

Rome 1960 Book Club Discussion Questions

“Rome 1960” tells the story of the 1960 Summer Olympics held in Italy’s ancient capital city. Use the discussion questions below as a starting point for your book club.

1. How does the city of Rome effectively function as one of the book’s most colorful characters? Do you think the 1960 Summer Olympic Games would have differed greatly if it had been held in a different city?
2. Discuss the political and cultural setting for “Rome 1960.” Think about both world affairs at that time and Cold War politics, race relations and events in the world of sports. What came as a surprise to you?
3. How did televising the Olympics for the first time change the course of the most prominent sporting event in the world? How would the legacy of the Rome Olympics have differed if it had not been televised?
4. Maraniss suggests that the 1960 Summer Olympics heralded a new era, not only athletically, but socially and culturally. In what ways is this evident? What did the “old era” look like? Contrast it with the tone set by the events in Rome.
5. Chapter 5 is titled “Out of the Shadows.” In what ways did individuals, teams and even countries emerge out of the shadows during the Olympics in Rome?
6. How did the controversies during the Olympics in Rome compare to those at other prominent Olympic Games, like Berlin in 1936, Mexico City in 1968 and Munich in 1972?
7. How are the issues of race and race relations interwoven into the story? What were some of the ramifications spawned by the events that took place that summer?
8. While Maraniss focuses on some of the most famous Olympians in history – like Wilma Rudolph and Cassius Clay – he also profiles lesser-known athletes who participated in the Rome Olympics. Who were some of your favorite characters in the book?
9. One of the Olympics’ fundamental principles is to promote the qualities of body, will and mind.” Which athletes in “Rome 1960” illustrated this ideal?
10. In the preface, the author alludes to the fact that female athletes in Rome were powerful tools in the propaganda war between the Americans and the Soviets. How was this true? Do today’s athletes function in similar ways when performing on an international stage?