Evolution of Olympic Sponsorship and Its Impact on the Olympic Movement

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Over the past Olympiads, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Olympic Organizing Committees (OCOGs), National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and in general the Olympic Movement have become increasingly dependent upon the significant financial support provided by corporate sponsors. The increased dependency of the Olympic Movement on corporate sponsorship is seen in the fact that 30% of the IOC’s budget and 40% of the United States Olympic Committee’s (USOC) funds are derived from sponsorship and licensing income. Olympic sponsorship involves not only financial support of the revenue, but provides products and services, technologies, expertise, and personnel to help in the organization of the Games. Sponsorship revenue for the 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympic Games accounted for 54% of all income. In addition, the Athens 2004 sponsorship program, with the combined support from domestic sponsors and The Olympic Partners (TOP), was the second largest source of revenue for the staging of the Olympic Games, providing approximately 23% of the Organizing Committee’s budget. As a result, in Greece, a nation of fewer than 11 million people, Athens 2004 sponsorship provided the highest-ever capital support of any domestic program in the history of the Olympic Games. The above-mentioned figures illustrate clearly the significant financial contribution of corporate sponsorship to the viability of the Olympic Movement and the continuation of the Olympic Games. The aim of this paper is to present financial data on the mutual beneficial relationship between the Olympic Movement and corporate sponsorship, as well as to discuss factors that may influence the nature of the Olympic Games due to their increased dependency on corporate sponsors. This discussion is conducted within the context of the IOC’s marketing framework and the growing literature devoted to Olympic sponsorship. Marketing strategies of Olympic sponsors at the 2006 Torino and 2008 Beijing Olympic Games will be also discussed. Of particular concern is the way sponsors have attempted to capitalize on the elements of the Olympic Movement and what precautionary measures the IOC has implemented to maintain the spirit and true value of the Olympic Games intact.

History of Olympic Sponsorship

The Olympic Games and sponsorship have had a long relationship, which was initiated with the ancient Olympic Games. Starting as an ancient Greek religious festival, where athletes competed in honor of Zeus, the Olympics have become one of the most celebrated and profitable media events in the world. In ancient Greece, cities would sponsor participant athletes by providing athletic facilities, equipment, and trainers. Although winners were only awarded a crown of wild olive leaves, they and their spon-
sor towns won huge renown. At the first modern Olympic Games, which were revived in Athens in 1896 as athletic Games, two thirds of the funds came from private donations. Interestingly, the largest expense of the Games, the refurbishment of the Panathinaiko Stadium, was fulfilled due to the financial contribution of a single benefactor. However, “revenue was also received from private companies, including Kodak, which bought advertising in a souvenir program.” It was not until the Stockholm Olympic Games in 1912 that companies would purchase official rights from the International Olympic Committee, such as rights to secure pictures and sell memorabilia. At the Amsterdam Games in 1928 the Organizing Committee granted the right for concessions to operate restaurants within the Olympic stadium, and precautionary measures were implemented to restrict program advertising and to ban advertising in and around the stadium.

The first financial surplus for an Olympic Organizing Committee was achieved at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games. Brown noted “the 1952 Games in Helsinki marked the first attempt at an international marketing program, with eleven companies from eleven countries giving value-in-kind support, such as food for athletes and flowers for medal winners.” Interestingly, the number of sponsors continued to grow in the following Olympiads, with 46 companies participating at the 1960 Rome Games and 250 companies at the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo. The participating number of corporate sponsors reached its highest peak at the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games with 628 sponsors and suppliers. Despite the extended number of corporate sponsors, the Games were a financial disaster for the Organizing Committee and the city of Montréal. The 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games were the signature Games in regards to a financial surplus and commercialization of the Games, as they marked a turning point in Olympic sponsorship. The first privately financed Games produced a surplus of $232.5 million in Los Angeles and introduced the concept of protecting the local population from cost overruns associated with a sporting event. The marketing program included 34 sponsors, 64 suppliers, and 65 licensees and sponsor hospitality centers were introduced for the first time. Through its marketing program the Organizing Committee provided the opportunity for corporate sponsors to strongly affiliate themselves with the Olympic Movement in a number of different ways. Marsano commented on the commercialization of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games:

There [were] plenty of opportunities for sale in the five-ring circus: television, commercials, product licensing, product exclusivity at the Games, team sponsorships, Olympic Movement sponsorships, award presentations, training center support, product endorsements, and almost anything a marketing person could devise.

The Olympic Partners (TOP)

Since the unexpected financial success of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) realized that corporate sponsors provided the Olympic Movement with substantial profits and sponsorship became an integral part of the Movement. Simultaneously, the interconnection and interdependence between Olympic Games and sponsorship was strongly enhanced.

The financial success of the Los Angeles Games was accompanied by major issues concerning over-commercialization and ambush marketing. One of the most important ambush marketing matters arose when Kodak ambushed Fuji film. Although Fuji was the official sponsor of the 1984 Games, many people were convinced that it was Kodak that was the official sponsor. Kodak was able to secure maximum media and on-site exposure by obtaining sponsorships with the United States Olympic
Committee and buying numerous television advertisements during the Olympic Games. By utilizing this effective promotional strategy Kodak successfully created the perception that the company was the official sponsor of the Games.\(^{13}\)

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<th>Table 1: Evolution of TOP Olympic Sponsors</th>
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<td><strong>TOP I</strong> Calgaray/Seoul</td>
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<td>Number of Clients</td>
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<td>Total Revenue (US $ million)</td>
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Due to the over-commercialization and the extended ambush or “parasite” marketing at the 1984 Los Angeles Games, the IOC introduced The Olympic Program (TOP) in 1985. Namely, the IOC established a marketing initiative “whereby a limited number of sponsors would receive special treatment and benefits on a worldwide basis while achieving product category exclusivity and protection for their Olympic sponsorship activities.”\(^{14}\) The original name of the program was changed to The Olympic Partners (TOP) in 1995. Brown noted that the change of the name reflected the nature of the relationship desired by the IOC between itself and the small number of multinational companies who are partners.\(^{15}\) Sponsorship has been defined as a business relationship between a provider of funds, resources or services, and an event or organization that offers in return some rights and an association that may be used for commercial advantage.\(^{16}\) Therefore, the IOC attempted through the TOP program to secure a stable and controlled revenue base, in order to maintain a successful and healthy relationship with its major corporate sponsors. In addition, the TOP program was one of the steps towards the implementation of a modernized funding process of the Olympic Movement. With the initiation of the TOP program, there was a dramatic increase in revenue throughout the five quadrenniums (see Table 1).

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<th>Table 2: Sponsorship Presence at US Olympic Games</th>
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<td><strong>1980</strong> Lake Placid</td>
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<td>Local Partners</td>
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<td>Licensees</td>
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<td>Sponsorship Revenue (US $)</td>
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<td>Licensing Revenue</td>
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<td>Total Partner Revenue</td>
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Source: IOC, Marketing Matters, 2/1 (June 2002)

The TOP program is the only sport-related marketing program in the world that provides complete category exclusivity worldwide while encompassing sponsorship of the event, the organizing body, and all participating teams.\(^{17}\) By initiating the product exclusivity for its partners the IOC was able to significantly reduce the overall number of sponsors by implementing quality over quantity of sponsors while increasing the revenues for the Olympic Movement (see Table 2). A reduction in the number of
corporate sponsors was considered as the one of the most important mechanisms for the IOC to restrict ambush marketing and to control the commercial aspects of the Olympic Games. The current TOP VI partners contributed an average of $80 million each in order to secure their four year exclusive rights to two Olympic Games, both winter and summer, as well as rights to sponsor Organizing Committees and all participating National Olympic Committees.

On the other hand, the Atlanta Organizing Committee was accused of extending the size of the national sponsor program and allowing an uncoordinated licensing program. The city of Atlanta and the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) tried to sell sponsorships during the 1996 Games in conflict with the IOC’s sponsorship program. As a result, IOC stated through its sponsorship program that future host cities would have to make commitments as far as curtailment of ambush marketing, protection of the Olympic image, and rights of the Olympic partners was concerned. Sponsorship is regarded as a mutual beneficial relationship. And the success of this relationship is based on the effective implementation and fulfillment of both property’s and sponsor’s objectives. Therefore, the IOC stated in the 2002 Marketing Report:

> The Olympic Family strives to ensure and enhance the value of Olympic sponsorship by diligently managing the partnership program, protecting the Olympic image and the rights of Olympic partners, and recognizing and communicating to a global audience the vital support that Olympic sponsors provide to the Movement, the Games, the athletes. Olympic partners have become fully integrated into the Olympic Movement, creating innovative programs that help to achieve corporate business objectives while supporting the Olympic Games and the Olympic athletes.\(^{18}\)

### Financial Contribution of Corporate Sponsors

**at the 2002 Salt Lake and 2004 Athens Olympic Games**

It is estimated that the Olympic image is the world’s most esteemed property, and Olympic sponsorship is the best-managed global brand marketing association program.\(^{19}\) The IOC reported that the TOP V program implemented in Salt Lake and Athens was the most successful Olympic marketing program from a revenue standpoint, and in regards to restriction of over-commercialization and ambush marketing. The IOC estimated that the TOP V program generated more than $650 million for the four-year period of 2001-2004, including the Salt Lake 2002 and Athens 2004 Games. Revenues from the TOP V program and the Olympic Properties of the United States (OPUS) partnership program accounted for approximately 54% of the total Olympic marketing revenue generation. Further, marketing programs related to Salt Lake 2002 generated a total $2.071 billion in revenue, the greatest ever in the Olympic Winter Games history.\(^{20}\) Approximately 67% of that amount was contributed to the Salt Lake Organizing Committee (SLOC) to support the staging of the Games. The remaining 33% of the total marketing revenue was distributed throughout the Olympic family (International Olympic Committee, United States Olympic Committee, International Federations, and Olympic Solidarity). The IOC stated “the success of Olympic marketing programs allowed the SLOC to far exceed the target revenue projections at the time of the Salt Lake City bid for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games.”\(^{21}\) Specifically, the SLOC’s $1.390 billion total share of Olympic marketing revenue exceeded the Organizing Committee’s total bid revenue target of $313.2 million by 87%. In addition, the TOP V program’s direct contribution to SLOC far surpassed the Organizing Committee’s original target of $50 million with $131.5 million; exceeding SLOC’s bid projection by 163%.\(^{22}\)
Similarly, Gerhard Heiberg, the Chairman of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) marketing commission, stated that “The Athens 2004 sponsorship program was an outstanding success. The grand national sponsors supported the staging of the Games, honored the history and heritage of Greece and shared the Olympic spirit with the world.” Interestingly, the IOC noted that the initial revenue target of $240 million from the Athens 2004 domestic sponsorship program was met two years before the Opening Ceremony. Furthermore, the Athens 2004 domestic sponsorship program exceeded initial targets by 57%, generating more than $360 million in domestic sponsorship of the Olympic Games and sponsorship of the Athens 2004 Olympic Torch Relay. Finally, the Athens 2004 sponsorship program with the combined support from domestic sponsors and the TOP partners was the second largest source of revenue for the staging of the Olympic Games, providing 23% of the Organizing Committee’s balanced budget. The Athens Organizing Committee limited the sponsorship program to a maximum of 40 partners. The program ultimately included 23 sponsors across three tiers. The IOC stated through its official marketing report:

> Olympic sponsors help the Olympic athletes to achieve their goals and enjoy their time at the Games amid the challenges of preparing for and competing in the most significant event of their lives. In making these contributions, Athens 2004 sponsors demonstrated their commitment to the Olympic ideals while leveraging the benefits of placing their products and services in the hands of the world’s most elite athletes.

**Olympic Sponsorship at the 2006 Torino and 2008 Beijing Olympic Games**

Current estimates of spending by TOP VI sponsors (Torino & Beijing) are $866 million with approximately 33% going to the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) and 17% to the Torino Organizing Committee (TOROC). The sponsorship approach of major corporations at the Winter Olympic Games in Italy seemed to vary based on the formidable challenges the 2006 Games presented. The first challenge was the time zones and delayed TV coverage to the United States market. Consequently, the United States TV ratings for the 2006 Torino Winter Olympic Games were the lowest in 20 years. With the continuing dynamics in media preference many Olympic faithful chose to access the Olympic coverage through alternative media. The 2006 Torino Opening Ceremonies attracted 244,575 visitors to the web site. This figure represented a 95% increase over the 2004 Summer Games in Athens. A record number of daily hits to the 2006 Olympic web site occurred on February 16th with over 50 million page views. While this falls short of the projected TV audience of 2 billion, the trend may signal a change for Olympic sponsors to extend their placement to additional sites.

During previous Olympic Games TV coverage produced superstars for a lifetime, yet with the fragmented media access points the Olympians of today may well prove to be very short-term stars. The Games have also encountered increasingly negative publicity as evidenced by various doping scandals among Olympic athletes. Specifically, during the 2006 Winter Games, the Austrian cross-country coach was suspended and an out-of-competition testing done on the Austrian team where blood-doping paraphernalia was found in the team residence at the Games. The much-touted US skier Bode Miller, who commented at a press conference that he skied better when he was intoxicated, subsequently failed to win a single Olympic medal. As a result, many Olympic sponsors prefer to focus their marketing dollars on the platforms created by the IOC and Games Organizing Committees instead of forming alliances with individual Olympic athletes.
Evolution of Olympic Sponsorship and Its Impact on the Olympic Movement

As fees for Olympic sponsors continue to rise dramatically, namely $80 to $100 million for a four-year sponsorship agreement with the IOC, corporations are becoming even more strategic in how they market their brands through the Olympics in first place. By integrating Olympic sponsorships into their global marketing strategy, corporations are able to ensure greater benefit from their investment.

Corporations are collectively set to invest more than $1 billion for sponsor rights leading to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Because the 2008 Olympics represent such a large and untapped Chinese market, corporations are fueled with high expectations regarding their investments. The totality of sponsorship revenues for Beijing will come not only from the TOP program, but from the organizing committee programs as well. BOCOG sponsors have reportedly paid as much as $100 million for access only to the 2008 Games and the Chinese National Olympic Committee and Team for the period 2004-2008. Led by German auto producer Volkswagen paying $100 million, BOCOG has also signed seven additional sponsors. Adidas has signed on as an official supplier for the BOCOG staff, but also secured rights to the Chinese team. Sandrine Zerbib, greater China head with Adidas, stated “What is most important for us, we believe, is that it will create a stronger bond with Chinese consumers and will help us accelerate our development in this market.” A similar market objective was expressed by United Parcel Systems (UPS) International President David Abney when signed up with BOCOG stating, “This sponsorship is another important step in strengthening our brand presence in one of the fastest growing markets in the world. Our goal is to be the leading global package delivery and logistics company to, from, and within China.”

Interestingly, the revenue attainable by the Olympic Organizing Committee has, for the first and probably last time, eclipsed that of the TOP level. The two factors creating this situation are the fact that the TOP program is full offering no opportunity for additional categories and the enormity of the Chinese market at 1.3 billion people.

The TOP VI sponsors are also interested in tapping into the Chinese consumer market. General manager of Coca-Cola’s Beijing Olympic project group noted that China offers amazing potential, with every person consuming on average 13 servings of the groups beverages per year, less than other world markets. Fellow TOP VI sponsor McDonald’s summarized the trend quite succinctly “any company that is in a global business has to pay attention to China.” McDonald’s is planning to nearly double its restaurants in China from 580 to 1000 by 2008, and has signed an individual sponsorship agreement with NBA star Yao Ming to drive the relationship. Parry stated, “Relationships are the most important thing when setting out to do business in China. You have to prove who you are and build your reputation up and be there for the long haul.” According to Kronick and Dome “the Beijing Olympics will not be about sport, it will be about creating a super brand called China.” It should be noted that while the Chinese market is huge, only 25% of consumers have the capacity to afford western goods and services.

However, there is a perpetual uncertainty among potential investors, especially because of the authoritarian government and the existing political climate in China. An additional obstacle and reservation for sponsors at the Beijing Games is a potentially cluttered and noisy marketing environment that is very likely to be created. For that reason, many companies like Visa have integrated a co-branded effort to their marketing strategies. The instability of some Asian markets, in comparison to Western markets, has led various United States and European based companies to implement co-branded efforts with Asian based companies. For instance, a partnership between Visa and global sponsor Samsung in the form of co-branded credit card was launched last March. This strategy will allow Olympic sponsors
to link back to Asian brands with special products, or prepaid programs that will provide United States and European companies to create the platform for acceptance at the Asian market.

Impact of Olympic Sponsorship

It is evident that protecting the Olympic image and the value of sponsorship for the Olympic partners are major concerns for the International Olympic Committee. As a result, the IOC’s marketing department has introduced a series of public relations campaigns with the main focus on raising awareness regarding the significant contribution of corporate sponsorship to the Olympic Movement. In addition to the public relations campaigns, the IOC has undertaken several market research studies in order to strengthen and promote the Olympic image and to understand attitudes and opinions towards the relationship between Olympic Games and corporate sponsorship. In the Barcelona 1992 Olympic Games, 79% of people in the United States, England, and Spain stated that the Olympic Games would not be viable without sponsorship. Furthermore, 86% stated that they were in favor of the Games being sponsored. Similar studies in 1996 found that one third of the respondents in a nine-country study suggested that their opinion of the sponsoring company was raised as a result of their Olympic sponsorship. In Sydney 2000, 34% of the spectators stated “sponsorship makes a valuable contribution to the Olympics and makes me feel proud about sponsors.” In the recent Winter Olympic Games in 2002, the IOC commissioned Sport Marketing Surveys (SMS) to conduct market research on-site with spectators, corporate guest, and media. According to the results of the study, “research results clearly illustrate that unprompted awareness of the Olympic sponsors was very high among Olympic spectators and media, and that all possessed a strong understanding of the importance of sponsorship to the Olympic Movement and the staging of the Games.” The results showed that 92% of the spectators agreed that “sponsors contribute greatly to the success of the Games,” 76% of the media agreed that they “welcome sponsorship support if the helps that Games to continue to be stages,” and 45% of spectators stated that they would be more likely to buy a company’s product or service as a result of them being an Olympic sponsor. Similar research studies in Athens 2004 Olympic Games depicted the positive attitude of spectators and media towards the support of corporate sponsorship to the Olympic Movement. In Sydney 2000, 34% of the spectators indicated “Sponsorship makes a valuable contribution to the Olympics and makes me feel proud about sponsors.”

In 2000, the International Olympic Committee conducted a research study in collaboration with a major Olympic sponsor and the Australian Tourist Commission (ATC). The IOC evaluated the attitudes of guests towards the Olympic brand. The sponsor evaluated the level of satisfaction expressed by its guests. Finally, the ATC examined pre- and post-Games travel patterns and the possibility for international visitors to return to Australia. Inevitably, the majority of the guests surveyed expressed a very high level of satisfaction in regards to hospitality issues and the organization of the Games. Most of the participants stated that sponsorship activities significantly affected their perception towards their Olympic experience in Sydney.

Olympic Sponsorship beyond Beijing

The IOC has awarded the Olympic Games through 2012. The Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) secured the rights to the 2010 Winter Games while London will host the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. Sponsors, both domestic and TOP VII partners, are beginning to line up. Five of the current TOP sponsors have extended through 2012 and Coca-Cola has renewed its sponsorship status through 2020. Bell-Canada bid $200 million to become the official telecommunications sponsor and
RBC Financial paid $110 for the banking services rights. At this early stage it is interesting to note that VANOC’s 2003 bid documents only projected a total of $200 million from all sources. The 2012 London Organizing Committee is projecting revenues of $750 million from TOP sponsors and $600 million from domestic partners. While the allure of 1.3 billion Chinese fades into Olympic history, Vancouver and London are positioned to attract tourists and their economic impact to comfortable and secure destinations. In Olympic tradition, leaders of these economies will attempt to lure business development through their day on the Olympic stage.

Conclusion

It is evident that the complicated marketing policies and management structures of the International Olympic Committee have evolved into one of the best-managed global brand marketing association programs in the world, characterized by sophisticated and effective marketing structures. Olympic Games have become one of the most large-scale and profitable global media events. Events associated with the Olympic Games have not only become great entertainment, occupation, and lifestyle, but solid business as well. The history of Olympic sponsorship has demonstrated the increased financial dependency of the Olympic Movement on corporate sponsors. Arguments have been raised about the escalating price for the TOP level sponsorships. An online 2005 poll with Marketing Magazine found that 67% of respondents thought that Olympic sponsorship was out of proportion to its marketing value. However, the authors believe that the best indicator is to watch where marketers put their money. Clearly, the pace of Olympic marketing and sponsorship has not slowed. However, a lingering question is whether the nature of the Games will be influenced and altered in the near future due to commercialization and the increased financial dependency of the Olympic Movement on sponsors. IOC President Jacques Rogge appears steadfast in his commitment to keep sponsor images off the field of play. Yet as the price increases so may the demands of the corporate sponsors.

Research studies conducted by the IOC have illustrated the significant impact of Olympic sponsorship on the spectators’ perceptions of the Games. However, most of the studies were conducted with Olympic sponsors’ guests as the primary participants of the studies. It is inevitable that these studies would project a highly positive perception of participants in regards to the value of Olympic sponsors to the viability of the Olympic Movement, since the results are published in the IOC’s official marketing reports.

Are the Olympic Games transforming into the biggest financial opportunity for sponsors to showcase their products and services through global media exposure instead of being the biggest celebration of humanity and sportsmanship? Critics have always charged that the Olympic Games are more about marketing and less about sport. Previous Summer Olympics, such as the 1996 Atlanta Games, have been criticized for over-the-top marketing and a carnival-like atmosphere as well as for being another advertising medium deluging Olympic fans. The reality is that sponsorship has become an integral part of the Olympic Movement, which involves an ongoing commitment by Olympic partners who need to find new ways to gain the maximum returns for their investment. Olympic sponsorship has indeed a dynamic nature, since sponsors significantly support the viability of the Olympic Movement and the continuation of the Olympic Games. The question is whether the organization and staging of a mega event as the Olympic Games would be feasible without the financial contribution of corporate sponsors. The answer is that the Games would not be feasible, since the cost of staging the Games has increased dramatically over the past decade. It is clear that the current situation favors a long-term
relationship between the IOC and a small number of sponsors. As Brown noted, “The IOC is placing more emphasis on promotion of the roles played by sponsors and on initiatives to ensure that sponsor exclusivity is preserved.” Unarguably, the IOC has achieved over the past decade, especially after the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, control of the commercial aspect of the Games by incorporating quality over quantity of corporate clients to the Olympic sponsorship program. However, the threat of ambush marketing and corruption scandals is always present. It would be interesting to see whether the IOC will continue to maintain its marketing and commercial control over Olympic partners based on the increased financial dependency of the Olympic Movement on corporate sponsorship. It is indeed a formidable challenge for the IOC to preserve the true essence of the Olympic Games by balancing terms such as sponsorship, return on investment, brand awareness, and benefits with Olympic ideals such as sportsmanship, human scale, noble competition, and solidarity. In a recent interview conducted by Sports Business Journal, Jacques Rogge was asked how he balances the Olympic ideals with commercialization. Rogge replied:

First, let me remind you that the games are the sole organization where there is no billboard- ing in the venues. There is no advertising on the bib or equipment or clothing of the athletes. That gives a kind of commercial-free environment. The second issue is that we say and we think that the support of the corporate world has led to the democratization of sport.

Olympic sponsors will continue to seek new ways to leverage benefits for their investment in the Olympics. It is the IOC’s critical role to continue affiliating with sponsors that do not simply create “noise,” but with those sponsors who create “meaning” and add true value to the overall Olympic experience. According to Kronick and Dome “Olympic sponsorship is a marathon, not a sprint.” Building relationship whether with the 1.3 billion people in China or with corporations and consumers in the developed economies of North America or Europe, epitomizes the objectives of Olympic Movement sponsors. The impact of Olympic sponsorship extends far beyond the IOC and a relative limited number of corporate sponsors and Olympic partners.

Considerable discussion has occurred within the IOC about changing the process by which the Games are awarded. Pundits at the IOC proclaim that awarding the Games (without a bidding process) to countries that are less economically developed will expand the Olympic ideals to a more global audience. However, one would be naïve to think that the corporations that grease the wheels of the Olympic machine would not have significant influence in those decisions. Previously noted statements from Coca-Cola about the Chinese market and the implied efforts of Volkswagen to secure automobile production and sales in China indicate that Olympic sponsorship appears to be more about the market than the Olympic Games. This could lead to a situation where the IOC would become a prisoner of its own success due to the increased dependency on the revenues from corporate partners. At what point do the Olympic Games become a traveling trade show to the world’s most lucrative markets where the entertainers are paid in medallions of gold, silver, and bronze?

The trend can already be seen in ticketing for the Games. For Torino, tickets to the Opening ceremony ranged from $250-850 US making it increasingly difficult for the average citizen to obtain Olympic Tickets. True there is an array of lower priced tickets, which have historically been available for less attractive sports. Unfortunately, tickets to more attractive sports are often secured by Olympic sponsors for use in corporate hospitality. Furthermore, the tickets frequently go unused as evidenced by the empty seats in lower tiers seen on the TV broadcasts of figure skating in the 2006 Games. Many true
Olympic fans were left literally out in the cold. The Olympic Games are apparently following other marketing trends moving from Business-to-Consumer (B-2-C) marketing strategies to Business-to-Business (B-2-B). However the IOC needs to carefully balance the needs of corporate sponsors with the passion for the Games residing in Olympic fans around the globe. A stated goal of the IOC is “To ensure the independent financial stability of the Olympic Movement and thereby to assist in the worldwide promotion of Olympism.” If the IOC does not attend to this balance, *Citius, Altius, Fortius* may well become the motto of the Olympic sponsors rather than that of the Olympic athletes.

**Endnotes**

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
22. Ibid.


Ibid.


J. Lee, “Marketing and Promotion of the Olympic Games,” Sport Marketing Quarterly, 8/3 (2005.)


IOC, 2006 Marketing Fact File.