



Book Recalls Golden Times In Rome

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For 18 days in 1960, Rome was the epicenter of the sports world. The Eternal City hosted the Summer Olympics that year, and it offered compelling stories, Cold War intrigue and foreshadowed the turbulent '60s.

Leave it to Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Maraniss to put all of those elements together, stitching together a tightly written, colorful tapestry in "Rome 1960: The Olympics That Changed The World" (Simon & Schuster, \$26.95).

Maraniss won the Pulitzer in 1993 for national reporting. His sports books have proven to have just as much depth, with groundbreaking biographies of Roberto Clemente ("Clemente") and Vince Lombardi ("When Pride Still Mattered"). While researching "Clemente," Maraniss was drawn to the drama that occurred during the 1960 Olympics.

"I kept seeing these amazing names," he wrote on his Web site.

For the United States, that meant decathlon champion Rafer Johnson ("smart, regal, empathetic, handsome, and superbly skilled") and Wilma Rudolph ("her will to win came from another impulse, to prove herself worthy"), who would win three gold medals in women's track and field.

The U.S. men's basketball team had perhaps the greatest backcourt in Olympic history with Oscar Robertson and Jerry West. And a brash boxer from Louisville, Ky. - Cassius Clay - would take home gold.

Maraniss, a fellow of the Society of American Historians, uses dogged research to give the reader a "you are there" perspective. All the main events are covered, but the undercurrents and subplots are what drive this book.

For example, long jumper Igor Ter-Ovanesyan of the U.S.S.R. was targeted by the CIA as a possible defector. U.S. runner Dave Sime, a medical student at Duke, was given the task of persuading the reluctant Russian. What results is a real-life spy thriller, and Maraniss pulls the story together beautifully.

There were judging controversies - U.S. swimmer Lance Larson touched first in the 100-meter freestyle final, but was ruled second to Australian John Devitt.

Abebe Bikila of Ethiopia won the marathon - running barefoot. Bikila ran past the monuments of the nation that had invaded his homeland 25 years earlier, finishing with the best time in marathon

history.

The first major doping scandal occurred when Danish cyclist Knud Jensen, who died during a cycling competition, was found to have taken Roniacol, a drug that intensified blood circulation. Italian officials, after an autopsy, inexplicably ruled the death the result of heatstroke.

Still, the fatality had a long-term benefit, as it led to today's Olympic drug testing system.

Print journalism still ruled sports, but television began to make inroads. The CBS studio host in New York would become an icon for ABC, but he was a mere footnote in 1960. Jim McKay was panned by The Boston Globe, which didn't like the "gee-whiz boyishness" of his commentaries.

Maraniss ends the book on a strong note. Officials in Rudolph's hometown of Clarksville, Tenn., wanted to hold a parade and banquet in her honor. Rudolph agreed - but only if all the events were integrated.

"The same magnetism that prompted her hometown to desegregate for a day drew people of all kinds toward her for the rest of her life," Maraniss writes.

Maraniss' prose is magnetic, too. He deftly transforms a complex event into a seamless story that is worthy of the gold medal that adorns the cover of "Rome 1960."

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