

# EXCALIBUR INTERVIEW

With Bruce Kidd, on the politics of sport

Bruce Kidd is a marathon runner. He represented Canada in the 1964 Olympic Games held in Tokyo. A director of the central region of the Ontario Track and Field Association, Kidd has always been an outspoken commentator of the international sports scene.

Kidd has written extensively on the topic for publications such as the Globe and Mail, Weekend Magazine and Canadian Dimension, of which he is an associate editor.

Kidd spoke with Excalibur about recent controversies in international sports including the Montreal Olympics, the boycott against South Africa, the structure of the International Olympic Committee and the relationship of politics and sports in general.

By MICHAEL HOLLETT

**EXCALIBUR — We constantly hear that sports are being invaded by politics, that you can't separate the two. Some say it's not like the good old days. Is this a new phenomenon and if so why is it happening now?**

**KIDD —** It's certainly not a new phenomenon, in the modern period there have always been cases where decisions were motivated by factors outside the interests of sport itself. For example after both the First and Second World Wars Germany and Austria were prohibited from participating in the next Olympics because they were deemed to be the aggressors. After the Russian revolution the national Olympic committee for the Soviet Union was not recognized by the International Olympic Committee. Until the period after the Second World War when the Soviets were regarded as allies, they were out of the Olympics and did not participate.

I think you can look at politics in sport on two levels. On the first level I think all sportsmen generally would like to see sport organized by people who are directly involved in sport. It seems to me that this is a legitimate concern and if that's what people mean by keeping politics out of sport well that's something that certainly at first blush is a fairly important sentiment.

On the other hand we've got to realize that sport is closely involved with social life, it's not a world apart and it's not isolated, particularly when sport requires an enormous community investment. It's foolish to think that the society which finances sport will allow it to operate under conditions that are radically different than operate in other fields that society sponsors. And so that interface between the world of sport and the community at large is always wrought with tension when the two do not share the same ideologies, do not share similar aims.

It's unrealistic to think the two will never meet. If you talk in terms of Montreal and all the anger among a lot of community groups in that city about the Olympics, if sportsmen were surprised by that they were burying their heads in the sand. You cannot expect a community to have to bear the brunt of the costs and the hassle, and everything else around the Olympics to just simply provide them Carte Blanche for the athletes.

It seems to me the sports community has to be very sensitive to the needs and concerns of the community that we go to for support.

In terms of international politics, people who say politics and sport shouldn't mix are primarily rationalizing the status quo. It's the old business that by not doing anything we're being neutral. What we are doing is legitimizing the existing arrangements by a line that sport and politics do not mix. In the case of Black Africa what they're saying is don't raise politics, don't bring your anger about apartheid into the Olympic games. The effect of this attitude is to perpetuate apartheid sport, and perpetuate the relationships between sports governing bodies in Canada and New Zealand which have relationships with apartheid sport.

**EXCALIBUR — Do you consider legitimate the use of international sports as a forum for raising political issues, or as just an inevitable one?**

**KIDD —** I make a distinction. I think that international sport ought to be a place where issues involving sport are to be raised. If there is racism in sport it seems to me it is appropriate to raise that question at the Olympics, as has been the case in Montreal.

I'm not generally in favour of sport being used as a platform for issues outside of sport, and that is why I was upset about the actions of the PLO terrorists in Munich. That, it seems to me, is taking advantage of the sports arena for making a point that doesn't deal with power relationships inside of sport.

**EXCALIBUR — What type of body is the International Olympic Committee (IOC)? Is it political or something else?**

**KIDD —** One of the things you have got to realize is that the IOC which governs all Olympic sports, is a completely undemocratic body. It is self appointed, in that it appoints its own members to represent itself in the countries where the members happen to live rather than organizations within particular countries choosing their own representatives to sit on the IOC.

The IOC justifies its Olympian decision making as being free, aloof, detached from the nitty gritty world of politics, which also means the nitty gritty world of representative politics. So its unrepresentative in that respect. It's also unrepresentative in the fact that the people in the IOC come primarily from the west, and primarily from Western Europe. There are 132 national Olympic Committees in the world that are entitled to send athletes to the Olympic Games. There are 78 members of the IOC. Those 78 members come from 54 countries of which 38 could be considered European or western. Africa has 41 national Olympic committees, and there are five African members of the International Olympic Committee. If you have a representative view of world politics, the IOC is as unrepresentative a major decision making body as you can get.

There are also no women on the IOC. For years the Africans have been criticized for extra-parliamentary tactics, threatening boycotts to get their views across. One of the reasons they haven't gone through the proper channels is that they are way under-represented on the proper channels. Most of these people are very powerful people, they are Club of Rome type people, they're largely very successful industrialists, captains of industry, military leaders, and so on. They are men who can afford to pay their own way to a meeting in Tokyo, a meeting in Brussels, a meeting in Rome and so on.

Lord Killanin is the international president of Northern Electric. Count Beaumont, one of the people who was concerned about keeping Taiwan in the Olympics, happens to be international president of Michelin rubber that has huge rubber plantations in Malaysia.

**EXCALIBUR — What about the whole question of South Africa and sports? Do they use sports to legitimize their regime?**

**KIDD —** I think that all governments that are involved in sports see it as having a strong ideological effect. It's just the South African system is such a heinous one. They're not the only government that sees sport as serving an ideological purpose.

The United Nations has passed a number of resolutions condemning apartheid sport in South Africa and requiring all member states not to encourage, and in fact to actively discourage, sporting groups within their countries from participating in sporting relationships with South Africa. Because New Zealand is still publicly condoning sporting relations with South Africa many black countries are boycotting any



Bryan Johnson photo

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sporting event in which New Zealand actively takes part. This means that if the status quo position continues to the next Commonwealth Games in Edmonton in the summer of 1978, it means that we will either have an all white games, or we will have games without New Zealand, or we will have no games at all.

At the moment the New Zealand cabinet seems to be bitterly divided down the middle and you have different groups from within the cabinet issuing quite contradictory statements. So the whole thing is quite up in the air.

**EXCALIBUR — What is going to happen about the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton in 1978, will they take place?**

**KIDD —** Trudeau is regarded by the Africans as a friend because of Canada's official position against South Africa. And I understand Trudeau is busting his backside to bring the New Zealanders and the Africans together and to get the New Zealanders to adopt a position the Africans can accept, namely that while private individuals can go to South Africa, the government will not be seen as officially condoning it and will be seen to be officially opposing it. If he can pull that off I expect that the Commonwealth Games will come off and everyone will be involved. If not there are several very painful options. My own feeling is that if there's a continued boycott, the Games should be cancelled.

**EXCALIBUR — Will sport be served if the Commonwealth Games are cancelled?**

**KIDD —** Well sport won't be served by cancelling the Commonwealth Games, it would mean that a very valuable activity would go by the boards. But there are times when you have to stand up and be counted and this issue, which is a complex one is such an issue. Are you going to play with those people who publicly condone apartheid in sport, or do you support your friends who very reluctantly give up their own opportunity to compete because sport involves the idea of international brotherhood and they don't feel they can participate as long as their brothers in South Africa are being treated the way they are.

In one study I saw recently in a five year period from 1969 to 1974 although there are four times as many blacks as whites in South Africa, there was 120 times the money spent on white sport than on black sport. And leading black sportmen who raised these kinds of questions in South Africa have ended up in jail, one of them

was executed, others have been tortured, all of this is documented.

**EXCALIBUR — Would Canadian athletes act independently of government policy and do the channels exist for them to not participate in the Commonwealth Games if things remain the same?**

**KIDD —** It's hard to tell. Certainly people like myself would argue strongly. If Trudeau is unable to resolve the situation, and if the fiasco continues, it seems to me we have an obligation not to compete, to honour the boycott.

Obviously there would be people who would try to participate. One by-product, which is perhaps a cloud with a silver lining, is maybe people will more seriously talk about the societal implications of international sport. The Commonwealth Games are going to cost Canadians \$40 million, it seems to me that we as athletes have to be very sensitive to the concerns of the Canadian community.

If we are not sensitive to the needs of the community, the community will sometimes step in and act. And that was the case with Trudeau. The sporting groups were not sensitive to either the national community in Canada, or the world community.

**EXCALIBUR — On the issue of South Africa?**

**KIDD —** And on the issue of Taiwan. And so Trudeau stepped in. And it seems to me that in the area of racism in sport, if we do not show ourselves sensitive to this, then there is a very real danger that the government will step in, and we've got to be prepared to deal with the government on that basis. On this issue the government would be acting in a proper way. On other issues when they step in, they may not.

I don't want to leave the impression that athletes and sports people should automatically or necessarily support their government.

It seems to me that there will be issues on which athletes will differ very radically from their governments. It seems to me though that we, like government, have got to be prepared to recognize that in the last resort its going to be the community at large who will approve or disapprove of these huge projects that small groups of athletes cannot finance themselves, like the Commonwealth Games, and like the Olympic Games. So the lesson of Taiwan, the lesson of the Montreal Olympics, the lesson of the South African issue is that we've got to be very sensitive to that community.