities, questions about social responsibility, and meaningful community engagement. What is most interesting about the Olympic Museum – at least in regards to its relatively recent Moscow exhibit – is that it appears to be reacting to contemporary museum debates about historical criticality and plurality. In so doing, the national Olympic Museum differs slightly from other similar sport museums (such as its parent institution in Lausanne, sister museums in other countries and places such as the National Sport Hall and Museum in Dunedin) that show neither reflexivity nor a progressive attitude toward addressing their uncomfortable issues.

The concerns expressed by academics about sport museums frame my appraisal of NZOC's *Return to Moscow* exhibit. I acknowledge that there were similarities between the NZOC exhibit and those in typical sport museums in terms of presentation style and content. However, I stress here that there are also notable differences that set the NZOC example apart. The organization's commitment to address a contentious historical moment, its eagerness to foreground athletes' voices, and its aim to prompt discussion about administrative decision-making, contributed, I contend, to an exhibition that demonstrated NZOC's commitment to thinking critically about itself and its histories in ways that may entice more academic praise than profanity. Of course, NZOC's *Return to Moscow* – as evinced via its museum – was, I recognize, not without its flaws. A temporary exhibit dealing with one 'touchy' subject, for instance, was quite different to deploying rigorously a sustained museological agenda underpinned by criticality. While the museum does need to satisfy scholarly criticism, I argue here that by, at least, responding to contemporary designs and desires the signs of a new direction in sport museums and public engagement are positive and promising.

## The Exhibit

Before detailing the exhibit, a short historical preface is necessary. On 24 December 1979 – as an escalation of Cold War tensions – Soviet forces invaded neighbouring Afghanistan. In addition to a variety of economic and political sanctions, the President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, called for an international boycott of the impending 1980 Moscow Olympic Games to show the West's contempt for Russia's foreign policy. In New Zealand, Prime Minister Robert Muldoon – keen to maintain important trade and diplomatic ties – aligned with Carter's administration. However, Muldoon was not immediately interested in sport, so the New Zealand Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association (NZOCGA) (as it was known at the time) had continued its preparations. On 15 April 1980 they announced the New Zealand Olympic Games team was to comprise 99 athletes. Around the time of the announcement, and certainly in the immediate weeks after, NZOCGA, sporting bodies and their athletes received considerable pressure from Muldoon and his administration to withdraw. NZOCGA's intention to send a team also drew comment and criticism from the public, media and sports bodies. NZOCGA asserted that the Government had no place in preventing athletes from attending the Games, and argued that the decision was ultimately to be made by sports bodies and their athletes. From April onwards, most of the country's sport organizations that had athletes in the Games team began to withdraw. In many cases their decisions did not involve the athletes, but rather, were made at the administrative level.

On 8 May 1980, NZOCGA met to discuss sending a team. Irrespective of sports bodies withdrawing, NZOCGA decide to accept the invitation. On 12 May, Muldoon increased his pressure on the organization by pulling Government support in Russia by making the New Zealand embassy unavailable to competing athletes. He also threatened to withdraw \$45,000 financial support and announced that public servants attending the Games would be given no special leave. There was divided opinion across the country, within sport bodies and among athletes over the issue of attendance. On 29 May, NZOCGA met again to discuss the continued withdrawals. Athletes continued to receive a barrage of pressure from a number of directions; government, friends, family, public, employers, pro-Afghanistan loyalists, Russian dissidents and anti-Olympic advocates. On 4 June, some NZOCGA members proposed the organization withdraw completely. However, NZOCGA Secretary General and Chef-de-Mission Tay Wilson disagreed somewhat and, feeling invariably duty bound, went to Moscow to support four of the country's athletes who had decided to participate (three canoeists, who were already in Europe at the time, and one pentathlete, who continued to train in New Zealand amidst hostile criticism). In the end, 61 of the athletes selected for Moscow were able to attend another Olympic Games. However, 33 athletes did not attend another Olympic Games. The details of this historical context form the basis of the Moscow 1980 exhibit.

The exhibit, which ran from September 2010 until February 2011, primarily consisted of five large panels (roughly 2m by 1m) that were designed like newspaper pages, labelled *The New Zealand Olympic Chronicle*, and dated 3 September 2010. The exhibit commenced with an introduction panel and also contained smaller panels that included a compilation of athletes' memories of the era. Adjacent to the panels were associated Moscow ephemera (for example, team jackets, equipment, passport photos, visas, Olympic accreditation, video images of the opening ceremony, a sound track with athletes narratives and a collection of various news paper cuttings, cartoons and correspondences to NZOCGA). 'The exhibition', the audience were told, 'chronicles a period in international and New Zealand political history that had a direct impact on athletes from this country and their aspiration to represent New Zealand at the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games'. 'The invasion of Afghanistan by Russia', the blurb continued, 'prompted a series of responses that would have long lasting consequences amongst members of the sporting fraternity within New Zealand'. Drawing on a range of historical material, including archives, cartoons and personal reflections, the exhibit presented 'an insight into this turbulent period of New Zealand's sporting history'.

Panel One, entitled 'Russian invasion of Afghanistan', described the political impetus behind the boycott, the New Zealand Government's response and the initial reactions from NZOCGA and sport organizations (see Figure 1). The panel emphasized that the boycott was a United States-led retaliation for the Soviet Union's foreign policy. The panel also outlined, in brief, some of the rationales New Zealand sport bodies gave for their withdrawal.

# The New Zealand Olympic Chronicle

Wellington

Established 1911

3 September 2010

## Christmas Eve 1979 – Russian Invasion of Afghanistan

With the high tension between capitalist and communist powers during the Cold War, trouble was brewing from the moment Russia was awarded the Games in 1974. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on Christmas Eve 1979 was the catalyst for action on the part of the US. President Jimmy Carter called for a boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow almost immediately. The aim of the boycott was to show the Soviet Union that its intervention in Afghanistan would not be ignored, and to highlight the depth of the West's contempt for the USSR's foreign policy. In spite of this, the 1980 Winter Olympic Games at Lake Placid had run smoothly, with a team from the USSR in attendance.

### Games Boycott

**Politics in Sport in Previous Years**  
The Olympic Games had been marred by political intrusions before 1980. The 1968 Mexico City Olympics had been notable for the black power demonstration by African-American athletes, and in 1972 a terrible tragedy befell the Munich Olympics with the tragic hostage situation resulting in the deaths of Israeli athletes. In 1976, the Montreal Games were marred by African countries boycotting due to New Zealand's involvement with rugby tours to apartheid South Africa. In the same year, Taiwan was refused the right to compete as the 'Republic of China' by the Canadian FIC; the USSR threatened to withdraw due to the defection of one of its athletes, and the USA threatened to withdraw in sympathy with the Republic of China. The world had entered an era of political activism in sport.

It is clear that in the latter part of the twentieth century, the Olympic Games were increasingly open to commercial, political and corrupt pressures. Unfortunately Pierre de Coubertin's hope for a peaceful world through the Olympic Games seemed thwarted.

The Olympic Charter specifies that freedom from government intervention is required of all NOCs (though in some countries there appears to be growing evidence of government direction and control, associated with government and financial assistance).

New Zealand had no government restriction on individuals departing for overseas or acquiring visas. Government had no voice in the administration of sport. All NZ sports bodies are autonomous and free to make their own arrangements for national and international competition.

### Boycott Unfolds Internationally

Many countries waited on the decision of West Germany. Other significant countries like Australia and Britain decided to send teams.

The International Olympic Committee was considering the proposal that the Olympics be moved to a permanent home in Greece.

The Soviet Union claimed a diplomatic victory over Carter's boycott attempt, considering Western solidarity to be lacking.

Alternative competition was being planned the world over.

### Boycott Unfolds in New Zealand

On 8 May 1980, the New Zealand Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association (NZOCGA) met to discuss their intention to send a team to the Games. Despite the possibility of an international boycott looming, it was decided that New Zealand would accept the invitation.

A full team of 99 was announced, which would have been the largest team ever sent to an Olympic Games by New Zealand at that time.



Official photo of the NZOCGA team for the 1980 Olympic Games. The team was announced on 8 May 1980.

However, Prime Minister Rob Muldoon wanted to show his solidarity with the USA. Shortly after the NZOCGA's announcement, Muldoon advised that there would be no official Government presence at the Games, meaning that the team could not rely on assistance from the New Zealand embassy in Russia. Funding cuts were also threatened.

Most problematically, the Prime Minister also announced that in 1980 no special leave would be given to public servants to attend the Games, either with or without pay. The threat from the Government was clear – if athletes or officials employed by the state travelled to the Games, there would be no job for them to return to. This of course included the significant number of teachers. The change in policy spelled the end of a dream for many athletes and officials who did not have sufficient

annual leave to be able to attend the Games.

The official Cabinet decision of 12 May reads:

1. In Moscow the team would be considered divorced from the Consulate.
2. Payment of the second instalment of \$45K would be looked at.
3. There would be no official Government presence at the Games so that the team would be divorced completely from the NZ embassy.
4. No special leave to attend the Games, either with or without pay, would be granted to members of the Public Service.

From April onwards, sporting bodies had begun to withdraw. Yachting was the first to pull out, officially withdrawing in April, though in May a letter signed by 9 of the 10 competitors protesting at the decision was received by the Yachting Federation. After the Prime Minister's announcement however, there was a further surge of withdrawals. Various officials pulled out due to lack of annual leave. Decisions were made at a board room level, often without the support or knowledge of potential Olympic athletes.

Various reasons were given for withdrawal, not all for the expected reason.

1. Equestrian – in protest at the Russian intervention into Afghanistan.
2. Hockey (men) – because of uncertainties relating to the Moscow Olympics.
3. Hockey (women) – because of insufficiency of competition.
4. Archery – because of hosting the world event on 22/23 November (were concerned about loss of government funding for this if they sent a team to Moscow).
5. Weightlifting – abhorrence of the Russian action.
6. Rowing – forced to withdraw as lack of annual leave made attendance impossible.
7. Cycling – 'having carefully considered all the facts and information available and bearing in mind the moral, political repercussions and public opinion aspects'.

The President of the NZ Amateur Cycling Association, Bill Main, 'expressed concern that amateur sportsmen were bearing the brunt of the attitudes and feels towards the Russians over their invasion of Afghanistan'. The team were well prepared and had gold medal prospects, but bowed to public opinion.



Figure 1. Moscow exhibit panel 1. Detailing the political context.

Similar to Panel One, Panel Two continued to address the political imperatives (see figure 2). The panel included excerpts taken from newspapers and sport administration correspondence. This was, the panel indicated, a highly contentious issue; across and within sport bodies there were a diverse range of opinions, emotions and pressures that complicated NZOCGA's actions. These were difficult times, and the panel gives the strong impression that pressure from Muldoon, his government and sympathizers on the New Zealand Sports Foundation, bore

heavily on the organization and its abilities to offer athletes appropriate protection and support. 'No organisation in a democratic society', NZSF Executive Director Keith Hancox remarked,

**The New Zealand Olympic Chronicle** 2

**World News** 3 September 2010

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**Olympics are becoming a Political Arena**

*(Evening Post 1 May 90)*  
Heavy pressure had been applied to various sporting bodies, though the public was largely unaware of this. The NZOCGA was independent and responsible for deciding to attend, and it was down to individual sporting bodies to determine their stance. In spite of this, the government still imposed itself on all concerned. Decisions were often made at a managerial level, with many athletes, still wishing to compete, feeling bitter and disappointed. Some athletes made the decision to withdraw as individuals.

*(Evening Post 8 May 90)*  
The NZOCGA came under constant pressure from the government to withdraw the team entirely. However they resisted the pressure and repeatedly confirmed their intention to attend. Lance Cross, then the Chairman of the NZOCGA, is quoted as saying that unlike most countries in the Western world, New Zealand will make that decision free of political interference.

In mid May the Prime Minister received a letter from President Corrier urging the government to take further steps to get athletes to not attend the Games. This pressure was brought to bear on the NZOCGA as the PM urged them to reverse their decision to send a team to the Games. Lance Cross called a meeting to further discuss New Zealand's participation.

*(Evening Post 20 May 90)*  
By the end of May, Finance had become a key area of concern for the NZOCGA, which was aware that it had no funding from either the government or the NZ Sports Foundation. The FM had stated that he was reviewing the terms under which the NZOCGA was scheduled to receive another \$40,000 for sending a team - the message was that if a New Zealand team was sent to the Games, they would be forfeiting the money they were due to receive. The FM called the issue of attendance a matter of high government policy.

The NZ Sports Foundation (funded by government and private corporations) was urging sporting bodies to use their funding to go to alternate competitors, saying that while they would not withdraw funds already paid to the various disciplines, they urged sporting bodies to consider the wider interests of New Zealand. The Executive Director Keith Hancox is quoted as saying 'No organisation in a democratic society, however much it may cherish its independence, should disregard the wishes of those elected to govern the nation'.

Sponsorship had already been secured through the Olympic Fund. By early May, the Olympic Fund had topped \$90,000, with companies sponsoring the team, with no conditions applied to the money. By late May it had reached \$420,000. If the Games

were to be boycotted, funds raised would be held for future participation.

**Final Appeal not to go to Olympics**  
*(Timaru Herald 20 May 90)*  
WELLINGTON - The Minister of Recreation and Sport, Mr Hight last night made what he termed a final appeal to New Zealand athletes not to go to Moscow.  
"I make one final appeal to all our athletes ... think of your country and what your Government is asking of you," he said in Parliament. "The Government gives a lot of money to the sports bodies, so I don't think it unreasonable for us to ask something in return. Think beyond your own hopes and ambitions ... Any athletes who did go to the Olympic Games would be letting New Zealand down" ... "Let me make it clear - in this situation, sport cannot be divorced from politics here in New Zealand. By contrast, though the Government does not interfere in the activities of sporting bodies, sportsmen cannot escape the fact that politics is involved in all aspects of life. Sports bodies must not, therefore, interpret freedom from political interference as a license to behave without concern for the broader interests of our nation" ... "This is far more important than the issue of sporting contacts with South Africa," he said.

**HOCGA Meet Again over Moscow**  
*(Evening Post 29 May 90)*  
Another meeting was held on 29 May to revisit the decision to attend the Games. This was as a surprise to some officials, who thought the decision was finalized. Many objections had been waiting on a decision from West Germany before making their decision, though they were always likely to boycott so that shouldn't have changed anything. Hours before the meeting, medal hopeful Rebecca Parrott withdrew, saying that it was in the best interests of NZ to make herself unavailable. She also cited lack of competition as a reason. Mr Fisher noted that she had been under pressure to withdraw. At the meeting the NZOCGA decided that no sponsor or government funds would be used to send athletes to the Games.

On 4 June 1990, the NZOCGA met about attending the Games for a final time. Notice of motion was given by Mr HE Houghton - I hereby give notice that I will move at the next meeting of the executive of the NZOCGA, (1) that the decision of 8

and 29 May 1990 to accept the invitation to participate in the 1990 Olympics in Moscow be rescinded, and (2) that the association withdraw from the 1990 Olympics in Moscow'.

**OLYMPIC SQUAD SHATTERED AS ATHLETES QUIT**  
*(The Star 7 June 90)*  
New Zealand is effectively out of the Moscow Olympics. The original team of 90 competitors, already more than halved by withdrawal, has been cut to seven when the rowing, athletics, cycling, judo, shooting and fencing squads announced they were pulling out of the team ...

**Intimidation is Alleged**  
... The announcement of the pullout, authorised by the Athletics Association chairman (Mr. C. Blamp) was made by the secretary (Mr. I. Boyd). He said the association was still firmly opposed to the Olympic boycott. "But because of the intimidation of competitors, which is affecting their preparation for the games, the withdrawal in the case of the New Zealand team and the long term financial implications to the Association of athletes in New Zealand if the team goes to Moscow, the NZAA has decided very reluctantly to withdraw its sanction from the Olympic team" ...

**Rowers Issue Statement**  
The New Zealand Rowing Association issued this statement ... "New Zealand rowing firmly believes that the Olympic boycott is a wrong method of settling a political dispute and adhere to the firm belief that participation in the Olympics would do far more good for the people of the world than the evils that have been stirred upon them". ... "It is with reluctance that we deplore our New Zealand decision of participation in the Olympics which for many of them has been a lifetime dream. We are conscious of the dedication and sacrifice made by all members ..."

**'Right Decision' says Mr Muldoon**  
*(The Star 13 June 90)*  
HERE - The Prime Minister Mr Muldoon has welcomed the news of mass withdrawals from New Zealand's Olympic team. "I think it's the right decision and I welcome the fact that individual sportsmen and women and associations are having second thoughts," Mr Muldoon said in understanding their concerns about finance. ... "Clearly it's not such of an investment for sportsmen," he said.  
In Auckland, the Minister for Sport and Recreation Mr Hight attributed the rash of Olympic withdrawals to public pressure. He said that he felt strongly limited for the sportsmen and women who had trained so hard and were now consequently so disappointed. "But I believe when they have had time to put things into perspective they will realize why the Government opposed them going. The Government had not tried to pressure would be competition, only pressure," he said.

Figure 2. Moscow exhibit panel 2. An array of actions and reactions.

however much it may cherish its independence, should disregard the wishes of those elected to govern the nation'. As a consequence of the ongoing political pressure and decreased financial support from the Government NZOCGA were effectively backed into a corner.

Editorial, Letters to the Editor

3 September 2020

**Editorial**

Did this boycott really succeed in stopping the Soviet Union anything? Tight control of media by the head of the USSR meant that the actions of the West would not have been portrayed as what they were, if they were discussed at all. Certainly the Krowlin was already aware of what the Western world felt about communism and its foreign policy. The people that were really deprived were the athletes. Although alternate competition was offered around the world, athletes were forced to side out on the sidelines of their sporting career, competing at the Olympic Games. The boycott's only achievement was to make athletes suffer.

The government that was so insistent that athletes oppose the Soviet invasion did not shoulder the burden of opposition along with the athletes. No trade sanctions were imposed by the NZ government, as the NZ had requested, instead the government's focus was on solely using the Olympic Games to show their opposition.

Equating sport with the events occurring in Afghanistan downplays the significance of what the civilians of Afghanistan were enduring.



**Athletes & officials' feelings and concerns**  
Many athletes felt that they had become pawns in a political struggle, many dealing with threats to their employment and harassment from some members of the public.

There was criticism of Innes Cross, as an IOC member, and a perception of his loyalties being divided. Cross went to the Olympic Games and enjoyed the event when athletes couldn't go. He participated in awards ceremonies and handed out medals to Russian athletes. In spite of this he supported the boycott, and in spite of being pro-boycott he had originally voted for the Soviet Union to hold the Games. Lord Killalee was apparently disappointed with the attitude displayed by Cross.



**Brian North Modern Pentathlon**  
"I'll be there...". Positive pentathlete vote to go, even if the only kind!  
(Evening Post Sat 7 June 1980)  
Brian North felt that the government was acting in a hypocritical way, especially considering their actions during the Vietnam War. Athletes were attending the Olympics, not visiting Russia.

North bore the brunt of the negative opinion from the New Zealand public as the immediate were preparing for the Games in Europe whilst he alone was preparing in New Zealand. His employers were contacted at a high level and asked whether it was in their best interest to continue to employ him. At home, he received abusive letters and phone calls from people who did not agree with his decision to attend the Games, including one letter that was written in blood.

**'North slips off to Moscow Games'**  
(Evening Post Wed 9 July 1980)

... There was concern for the safety of his family from the government and other dissenters. However, he notes that he was also shown strong support by other members of the public...

North retired before 1984, in part due to the pressure he endured as a competitor over the 1980 Olympic Games. To date New Zealand has never again been represented in modern pentathlon at an Olympic Games.

**Ian Ferguson Canoeing**

Ian Ferguson notes the money and time he and other athletes had spent on training and preparation for the Olympic Games. He had spent four years training and peeing for everything himself with no government funding. He had dedicated his life to the game, and did not see the government stopping trade with the USSR or changing any policy, so wouldn't see why he should take the brunt of the action. He felt that he did what he was there for. Ian felt that the boycott had no effect on the USSR; he felt that they were unconcerned and did what they wanted anyway. He noted the 'lit for lat' at the 1984 LA Games when members of the Eastern Bloc refused to attend. Ferguson also felt that sport was being used as a political weapon, and the only people hurt by boycotts are the athletes that don't get to attend the games.

**Tay Wilson (Chef de Mission)**

Tay Wilson was opposed to a boycott from the first. He saw athletes pulled from teams, and some were very bitter as they never got another opportunity to attend an Olympic Games.

... Sports administrators made the decisions - they forgot it was a once in a lifetime opportunity for many.

**Warne Williams (Shooting)**

Uncertainty was ongoing, and his shooting team was the last to pull out. The last minute cancellation left him frustrated with the last opportunity and the lack of support from the government.

**Ron Palenski (Journalist)**

Ron Palenski was the only NZ Journalist at the Games, sent by the NZFA. He considered that there was a lack of independent view, with countries obediently following the US. He felt that the Olympics were used to make a political point by Carter.

**John Walker (Olympic 1800m Champion)**

When asked his reaction to the withdrawal, Walker said "Of course I am disappointed but they had no choice, I only wish they had made that decision a month ago. Obviously the NZ Amateur Athletic Association has been manipulated - manipulated by the Government, the press and the public - but it was a move they had to make. I am sorry my name as Olympic champion has had to end like this... I feel hurt as sorry for those who had sacrificed so much for what any will have been a once in a lifetime opportunity. I was in a situation where I had people wanting me to pull out of the team and then saying that if I did, the rest would follow. It was not up to me to dictate what should have happened..."



**Karen Page (Pentathlon)**

Perhaps the most disappointed of the three New Zealand athletes who had come to North America for their final preparations was 20 year-old pentathlon novice Karen Page, of Auckland. A late addition to the team after going to Australia to try to qualify, she said from Canada: "I had double stent to send all alone. It was only this week, after the association's second vote, that I had begun to believe we were really going. Now it has all gone down the drain... I don't think I'll stick around for another 4 years," she said.

**Tay Brook (Swimming)**

It is a sad sporting fact that the 33 athletes selected for the 1980 Moscow Olympics who never attended this or any other Olympic Games can never be called true Olympians simply because we never competed. However, after 21 years, official recognition of our place in New Zealand's proud Olympic history supports the truth that we were good enough to be Olympic athletes and after all the disappointment in 1980 and ever since, this indisputable fact is really all that matters.



Figure 3. Moscow exhibit panel 3. Athletes and administrators voice their personal perspectives.

Panel three was the most interesting. Entitled, 'Editorial, letters to the Editor', it contained a selection of eight affected 'voices' (including the Chef-de-mission, Tay Wilson, and Ron Palenski, New Zealand's only journalist at the Games). The panel was significant in that it evoked athletes' unique personal, and deeply emotive, responses; which, in many cases, endure today. 'Many athletes', the panel remarked, 'felt that they had become pawns in political struggle, many dealing with threats to their employment and harassment from some members of the public'. By foregrounding athletes' voices', the panel encouraged the audience to consider the boycott not only as a distant event, but rather, as a poignant moment that had far reaching consequences for athletes' lives and their future sporting performances. 'The people

that were really deprived were the athletes', the panel notes, 'although alternate competition was offered around the world, athletes were forced to miss out on the pinnacle of their sport career competing at the Olympic Game. The boycott's only achievement was to make athletes suffer'. To reiterate the longevity of the hurt and suffering caused, the panel also contained athletes' contemporary reflections. 'I had doubts about us going all along', pentathlete Karen Page noted, '...now it has all gone down the drain'.

'Deep in my heart I know that the Moscow boycott wrecked my athletic career', athlete Mike Parker wrote, '...it put a chink in my resolve; my commitment to succeed'. As a result of the Moscow fiasco, athlete Kim Robertson mourned, 'I became disenchanting with the buzz that I used to get from running in the black singlet and never really had the same spring in my step'. 'It is a sad sporting fact that the 33 athletes selected for the 1980 Moscow Olympic who never attended this or any other Olympic Game can never be called true Olympians simply because we never competed', rower Tony Brook opined: 'we were good enough to be Olympic athletes and after all the disappointment in 1980 and ever since, this indisputable fact is really all that matters'. The IOC member to New Zealand, Lance Cross, also received his share of condemnation. The highly emotive reflections were continued throughout the exhibit. By highlighting tensions between athletes, their respective administrations, and NZOCGA, the panel raised salient questions about the authority, autonomy, diplomacy and power of sport organizations. All of these remain pertinent issues as the organizations negotiate their identities and work in the present. More so than this, the panel was the cornerstone of NZOC's efforts to enable these affected athletes to tell their story. It was a space – and it would seem a much needed place – for athletes to share their emotional responses, to acknowledge the wrongs done and the hurt caused and forge a new historical narrative.

In keeping with the exhibit's intention to honour athletes and their lost opportunities, Panels Four and Five essentially read as memorial rolls (See figure 4 and figure 5). Panel Four listed the entire team of 99 athletes, plus 42 official and support staff, who were selected to attend the Moscow Olympic Games. Panel Five provided a summary of results, events and key moments of the Moscow Olympic Games. Most significant on this panel, un-missable under the heading 'BROKEN DREAMS! Moscow NO! Olympics Never! For 33 Athletes', was the list of athletes who were selected but never got the chance to compete in another Olympic Games. Despite NZOC's developing interest in its own history, and several publications on the country's Olympic history, this was the first time these athletes had been officially acknowledged. Many of these 'forgotten' athletes' experiences at the time and recollections since were included in the exhibits accompanying compilation. This panel, like its counterparts, also included a few photos of athletes who competed and a number of cartoons lampooning the political overtones of the Games and, specifically, the New Zealand government's hard line tactics.

In and of itself, the exhibit would stand as a provocative and poignant display; unique in its ability to traverse tricky terrain and cultivate critical discussion about the organization and this less than enamoured moment in its history. Although such considerate reflection has not typically been a characteristic of the organization, the exhibit showed that NZOC can confront its darkest days and deal with the consequences of the associated historical discourse in the present. But, just designing an exhibit and hosting a launch was not enough. To reiterate the organization's commitment to celebrating all aspects of its Olympic histories, and show renewed respect toward disenfranchised athletes, NZOC combined the exhibit launch with a thirtieth anniversary reunion event. NZOC invited all of the selected athletes and officials (or their next of kin).

In addition, some of its current executive members, key stakeholders, media, and government representatives were also invited. It was at this event that NZOC, on behalf of the current New Zealand government, issued a brief empathetic statement to the affected parties. Below, NZOC's empathetic address is considered within the context of the contemporary apologetic aeon. In addition, the suggestion is made that NZOC's 'newly' discovered empathetic character – as evidenced in the *Return to Moscow* events and related creation of a pluralistic historical narrative – demonstrates a refreshing change in public historiography.



**Moscow Olympic Team  
Announced**

15 April 1980  
The team of 99 athletes to compete at the Olympic games in Moscow was announced today by the NZOIA. There are several surprises but it is a strong team with a number of promising athletes amongst them.

**ARCHERY**

Kevin Fairhall

Garry Wright

**ATLETISMO**

Bob Simon - 5000m

Mike O'Rourke - Javelin

Kevin Pease - Pentathlon

Mike Parker - 800m Road Walk

Steve Quirk - 10,000m

Kia Robertson - 400m

Kevin Ryan - Marathon

John Walker - 1500m

**CANOEING**

Don Patterson - K1 500 & 1000

Alan Thompson - K2 500 & 1000

Graff Walker - K2 500 & 1000

**CYCLING**

Kevin Hinckell - Road Race & Team Pursuit

Stephen Cox - Road Race

Anthony Cliff - Line Race Trial

Vern Humeau - Road Race

Eric Macdonald - Ice Sprint & Team Pursuit

Grosven Miller - Team Pursuit

Miss Richards - Individual Pursuit & Team Pursuit

John Smart - Road Race

**SKIING**

Ann Ferguson - 2x Springboard

Steve Todd - 3 day Event

**SWIMMING**

Wendie Bell - Individual Free

**SWIMMING**

Emma Davis - Individual

**SHOOTING**

Paul Anderson

Jeff Armstrong

George Cameron

John Dale

Greg Dawson

Jeff Gibson

Tony Brown

Trevor Lawrence

Barry Webster

Colwyn Walker

Maurice Wargart

Alan McIntyre

Peter Wilmsham

Arthur Puckle

Roscoe Pikel

Graham Elliot

**ROCKY (HOCKEY)**

Pat Burrows

Christine Berry

Don Cameron

Martina Gray

Shirley Hall

Allison King

Barbara Klammann

Barbara Knappe

Jennifer McDonald

Don McLean

Karen Thomas

Lesley Greenleaf

Janice Bell

Judith Phillips

Gail Redburn

Edith Weber

**TABLE TENNIS**

David Clark

Bill Vincent

**WINDSURFING**

Brian Smith

**BOXING**

Ian Roberts - Cuslow Four

Anthony Brook - Cuslow Four

Alan Cotter - Eight

Stephen Tomblin - Reserve

Viv Hargr - Cuslow Four

Duncan Hillard - Cuslow Four

Peter James - Eight

Greg Johnston - Eight

The Logan - Eight

Burrie Macdonell - Cuslow Four

Grant Madley - Eight

Conrad Robertson - Eight

Robert Robinson - Eight

Dave Rodger - Cuslow Four

Anthony Russell - Cuslow Four

Mike Steiner - Cuslow Four

Ivan DeWilde - Eight

Keith Trank - Cuslow Four

Timothy Wilson - Eight

**SAIHING**

John Hilder - Flying Dolphins

Richard Jordan - Team Cuslow

Tom Dodson - Free

John Jones - 470 Cuslow

Murray Jones - 470

Andree Knowles - 470

Don Harvey - 470 Cuslow

Murray Ross - Flying Dolphins

Don Sellers - Torneo

Geoff Day - Torneo

**SHOOTING**

Don Hollinger - Smallbore Rifle

John Smith - Smallbore Rifle

Wayne Williams - Running Deer

John Westley - Clay Target, Short

**SWIMMING**

Geary Harding - Backstroke 100 & 200

Malcolm Jones - Backstroke 100 & 200

Robinson Purvis - Freestyle 200 & 400

Wendie Bell - Backstroke 100 & 200

Paul Ross - Butterfly 100 & 200

**WINDSURFING**

Bruce Barrett

**OLYMPIC GAMES  
TEAM OFFICIALS**

The Moscow Games Team officials have also been announced. The team officials total 48 in number and is made up of the following:

**Officials**

- Ray Wilson - Chief de Mission
- Brian Brown - Assistant Chief de Mission
- Grosven Greenhill - Director of Medical Services
- Richard Jackson - Women's Manager
- Bill Marshall - Assistant Director of Medical Services
- Mark Grant - Head Physiotherapist
- Don Ede - Physiotherapist
- Peter Steiner - Physiotherapist

**Section Managers & Coaches**

- ARCHERY**
  - Charles Haddleton
  - Reinde Steiner (women)
- ATLETISMO**
  - Ann Jelley
  - Denise Treavor (women)
- CANOEING**
  - Russell Howson
  - John Grant (men/women/women)
- CYCLING**
  - Gordon Sharratt
  - Wayne Thorpe (men/women)
  - Jim Chantley (road/women)
  - Richard Tomblin (road/women)
- ROCKY (HOCKEY)**
  - John Goss
  - Don Cameron (women)
- TABLE TENNIS**
  - Kevin Lusk
  - Robert Robinson (women)
- SHOOTING**
  - Erin Turner (women)
  - Brian Maxwell (men's/women)
  - Gladye O'Brien (women)
  - Shirley Biddy (women's/women)
- TABLE TENNIS**
  - John Clarke
- SAIHING**
  - Colin Green
  - Richard Douglas (backstroke/interceptor)
  - Harry Wilson (coach - mixed four)
  - Patricia McQueen (women - cuslow four)
  - The Bell (women - eight)
  - Miss Brown (transport Director/backstroke)
- SHOOTING**
  - Don Stewart
- SWIMMING**
  - Marlene Tomkinson
  - Anthony Keenan (women)
- SAIHING**
  - Peter Mander
  - Chris Dawson (backstroke)
  - Ray Dawson (women)
  - Kerry Kingham (interceptor)



Figure 4. Moscow exhibit panel 4. The announcement of the Olympic team

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### Team to Moscow

After all the withdrawals, eventually all that was left were 3 canoeing competitors, and 1 modern pentathlete. In the end, only four New Zealand athletes competed at the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. The team was made up of two sports:

**Canoeing**  
 Ian Ferguson    K1 500, K1 1000  
 Alan Thompson    K2 500, K2 1000  
 Geoff Walker    K2 500, K2 1000

**Modern Pentathlon**  
 Brian South

The athletes were accompanied by a group of four officials:  
 Chief de Mission    **Ray Wilson**  
 Medical    **Gwenie Campbell**  
 Canoeing    **John Smart**  
 Modern Pentathlon    **John Clarke**



### Alternative Competition

The Minister of Sport and Recreation, Mr. Hight formed a committee for arranging alternative competition, and NZOC's deputy chairman Mr. Dutton was invited to join. However, he left the committee quickly when he found out that all the NZOC sponsors had been approached for their funds to be used for alternative games.



### Games Team Results

Final results from Moscow for the four competitors who defied the boycott and competed at these ill-fated Games.

**Canoeing**  
 Ian Ferguson    7<sup>th</sup>  
                          K1 500  
                          K1 1000    8<sup>th</sup>  
 Alan Thompson & Geoff Walker    4<sup>th</sup> (Grand final)  
                          K2 500  
                          K2 1000    DNC

**Modern Pentathlon**  
 Brian South    47<sup>th</sup>



**Notes about the 1980 Moscow Olympic Team**

- Ninety nine athletes were selected.
- New Zealand was to compete in 18 sports.
- Ninety five athletes withdrew from the team.
- Four athletes competed at Moscow.
- Sixty six of the selected athletes competed at Moscow or another Olympic.
- Thirty three of the team did not compete at any other Olympic Games.

**Highlights - 1980 Moscow Olympic Games**

- Soviet gymnast Aleksandr Dityatin won a medal in each of the eight gymnasium events, including three titles.
- Vladimir Salnikov (USSR) won three gold medals in the swimming pool. His time in the 1500 m freestyle was the first below 15 minutes.
- Belarussian Vladimir Partisevich of the USSR won 3 gold medals in canoeing. Hindupian Mirka Yeflor won the 5000 m and 10,000m double, emulating Loana Viner's 1976 performance.
- West-German Christlof of East Germany won his second consecutive mountain gold.
- Women's field hockey was an Olympic sport for the first time. However, due to the boycott, only the Soviet team was planning to compete. The team from Elizabeth was invited just a week before the start of the Games, but nevertheless managed to win the nation's first gold medal.
- East Germany dominated rowing: they won eleven of the fourteen available titles.
- Teddie Stevenson of Cuba became the first boxer to win three consecutive Olympic titles.

### BROKEN DREAMS!

#### Moscow No! Olympics Never! For 33 Athletes.

The following thirty three athletes were selected to represent New Zealand at an Olympic Games for the first time. These athletes were withdrawn from this 1980 Moscow Olympic Games Team by their National Sporting Organisation and they were never selected to compete at another Olympic Games.

Pat Barwick	Hockey
Christine Berry	Hockey
Kevin Blackwell	Cycling
Anthony Brook	Rowing
David Clark	Judo
Alan Cotter	Rowing
Rowena Davis	Gymnastics
Richard Dodson	Sailing
Stephen Donaldson	Rowing
Sue Emerson	Hockey
Jeff Gibson	Hockey
Marianne Gray	Hockey
Allana Hiba	Hockey
Duncan Holland	Rowing
Peter Jansen	Rowing
Melanie Jones	Swimming
Andrew Knowles	Sailing
Eric Mackenzie	Cycling
Karen Thomas	Hockey
Janice Neil	Hockey
Karen Page	Athletics
Mike Parker	Athletics
Judith Phillips	Hockey
Kim Robertson	Athletics
Robert Robinson	Rowing
Gail Rodbourn	Hockey
Paul Rowe	Swimming
Anthony Russell	Rowing
John Scott	Shooting
Gerald Sly	Sailing
Jack Swart	Cycling
Edith Weber	Hockey
Wayne Williams	Shooting
Garry Wright	Archery

**Sources**

- Olympic Museum Wellington Collection
- Eric South Cartoons
- Seville Lodge Cartoons
- National Daily Newspapers
- Moscow Team Members and Officials



Figure 5. Moscow exhibit panel 5. Lost opportunities.

### The Aeon of 'Apology'

NZOC's intentions to atone for their Soviet sporting slip-up (that is, arguably not supporting athletes as well as was expected and not taking a harder line with national sport bodies who denied athletes an Olympic place) are laudable. However, historically inspired, politically motivated, public apologies are not particularly novel. The apologetic aeon, it seems, has long since arrived (for a cogent analysis see Gibney, Howard-Hassmann, Coicaud, & Steiner, 2008). As Howard-Hassman and Gibney explain, 'we live in an age and a time that seeks to establish the political truth' (2008: 1). Moreover, they continue, there now seems to be (especially in the West) 'universal recognition that a society will not be able to successfully pass into the future until it somehow deals with its demons from the past' (2008: 1). Such thinking has exacerbated, and arguably expedited, a proliferation of apologies, and/or empathetic statements, around the globe. The intensification of apologizing has been borne out of the various Truth Commissions of the early 1990s, which sought answers to, and accountability for, apartheid oppression and violence toward indigenous South Africans in that country and its neighbouring states (Brooks 1999; Barkan 2000; Torpey 2003; 2006; Lazare 2004; Howard-Hassman and Gibney 2008). Yet, since then, the quest for apologies has been motivated by, and encourages, other social groups. These have included other indigenous groups seeking compensation for colonial repression (for example, in New Zealand, Australia, United States and the United Kingdom), civil rights advocates wanting acknowledgements for past human suffering (for example, ethnic migrant abuse, psychiatric patients denied appropriate care, or slavery) and members of religious groups (like the Catholic Church) who have sought accountability from their leaders for various spiritual, racial, gender, sexually-related offences. There are, to note, also the innumerable contemporary apologies for corporate malfeasance (Latif 2001; Patel and Reinsch 2002).

Irrespective of the reasons, public apologies have become the *modus operandi*, and, in some instances, the prerequisite, for individuals and groups wishing to be seen as socially responsible and accountable. Although 'at first glance, apologies seem so simple and straightforward', Tavuchis reminds us, they 'constitute strategic instances that illuminate complex social processes and the intricacies of moral commitments' (1991: 3–4, 5). But, what constitutes an apology? Thompson suggests that, an 'official apology is by no means an uncontroversial or universally accepted practice' (2008: 31). In essence, and drawing on the work of Austin (1962) and Tavuchis (1991), Thompson writes, 'an apology is a speech act – that is an action performed by an appropriate person saying appropriate words on an appropriate occasion' (2008: 32). Extending this to its more popular public usage today, Thompson proffers further that 'a political apology is an official apology given by a representative of state, corporation, or other organized group to victims or descendants of victims, for injustices committed by the group's officials or members' (2008: 31). For Thompson, not just any words will do, and the legitimacy of an apology is contingent on whether it meets several criteria. These quite subjective criteria essentially focus on whether the apology is meaningful, necessary, appropriate, adequate and has some relation to reparative justice.

To a degree, it may be possible to concur with Thompson's general requirements of an apology. An apology is invariably a nuanced, complicated, multifarious term engendering self-exposure, remembering, defence, restitution, reconciliation, acknowledgement, embrace, acceptance, an assuaging of guilt, remorse, reflection, among many other qualities and dimensions, not least of all is regret. However, an apology should be also underpinned by some discernable element of empathy and ethical concern (which, in my opinion, does not always necessitate the precise word 'sorry'). Moreover, apologies should invariably not only be characterized by the intention, nature, and manner of their delivery, but also by how they are received, acknowledged and eventually accepted (or rejected). Thus, in the case of NZOC, only the athletes and other affected parties can validate the success of their apologetic endeavours.

The apologetic aeon can be understood as a consequence of 'the new international emphasis on morality' (Barkan 2000: xvii), in which cultural, social and political institutions have sought to assuage historical guilt, appease parties in the present and generate more harmonious relationships for the future. In this respect, the ethos, characteristics and ethical dimensions of apologies bear many similarities to the museum industry's paradigm shift. Indeed, apologies –

or at least prophetic and empathetic public addresses – are part of progressive museological thinking. Both museums and apologists are, in Howard-Hassman and Gibney's opinion, players in the emergence of a 'new politics of recognition of 'others', of minorities' (2008: 4). A fundamental component of this new politics is the importance placed on social recognition and responsibility; specifically this has involved institutions, individuals and groups facing their demons by acknowledging their historical wrongs. In addition, this neo-politics necessitates apologizers allowing the disfranchised a forum to be heard, acknowledged, and respected. NZOC's *Return to Moscow* showed attentiveness toward this neo-politics.

NZOC's 'apology' began with an address by Mike Stanley, the organization's current President. Stanley was also a former rower, and one of the 99 athletes selected for the 1980 Moscow Olympic Team. Stanley's empathetic statement – which essentially, and perhaps oddly, constitutes also an apology to himself – was as follows (emphasis in the original speech kept):

I, on behalf of the NZOC, and as a team mate of the 1980 Olympic team, thank you very much for joining us this evening. It's not a reunion, it's a union. Many people I have already met this evening I have met for the very first time. I guess this all talks to the sense of something that we missed as a group of people, that we haven't had the opportunity to share the camaraderie of being in an Olympic team that went onto the field of play together.

That we weren't able to share that opportunity together, I guess I can, as the current NZOC President, *express this organisation's regret that that didn't happen*. That the opportunity for you to represent your nation, particularly for the 33 who never got to go to the Games, that that opportunity was taken away from you; *it is deeply regrettable*. There were a lot of reasons behind it of course. The times were complex. It was in the heart of the cold war. John [Macbeth] has reminded us who the Prime Minister was at the time; a slightly domineering man who always seem to get his own way, for a little while at least. And unfortunately, the history of boycotts that seemed to tar that time. *And I guess we can look to ourselves as victims of that*. But I sense that in this room tonight, *that there is a lot of resolution we have all done. What I sense is a reconciliation of those feelings...that this caused a great deal of distress and anger*.

I hope now that we meet completely as equals, and *highly valued members of this Olympic family*; and certainly you are. *Tonight is our attempt to be able to recognise you as very, very, important, and as I said, highly valued members of that family*.

It [NZOC] is a very different organisation today as it was back in the days of 1980, which were largely volunteers. It is now very much a professional operation whose primary focus is to ensure that our athletes get to the Games in the very best possible shape that they can. *And, that they understand the values of the Olympic movement and the inspirational example of our athletes who represented us*, and who strive to be the very best that they can be. And I mean that in the widest inclusive sense. *All of you are included in this Olympic family*.

Stanley's statement was then followed by a letter from Murray McCully, the National Government's Minister of Sport and Recreation. The letter, detailed below, was read by then NZOC Secretary General, Barry Maister, who adamantly pointed out that he was 'not a member of the Government, nor an apologist for it'.

Dear Moscow Olympic Games team members, I would like to pass on my sincere apologies for not being with you tonight.<sup>1</sup> Regrettably my foreign affairs duties prevent me from being there with you to recognise this important occasion, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1980 Moscow team.

The opportunity to represent your country at an Olympic Games is the pinnacle of any athletes' career. To have had this denied to you due to circumstances beyond your control will have had a hugely damaging impact on your sporting careers. Sadly, that has been compounded by the failure to formally acknowledge the significant achievement of having been selected as a member of the New Zealand Olympic team and all that that entails. In this regard I applaud and thank the Olympians club of New Zealand and the New Zealand Olympic Committee for recognising the need for such an occasion and for organising this important event. As Minister of Sport and recreation, and on behalf of the Government, I wish to acknowledge your selection in the Moscow Olympic team. For too long your achievement in being selected for the team has not been formally celebrated, nor has there been appropriate recognition of this personal impact of not being able to attend the Moscow Games. I hope tonight goes some way to addressing this for you all.

Once again I apologise for not being there with you tonight. I hope you have a most enjoyable evening.

Hon. Murray McCully.

In both the apology and exhibit, the organization tried to convey its role in, and regrets about, athletes' non-selections (whether or not this can be attributed to their action or inactions). More significant than this, NZOC created an opportunity for the voices, thoughts, experiences and emotions of the affected, and largely forgotten athletes, to be heard. In so doing, this may have been a profound moment for NZOC; an occasion that enabled athletes to assert, and in addition to positive and ambivalent thoughts, their condemnation, disappointment, disapproval, frustration, hurt and anger.

By recounting their trials and tribulations, NZOC and its athletes were able to create a collective, and deeply personal, narrative. In foregrounding athletes' voices and making a space for contrition, absolution, reconciliation, affected parties were collaboratively able, in Howard-Hassman and Gibney's opinion, to generate a new 'common historical narrative, a national story that brings all together in an acknowledgement of past wrongs' (2008: 4–5). As such, it might be possible to see that NZOC's *Return to Moscow* was invariably a means to restore social harmony; to, as Thompson writes, re-establish 'good feelings and trusting relationships' (2008: 33). 'This is a significant function', journalist and master of ceremony, John MacBeth announced, 'because it brings together as a team a group of individuals who, because of circumstances, never got together as a group ... so here we are together as a team for the first time'. More so than this, he continued, 'after all the athletes who represented New Zealand at other Olympic games were acknowledged last year, I think this fills a big gap, an obvious gap, and was something that needed to be done'.

NZOC's efforts can also be read with some scepticism. Indeed, as Howard-Hassman and Gibney warn, 'states and private actors now offer apologies to groups and individuals in the hope that they can thereby "close" the memory of an incident' (2008: 5). Essentially, once remembered, there is closure, and it might be argued, forgetting. This may be the case but, given their continued interest in their own histories and investments in better athlete relations, it does not seem the case that NZOC was after such closure. Rather, this was a calculated, yet thoughtfully considered, exercise in social responsibility and historical revision. While the boycotts of 1980, and also those of 1976 and 1984, haunt Olympic histories, the occasion has remained something of a footnote in New Zealand's Olympic stories. Previous New Zealand Olympic histories (for example, Palenski and Maddaford 1983; Palenski and Romanos 2000; Romanos 2008) also afford little space to the complexity of the issue or its prolonged influence on athlete lives and experiences, or for that matter, their desire for recognition from, and a better relationship with, their sporting bodies and national Olympic committee. As Howard-Hassman and Gibney might say of NZOC's efforts, showing such empathy, and allowing apologies to be accepted, is a way to relieve victims' suffering. A consequence of which, they add, is that 'both sides will be able to engage in collective reconstruction of social, political, and personal

relations' (Howard-Hassman and Gibney 2008: 4).

It is easy to critique apologies; least of all on the pretext that they are superficial and meaningless gestures made by leaders, groups, and individuals who have no intention of avoiding similar acts in the future. In order to understand if apologies are 'meant to erase real injustices from public memory and exculpate the perpetrators', say Howard-Hassman and Gibney (2008: 8), 'we must consider whether the politics of an apology is not merely a cynical type of symbolic politics'. NZOC's apology could reasonably be understood as a symbolic, and even cynical action. Indeed, in its 100-year history the organization has shown considerable inconsistency and indecision in dealing with political challenges and pressures. Accordingly, if similar circumstances present themselves in the future NZOC's reactions could, arguably, still be the same. However, on the other hand, 'to neglect the historical record is to do violence to this identity and thus to the community that it sustains', Waldron reminds us, 'and since communities help generate a deeper sense of identity for the individuals they comprise, neglecting or expunging the historical record is a way of undermining and insulting individuals as well' (1992: 6, cited in Thompson 2008: 33). NZOC's efforts – which may be read in a number of ways, and, potentially criticized as 'too little, too late' – were, however, still necessary and certainly welcomed.

To their credit, NZOC is one of few sport bodies to have broached the issue of apology. In sport, not many national or international organizations, least of all Olympic committees, have felt the need to apologize; either for the own actions or inactions, or on behalf of external influences. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is particularly notorious for avoiding apologies – despite frequent calls to do so. For example, the IOC has been lobbied to issue an apology to 1968 Olympic medallists, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who were stripped of their medals as a result of their infamous podium protest. While the IOC's renowned museum in Lausanne has recently shown some ability to think about the philosophical and moral dimensions of sport (for example, with its recent exhibits on sporting heroes and 'champions of the mind'), they have not yet been bold enough to tackle controversial political issues to any significant degree.

One notable exception to the anti-apology ethos of sport administrators occurred recently and relates to the same period as the Moscow Olympic Games. In May 2010, and importantly prior to FIFA Football World Cup in South Africa, the South African Minister for Sport, Reverend Makhenkisi Stofile, apologized on behalf of the country's government for its part in the exclusion of Māori rugby players from its international competitions during the apartheid era. Stofile also strongly urged the New Zealand Rugby Board (NZRU) to apologize to affected players. The incident caused heated debate in New Zealand and, in particular, resulted in a series of tense and terse exchanges between the NZRU and Māori Rugby Board (MRB). The NZRU eventually apologized, though the statement was not unanimously backed by the MRB who felt the move be an unfair condemnation of past Māori administrators (Dickison & Gay, 2010). However, as significant as the occasion was, and as fervent as these contemporary debates have been, neither the Rugby Museum or National Hall of Fame and Sport Museum in New Zealand, or the World Rugby Museum in Twickenham (arguably three of the most important repositories for the sport's histories) have followed up by developing critically-orientated, reflexive, exhibits.

The apologies described above, all classify as diplomatic acts in the sense that they are politically orchestrated attempts to remember and forgive (and potentially forget), are orientated toward smoothing past injustices and advocating racial, political, social reconciliation. Apologies serve, in Bilder's opinion (2008), as an effective remedy for soothing international relations; and, in NZOC's case, the internal frictions that occur as a consequence of fraught international politics. For NZOC, the apology was not intentionally diplomatic, but given that it spoke to/addressed a particular political relationship and set of international diplomatic events, it would be erroneous to divorce the event/exhibit from its strong political undertones or diplomatic consequences. Indeed, government representatives were either present and/or acknowledged, and a representative of the Russian embassy was also in attendance. However, while NZOC may have been merely trying to gather affected parties and stakeholders together in an appropriate place, at an appropriate time, to say the appropriate words, commentators such as Bilder remain sceptical of such politically driven apologies. When individuals, groups,

organizations and governments apologize for long-past historical injustices, he suggests, 'these apologies are often worded primarily as expressions of regret rather than as a genuine admission of fault and responsibility and are rarely coupled to commitments to effective repatriation' (Bilder 2008: 27).

It is critical to note that, unlike the NZRU's highly-mediated and contrived statement, the NZOC did not exactly say sorry. In Thompson's opinion (2008), this omission detracts from the genuine nature of the apologetic act. NZOC did, however, in an event that attracted significant television and newspaper attention, express their deep regret. In NZOC's defence, and contra Thompson's argument, 'sorry' would have been unnecessary and indeed misplaced. Saying sorry may have led to the implication that NZOC was *the* body responsible for the boycott. This was, as we know, not the case at all – they were one party in the proverbial room. What they could have done, perhaps, was to apologize for not providing athletes with the moral support to go and for not supporting the decisions of national associations better. Yet, on the basis of informal discussions with individuals at the time, I am unsure as to whether this sort of apology would have been received any differently.

NZOC's empathetic statement was, certainly, an expression of regret. Moreover, they may not have accepted the incident was their direct fault, but they did show some level of responsibility as well as consideration for the effects of the boycott on individual athlete's lives. What is critical', to recall Tavuchis, 'is the very act of apology itself rather than the offering of material or symbolic restitution (we cannot undo what has been done, only erase it by seeking forgiveness)' (1991: 22). NZOC had other options. It could have done nothing. However, by not apologizing, by choosing not to partake in a critically reflexive dialogue, NZOC had, until recently, denied many Moscow athletes (especially those chosen but forgotten), a chance of a legitimate place in the contested narratives that are New Zealand's Olympic histories. This was what the apology sought to redress. In the final instance, the apology may be considered an appropriate way for NZOC to acknowledge the importance of the victims' understanding of the past. During the reunion Athletes informally remarked that the event and the apology were symbolic gestures that did go some way to appease the sourness of the past, the terse relationships between affected parties and contribute to the restoration of good feelings and positive relations. The injustices done through the boycott in 1980, conjointly with the attempts to right matters in 2010, are then, arguably, an important maker and marker of NZOC and athletes' collective historical identity. If we consider the efforts, empathy and exhibit as genuine, NZOC's *Return to Moscow* thus served to re-anchor the organization to its more colourful past. It also provided a means to curtail further criticism and condemnation, raise its public esteem and profile and contribute to its contemporary agendas of maintaining an athlete-centred identity and positive self-image.

## Conclusion

The decision to 'return to Moscow' amounted to an attempt to revisit an old wound in order to craft *anew* a more pluralistic historical narrative. It was an ambitious project for NZOC. The event and exhibit required the organization to undertake a level of critique and self-reflection that is uncommon and uncharacteristic within the sporting sector and Olympic organizations. The timing of the reunion and exhibition was certainly no coincidence. Motivated by more than just symbolic reunion revelry, NZOC's *Return to Moscow* was part of a broader well-conceived project of maintaining its contemporary public image and relevance to forge stronger athlete-relations and better align itself to its stakeholders. As such, NZOC's *Return to Moscow* was undeniably political. The politics of the present, as illustrated in the empathetic reflections and athletes' apology acceptance, are a part of NZOC's desires for a new historical narrative. In this sense, and with its emphasis on acknowledging the contentious, controversial, difficult and uncomfortable moments, there is considerable merit in NZOC's *Return to Moscow*. By foregrounding athletes' narratives, invoking emotive responses, and provoking discussion, the exhibit created what Phillips and Tinning might coin, a generative 'museum story space' (2011: 63); a space that enabled viewers not only to remember and reflect, but also to critique, judge and evaluate. Hence, with its ability to engage in a critical discourse about its past, NZOC, unlike other public sport history sites, has aimed to become 'an institution from which 'the public can

form a “reliable intuition” (Šola, 1987b: 9). According to Harrison (2005: 48), this intuitive understanding is ‘derived from the museum’s standing in a posture of argument, dialogue, or at the very least in conversation with society’.

This paper has aimed to draw some synergies and congruence between critical museum directions *and* the aeon of apologies. The challenges and difficulties associated with critical museum practice and public apologies came together productively in NZOC’s decision to address the events of 1980 and in their efforts to create a more inclusive historical narrative. By spending considerable time, money and energy to initiate social and historical debate by reflecting on their past practices and inactions, the organization, unlike its parent body or many other sport museums and halls elsewhere, demonstrated clear cognisance of their social responsibilities (and possibly, fallibility). It demonstrated recognition that NZOC’s histories have involved considerable contestation, controversy, and tension and showed understanding that its very authority and existence are contingent on the legitimacy afforded to it by its members. Showing historical sensibility and sensitivity (via empathetic exhibits which establish that desirable story-telling space), are fundamental in this continued relationship between NZOC and its members. NZOC want, in my opinion, to be seen as a modern, progressive, reflexive, athlete-sensitive, open-minded organization. Despite being 100 years old, this is not an antiquated organization, but one in touch with its histories in a number of ways. By revisiting Moscow, NZOC has shown promising ways for sports organizations and their members to deal with the imperfections and shortcomings of their own existence.

*Return to Moscow* is one small, yet significant, example of how sport museums and their affiliated organizations might better engage with the communities they aim to represent. As scholars attempting to foster constructive dialogue between university-based researchers and public industry, we should thus encourage reflexive efforts such as those attempted by NZOC. Our dialogue should be filled with ideas about how we can collectively, creatively, critically and considerately engage with historical colour and controversy. And, in so doing, turn our public projects to more affective, and perhaps exciting, ends.

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## Notes

- <sup>2</sup> A point of clarification needs to be made here. McCully’s apology for not attending the event in person should not be confused with the rest of his empathetic statement that follows. While McCully’s absence may have irked some members of the audience, I am more interested in the empathy expressed in the statement that follows. I accept, however, that for some McCully’s physical presence, or lack thereof, bears heavily on the authenticity of the apology and its inevitable impact.

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