

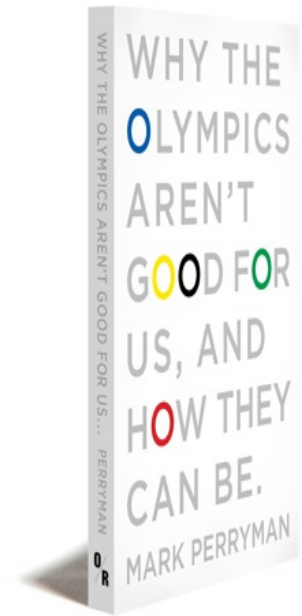
Think that the Olympic Games couldn't have been topped? Think again.

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Sports activist and writer **Mark Perryman** presents a sharply critical take on the way the London Olympic Games have been organized, and provides what he sees as a blueprint for how they could be improved. The London Olympics have been promoted as of great benefit for the host city and nation, but will they deliver on legacy and sustainability promises? **Rebecca Litchfield** considers Perryman's plans for how the Games can be made more inclusive and exciting to watch.

Why the Olympics Aren't Good for Us, And How They Can Be.
Mark Perryman. OR Books. July 2012.

Mark Perryman's most recent work *Why the Olympics aren't good for us, and how they can be* might seem insubstantial at a mere 136 pages, but despite its slight appearance, this work is anything but lightweight, and was timed precisely to coincide with the arrival of the 2012 games in London. Perryman is well known in the world of sport and leisure culture; indeed, he is the co-founder and head cheerleader for the Philosophy of Football, a team and a mindset that rallies against the corporate dominance of the game and challenges the racism and violence that they believe to still be inherent in some areas of the game.



With this background it comes as no surprise that Perryman's newest writing opposes what he sees as the corporate control of the Olympics, and expresses concerns about where this culture is taking an event that should be about promoting sport in the community – both local and global – and bringing about a legacy of inclusion, rather than a crack-down on Olympic language used by anyone other than the sponsors and “worldwide partners.” However, despite this stance Perryman is an Olympics enthusiast. His passion for the event is evident throughout his polemic, and helps convince the reader that his alternative “Five New Rings” of Olympic principles really could work to make the next games a true success, not just in terms of sport, but legacy, sustainability and community.

Perryman opens the book with the confession that he was doubtful that the successful London bid would “do much for the country's physical or economic health.” However, he is quick to argue

that the reason he has written the book is not to show that the Olympics are at fault, but to demonstrate how they could be so much more than they have become.

After a brief introduction to the history of the games, and an outline of what the London 2012 Games claimed they would be providing for both the local and global communities, citing numerous reports that apparently disprove perceived positives, Perryman moves swiftly onto the crux of his book: Five New Olympic Rings. These “new rings” each stand for a way in which the Olympics could be organised differently in order to return them to a truly public event to show off international sporting greatness. Perryman argues that the fundamental approach to the game needs to return to the original symbolism of the rings as figured by their designer Baron de Coubertin: five continents united by sport. He does not believe the Olympics to be inherently bad, quite the contrary, but he does believe that changes need to be made.

Firstly Perryman argues that the hosting of the games should be decentralised. Rather than having a host city, why not have a host nation, with events being held across the country. This would showcase new regions of a country to the world, rather than the focus inevitably falling on the capital city: already a well-known tourist destination. He strengthens his argument by suggesting alternative locations for 2012 Olympic events: mountain biking in the Lake District for example. He also points out that this would spread the legacy of the games and provide different regions and cities with outstanding venues for sports, rather than centralising them and making it almost impossible for the majority of the population to benefit from them.

The second new ring follows on by suggesting that venues be chosen to maximise the number of tickets available. Perryman rightly points out that many existing venues across the UK would have held more spectators than the custom build stadia. The Millenium Stadium in Cardiff holds three times the number of people than Greenwich Park was able to for the show jumping. Seven different cities have areas that would hold more than the newly built Olympic Hockey Stadium in Stratford. He points out that not having to build the venues, and by having greater capacity, not only are a wider spread of people able to see the events, they also become significantly more profitable.

Once again Perryman’s third new ring builds his argument: relocate events to outside of the stadia and allow spectators to view for free. This would be a great way for young people to get involved in the Olympics, and see the highest level of sport in the world taking place on their doorstep. He points out that by changing the marathon route so that its is a loop as in the London 2012 games, rather than an A-B stretch as it is for the London Marathon, the Olympic committee significantly reduced the amount of people able to watch by the roadside, actively undermining the claim of “sport for all.”

The fourth ring becomes more controversial as Perryman argues for a change in how sports are chosen for Olympic status. He believes it should be on a basis of universal accessibility, pointing

out that sports such as sailing, fencing, rowing and equestrian events all presume a level of wealth in order to participate due to the basic equipment involved, whereas sports such as football, running and boxing require very little and therefore are more accessible to those across *all* Olympic nations.

Finally Perryman addresses the corporate nature of the modern Olympics, and attacks the way that sponsorship of the games is handled, in particular the unprecedented protection of logos and words at the 2012 games which “effectively privatised bits of the English language.” Perryman argues that the Olympic logo, the New Five Rings, should be used in entirely the opposite way: No commercial use of the logo. Only non-profit organisations can use it and it would be “recast as a badge of civic and sporting pride.”

Perryman’s suggestions are dramatic, and yet all routed in a passion for the event and the desire to keep the “internationalism of the Olympics” whilst making them stand for “decentralisation, participation, sport for free, sport as a value not a commodity” with all five values interlinked.

The book might be slight, and lacking in a detailed history and analysis of just how the Olympics have come to be in their current form, but Perryman’s clear and concise outline of what the London 2012 games could have been is enthralling, enticing and will make the reader feel the same passion and the same outrage for the games that we could have had this summer. This is a book that the Olympic Committee of Rio 2016 should read.

Rebecca Litchfield began her academic career in American Literature at Warwick University, before moving towards urban and architectural theory at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. Her thesis combined her passion for both subjects and explored the notion of “psychotopography” in the works of American writer Steve Erickson. In 2011 she took a step back from academia to start her own artisan preserves company. She now juggles days in the kitchen with freelance food writing, whilst continuing her academic passions through research, editing and review work. [Read more reviews by Rebecca.](#)

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