

The Portrayal of Race, Ethnicity and Nationality in Televised International Athletic Events

By Don Sabo, Sue Curry Jansen, Danny Tate, Margaret Carlisle Duncan and Susan Leggett.

Edited by Edward Derse, Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.

Copyright: Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, November 1995.

Reprinted with permission.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Findings and Interpretations - The study produced seven major findings:

1. The sports productions covered attempted to provide racially unbiased treatment of all athletes.
2. Race, ethnicity, and nationality were treated differently by each production.
3. Black athletes were not represented negatively.
4. Asian athletes often were depicted by cultural stereotypes.
5. Hispanic were depicted positively, but often were described in terms of physical characteristics.
6. Minorities were underrepresented in commentator and interviewer appearances.
7. The television coverage reflected a nationalistic bias.

Appendix - Methods, Sample, and The Problem of Defining Race References

Introduction

This study analyzes the stories that American television tells when it covers international sports events. We sought to determine whether the narratives, metaphors, framing devices, and production practices used by television to cover these events differed according to race, ethnicity, or nationality of athletes.

Discussions of race relations within sport gained public and academic attention during the late 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s, sport media organizations sometimes were criticized for racist depictions of athletes of color. These critiques served as a touchstone for the public, journalists, and broadcasters to discuss how racial prejudices are reflected in sport media. A number of research studies showed that televised sports sometimes reinforce racial stereotypes. Partly in response to growing public and scholarly interest, as well as increasing pressures from minority advocacy groups, sport media professionals have looked more closely at racial issues in sports during the 1990s. For example, NBC aired a special, hosted by Tom Brokaw, on the Black male athlete, and CNN and ESPN produced documentary series on Black athletes in 1990 and 1991.

Several research studies have focused on representations of athletes of color in televised athletic events (Jackson, 1989; Rainville & McCormick, 1977). And in recent years, a number of scholars in communication studies and sociology have turned to the internationalization of sport media (Bellamy, 1993; Lule, 1992; Maguire, 1993; Real, 1989; Tunstall, 1977; Whannel, 1992). This report intends to supplement and update previous research, and to promote discussion of the treatment of race and ethnicity by sport media producers.

The study examined seven televised international sports events occurring between 1988 and 1993: the 1988 Olympic Winter Games, 1990 Goodwill Games, 1991 Pan American Games, 1992 Olympic Winter Games, 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, 1993 World University Games, and the 1993 World Track and Field Championships. The broadcasts were aired on several different networks. Sport competitions, personal profiles, and opening and closing ceremonies were analyzed for their treatment of race, ethnicity, and nationality. In all, this study examined media treatment of 161 athletes

from 31 competitions. We also studied the racial/ethnic composition of broadcast images by commentators and interviewers.

Findings and Interpretations

The Sports Productions Examined Attempted to Provide Racially Unbiased Treatment of All Athletes.

Sports television producers and commentators appeared to make an effort, though not always successfully, to treat all athletes fairly, regardless of race or ethnicity. Each of the five openings and closings analyzed contained visual images emphasizing racial and cultural diversity, showing racially-mixed groups of athletes at opening ceremonies. Another production offered a sequence of shots that showed an Asian sprinter, athletes hugging, a Black track and field athlete, a Black athlete kissing a medal, a White female gymnast, and a Russian weight lifter. In the case of the 1990 Goodwill Games and 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, these visual presentations were accompanied by commentator or voice-over discussions of race, culture, or nation.

Producers selected athletes to interview from a cross-section of races and ethnic groups. Predictably United States athletes were more likely to be interviewed in these American productions than foreign athletes. There was no relationship, however, between race/ethnicity and the likelihood of being interviewed.

Generally, an effort was made to avoid prejudicial treatments of minority athletes and to produce a balanced multicultural atmosphere. This finding resonates with other work documenting trends toward multiculturalism in mainstream television (Gerbner, 1993).

The Treatment of Race and Ethnicity Varied Across Productions.

The extent to which racial and ethnic diversity was addressed varied across productions. For example, the World University Games featured a White narrator who not only guided viewers through all the games, but even gave a tour of the ethnic cuisine of the host city, Buffalo, New York. The production of The Goodwill Games, by contrast, not only relied on multiple narrators; it also was multilingual, using on-screen translators to an extent unprecedented in U.S.-produced television coverage of international sports events.

Race almost never was mentioned by commentators. A personal interview segment focusing on Native American Ryneldi Bynenti was one notable exception. There were a few instances when athletes described themselves in terms of their racial identity. In the vast majority of cases, however, we found no overt narrative references to race.

Ethnicity, however, was occasionally mentioned by commentators. For example, there was an extended exploration of the Albanian heritage of a United States-born swimmer who competed for Albania in the 1992 Barcelona Games. Ethnicity was more likely to be acknowledged by commentators if it connected with some history of ethnic conflict. Bosnian runner, Mirsada Buric, was discussed against the backdrop of ethnic conflict in her country. The family of gold medalist swimmer Pablo Morales was said to have immigrated to the United States in order to escape the political repression and squalor of Cuba in the 1950s.

Black Athletes Were Not Represented Negatively.

Some previous studies suggest that racial stereotyping of Black athletes in sports media is covert and systematic (Sabo & Jansen, 1995). Rainville and McCormick (1977) found that White football players were praised more frequently than Black players. The researchers concluded that announcers were "building a positive reputation for White players and a comparatively negative reputation for Black players." Journalist Derrick Jackson (1989) conducted a content analysis of televised sports commentary in American basketball and football. Results showed that Blacks were more likely than Whites to be described in physical terms and demeaning intellectual terms.

In contrast to Jackson's analysis, our content analysis showed Black athletes were *not* more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to be described in physical terms. We defined, counted, and coded commentator remarks that referred to physical characteristics of athletes. Physical descriptors were phrases or sentences that described or called attention to bodily characteristics and/or athletic qualities (e.g., "so strong," "athletic skater," "great jumping ability," "not an imposing physical figure," "very great leaping ability," "tremendous amount of physical talent"). Statistical analysis showed that commentators were significantly less likely to use physical descriptors to refer to Black athletes than their Asian, Hispanic, or White counterparts. Asian athletes, for example, were twice as likely to be described this way than Black athletes (80% versus 39%).

Second, we did *not* find evidence that commentators constructed negative representations of Black athletes. In fact,

Black athletes were *least* likely to receive negative comments. We defined, counted, and coded positive and negative commentator evaluations of athletes and their performances. Positive evaluations included phrases and sentences such as "very nice sprinting technique, as always," "a good start for him," "put her in the lead and she can win a race for you!," "one of America's best sprinters since 1975," "very sensational," or "one of the most exciting boxers in the tournament." Negative evaluations included phrases and sentences that implied censure or criticism such as "he's just having a horrible meet," "she's not up to the standard of previous Soviet athletes," "he's inconsistent," "not a real solid dive," "if there is any choreography, you can't see it," "his performance is bad news," and "many have sometimes called him a choke artist."

Chi square analyses yielded no significant differences in the number of positive evaluations by race and ethnicity. However, Black athletes were significantly less likely than Asian and White athletes to receive negative evaluations from commentators.

Last, qualitative analyses of the personal interview segments showed that race, ethnicity, or nation did not appear to determine the types of stories or metaphors that producers and commentators used to portray athletes. After scrutinizing the visual and oral texts of these segments, we created a typology of eight different motifs: Injury and Pain, Personal Transformation, Family and Relationships, Self-Achievement, Training for Competition, National Background, Winning and Losing, and Personality. We found that race and ethnicity were unrelated to the story motif, the length of segments, or the visual treatment of athletes in these segments.

In conclusion, the disparity between our findings and those of previous researchers suggests that media professionals have responded to past criticisms of prejudicial treatment of Blacks (Dates & Barlow, 1993; Jhally & Lewis, 1992). The less frequent use of physical descriptors and negative evaluations in reference to Black athletes suggests a heightened sensitivity, maybe even a guardedness, among commentators concerning negative representations of Black athletes.

Asian Athletes Often Were Depicted by Cultural Stereotypes.

Several findings suggest that Asian athletes were depicted in ways that drew upon stereotypical descriptions of Asians as stoic conformists and excessively hard workers who are fanatically concerned with success.

First, although commentators avoided making overt references to race in the case of Black athletes, they seemed less constrained with Asian athletes. One weightlifting competition, described as the "battle of the Asian stars," was introduced as follows:

The serenity, the calm, that is the East. The mystique of the Orient with its mysterious inner strength. That strength today transformed into the brutal power of Olympic weightlifting, where Asian strong men dominate the bantamweight division.

Other commentator statements portrayed Asian athletes as obsessive hard workers, conformists, and extremely self-disciplined. The overall Japanese approach to marathoning was said to be "a religion, it's an obsession." Others discussed the propensity of Asians to train fanatically, "to practice much harder than the Americans."

Second, Asian athletes were significantly more likely than Black and Caucasian athletes to be described in physical terms. Half of Asian athletes and 55% of Hispanic athletes were described two or more times in physical terms, while 25% of Black athletes and 29% of White athletes fell into this category. Commentators made frequent references to the size of Asian athletes (e.g., "she's slight at 103 pounds," "look at the quadriceps, how they seem so overdeveloped and bowed," "she's a slight athlete, only about 100 pounds").

Third, commentators were significantly more willing to talk about the emotions and personalities of Asian athletes. We tested for hypothesized differences between the use of psychological descriptors across racial and ethnic groups.

Psychological descriptors were phrases or sentences that described or called attention to the inner emotional states or personality characteristics of athletes. Examples included "she's a nervous wreck," "he's disappointed," "quietly confident," "not very happy with that dive," "bubbly personality," "she's completely focused," "proud," "he has fantastic concentration," and "he's at least distraught."

While some commentators called attention to the "remarkable concentration" and "business-like attitude" of Asian athletes, others voiced surprise when Asian athletes outwardly expressed their emotions (e.g., "normally you don't see that kind of emotion out of lifters, but he is very pleased with himself," or in reference to the Chinese women divers, "they seem a lot more emotional than in 1984").

The representation of Asian athletes as unemotional or reluctantly emotional was amplified by several discussions about their mechanical or machine-like performances and training practices. For example, a personal segment with Chinese swimmer Lin Li, emphasized her methodical and repetitious training practices and also raised the issue of drug use by the Chinese swimmers. We found that once framed in the overall context of the machine metaphor, even positive descriptions of precise performance lent themselves to negative mechanistic images that dehumanized some Asian athletes and diminished their achievements.

Fourth, Asian athletes were the most likely to appear in slow-motion replays. For example, Asian athletes were almost twice as likely to appear in slow-motion replays as Black athletes (77% versus 41%). The greater use of slow-motion replay may be a visual extension of the tendency among commentators to focus on the physical characteristics of Asian athletes, to exoticize them, or perhaps to prolong or intensify gazing upon their foreignness. Slow motion also might amplify the mechanistic metaphors used in some commentaries.

On the other hand, the disproportionate use of slow motion video to cover Asian athletes very well may be linked to the particular events in which the athletes appear. For example, the women's figure skating events at the 1992 Olympic Winter Games at Albertville relied heavily on the use of slow-motion. Each episode of coverage was preceded and ended with long slow-motion montages of the competitors. Since, in this particular case, Asian athletes featured prominently in the competition, a disproportionate amount of slow-motion coverage can be attributed to the production of that particular event rather than an prejudicial treatment of race/ethnicity.

Likewise, Asian athletes often appeared, and excelled, in events that are best covered by using slow-motion. Diving and weightlifting are two examples of such sports. Slow-motion becomes a necessary tool in covering these sports because the actual time of the competitive action is so short. The short time it takes to complete a dive or a lift requires using slow-motion to achieve the best possible coverage. Sports such as basketball, certain track and field events, or equestrian do not rely on slow-motion to the same extent. This fact also may explain to some extent the disproportionate appearance of Asian athletes in slow-motion sequences.

In conclusion, we are not proposing that commentators should present Asian athletes identically to Hispanic, Black, or White athletes. Non-prejudicial representation in sport media does not mean hiding cultural differences behind contrived sameness. In fact, cultural differences enrich global athletic events. Representations of Asian athletes as machinelike and unemotional, however, seem to call forth images that reflect and feed racial stereotypes harbored by many Americans. In the current context of political tension with North Korea and China and the trade war with Japan, it is possible that Asian athletes are being cast as adversaries as were Soviet bloc athletes of the Cold War period.

Hispanic Athletes Were Depicted Positively, but Often in Physical Terms.

Our analysis yielded mixed findings regarding the representations of Hispanic athletes. Commentators often seemed to make a conscious effort to place Hispanic athletes in a favorable light. Hispanic athletes were not likely to receive negative evaluations from commentators. Commentators seemed quite liberal in their praise of Hispanic athletes. In the coverage of the Pan American Games, for example, commentators lavished praise on the Cuban men's gymnastics team while repeatedly bemoaning the poor performance of the United States men's team. Barcelona Olympic Games gold medalist swimmer Pablo Morales was featured more than any other athlete in our study. His stellar performance was framed as a fulfillment of a dream, more precisely, the American Dream of making it big, becoming a hero, and succeeding despite one's class, racial, ethnic, or national origins.

Morales appeared in several personal segments, promotional footage and graphics, and in the opening and closing segments of the Barcelona Olympic Games. His Olympic achievements were described as an immigrant success story. Commentators explained that Morales' parents had left the oppressive rule of the communist regime in Cuba to come to the United States. They taught young Pablo the value of hard work, and after many setbacks, he won the coveted gold medal. Hence, in the Pablo Morales story, producers merged images of Hispanic ethnic heritage, political repression, and successful upward mobility *a la* the American Dream.

Other findings implied Hispanic athletes were perceived differently from Blacks and Whites. We found that commentators were more likely to call attention to the physical characteristics of Hispanic athletes (55%) than to Black and White athletes (25% and 29%), and even Asian athletes (50%). Hispanic athletes were also second-most likely (next to Asian athletes) to appear in slow-motion. These findings indicate a tendency among the generally White commentators and producers of televised international athletic events to focus on the physicality of Hispanic athletes. Whether the data represent a negative tendency to objectify or exoticize Hispanic athletes more so than Black and White athletes is a matter for further research.

Ethnic Minorities Underrepresented as Announcers.

Despite the high visibility of racial and ethnic minorities as athletes, Whites held the greatest presence in the broadcasting booth.

We recorded and coded the race/ethnicity of all the commentators and interviewers who commented on a competition or interviewed an athlete. This was done for each athlete included in the sample. Rather than simply counting the number of Black and White commentators constituting the on-camera production staff, this procedure yielded a more accurate measure of the *extent* to which members of each race and ethnic group actually participated in commenting on specific athlete and competitions. This procedure removes the masking effect of tokenism. A hypothetical production may employ three White commentators, one Black commentator, and one Hispanic commentator, yielding a 40% minority participation rate. Yet, the two minority commentators may make only 10% of the total commentator appearances in a given broadcast.

In terms of total broadcast images (commentators and interviewers), whites accounted for 89% of all appearances. Blacks accounted for 10.5 % of appearances. Hispanics and Asians each accounted for less than 1% of total appearances. The underrepresentation of ethnic minorities becomes clear when compared to U.S. census figures showing that Blacks are 12.5% of the U.S. population, Hispanics 9.9%, and Asians 3.3%. The greatest underrepresentation is seen in the case of Hispanics who account for almost 10% of the U.S. population, but are nearly invisible as announcers. Asians and Blacks also are underrepresented in terms of total broadcast images, but to a lesser extent.

Whites accounted for a very large share of *commentator* appearances, 92% of 369 total appearances. Blacks made up the remaining 8%. There were no Hispanic and Asian commentators in the content analysis sample.

Blacks fared much better as *interviewers*, appearing in 39% of all interviews. Hispanics and Asians were underrepresented once again, appearing in 6% and 3% of the interviews. Fifty-two percent of the 31 interview appearances were made by White interviewers.

Findings also suggest that race and ethnicity may have influenced the assignment of commentators to specific athletes and/or competitions. As the study shows, White commentators were most likely to appear with White athletes (a ratio of 2.3/1) and least likely to appear with Black athletes (a ratio of 1.8/1). In contrast, Black commentators were slightly more likely to appear with Black athletes (a ratio of 1/5.4) than White athletes (a ratio of 1/6.3).

Of course, the fact that many sports commentators/interviewers are hired precisely because they are former athletes in a particular sport would partially explain these numbers. One would expect, for example, that Blacks would be more likely to be commentators/interviewers in the sports of track and field or basketball where they comprise a large percentage of all athletes in the sport as opposed to figure skating or swimming where Black athletes make up a relatively small percentage of athletes. And though racism and prejudice might account for the relatively small numbers of minority athletes participating in some sports, the greater propensity of commentators/interviewers to appear with athletes of the same race/ethnicity is probably explained in part by the athlete population from which commentators/interviewers are drawn.

In conclusion, it is not surprising to find unequal racial/ethnic representation among the commentators/interviewers in this study. Inside and outside the institution of sport, racial and ethnic minorities have struggled for increased recognition and advancement. Hispanic and Asian athletes have been almost invisible in sociological research on sport (Melnick & Sabo, 1994). Within the professional hierarchy of sports broadcasting, the commentator role holds more prestige than the interviewer role. The fact that Whites were more visible as commentators than Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics may reflect historically long-standing patterns of racial inequality. And yet, the greater visibility of people of color as interviewers may mean that racial and ethnic minorities are making successful inroads into middle-level positions in the sports broadcasting profession.

It is also important to note, however, that the production format of televised international sports events heavily influences the numbers of racial/ethnic images seen by the viewer population. The nature of the host/commentator system dictates that a relatively small number of individuals comprises a large proportion of total broadcast images. The findings of our study would be significantly different, for example, had we examined the 1994 Olympic Winter Games. (The research was done prior to these Games.) At these Games, the two primary host/commentators were an African-American and an Asian-American. For these Games alone, Blacks and Asians would likely account for a disproportionately high number of viewer images. So, while the total number of viewer images tells us something about the preponderance of racial/ethnic images viewers see, that number alone does not indicate a pattern of racial/ethnic bias. A fuller picture will consider the number of host/commentator images along with the racial/ethnic composition of the entire on-screen staff and the athlete population.

The Television Coverage Suggested a Nationalistic Bias.

Nationalism thrives on "we versus them" scenarios. In this regard, we found that commentators characterized athletes from Communist or former Communist countries in ways that suggested they are cheaters, machine-like, inhuman, and without feelings. In contrast, athletes from the United States and its allies were generally featured as warm, fair, and humane. Nationalism also produced inconsistencies in the commentary. While it was stated or implied that some nations bring a political agenda to international athletic events, the hidden message was that the United States had no such political agendas. Whereas doubts are raised about the state funding of athletes from other countries, problems linked to corporate or university sponsorship of athletes in the United States or other western democracies are unstated. Comments about drug use among Chinese or East German athletes ignored the fact that some United States athletes use drugs as well.

Nationalist sentiments were reinforced by an aura of familiarity around United States athletes. While 61% of United States athletes were frequently referred to by first name only, only 41% of foreign athletes were so addressed. United States athletes also were more likely than their foreign counterparts to be interviewed and allowed to speak for themselves, 38% versus 7%. Commentators were twice as likely to refer to the families of United States athletes than foreign athletes; 31% and 15%. And finally, the openings and closings and personal profiles tended disproportionately to highlight United States athletes.

Whereas the greater familiarity of commentators with United States athletes might be attributed to nationalism, other

more mundane factors likely apply as well. United States viewers were the primary audience for these productions. Building viewer identification with the athletes serves the economic interests of the television networks by increasing ratings. Also, many producers, commentators, and interviewers are former athletes themselves, and they are more likely to be acquainted with United States athletes than foreign athletes. And finally the greater familiarity of the predominantly White, English-speaking American commentators and script writers with English names and North American geography would be expected in a production made for American television. Such familiarity might indicate some degree of unconscious nationalism, but probably is not a mark of conscious bias.

These findings raise some interesting questions. As the globalization of sport and society continues into the next century, will commentators and producers increase their knowledge of foreign cultures and geography? As popular culture and mass media flows between all countries, will the aura of familiarity currently surrounding United States athletes spread to envelop athletes from other nations as well? Or will sport media reflect nationalistic strife and affiliation in the global arena?

Conclusion

In 1944, Gunnar Myrdal described racism as "an American dilemma." Racism also has been a dilemma for United States media, a site of vigorous debate concerning the topic of racial representation (Dates & Barlow, 1990; Montgomery, 1989). Sport media have not been immune to charges of racism.

On one hand, the results of this study show that producers of televised international athletic events generally are attuned to issues of racial representation and cultural diversity. Part of this growing awareness has no doubt been kindled by the high visibility of Black athletes in the United States, the work of minority advocacy groups, and the availability of pertinent research. While previously documented patterns of media representation of Black athletes are being addressed, however, we now see biased treatment of Asian athletes.

Issues of racial and ethnic representation in televised international athletic events are not limited to the ways that producers and commentators describe and visually frame the athletes themselves. The low numbers and visibility of Asian, Hispanic, and Black commentators and interviewers are also at issue. The genuine empowerment of racial and ethnic minorities in sport media will draw more fully upon their journalistic, production, and management skills as well as their athletic abilities.

Nationalism is likely to remain a feature of televised international sports for some time to come. The "we-them" mindset, which is such a pronounced dimension of nationalism, is also a common denominator of athletic competition and sport culture. The very fact that individuals compete as representatives of their countries opens the door to nationalistic sentiment and bias.

Fair treatment of all persons by sports television is likely to grow as long as United States media organizations offer programming that appeals to many different ethnic, racial, and national groups. Diverse audiences may be offended by stereotyped portrayals of race, ethnicity, and nationality, especially when members of their own races or ethnicities are disserved by media representations. As the 20th century ends, multiculturalism does not have only ethical value, it also has pragmatic value for building domestic and global audiences and increasing profits. Media producers can no longer simply conceptualize race and racism as an American dilemma to be played out in shades of black and white. They must become sensitized to racism's multiple nuances, and paradoxical global manifestations.

Appendix

Research Methods / Sample / Problem of Defining and Measuring Race

Research Methods

This study used both qualitative and quantitative analyses to describe several aspects of seven televised international athletic events. Rhetorical and narrative analysis, analysis of production units, typologies, and simple descriptive statistics were used to analyze the production practices that framed the events and competitions and established the visual look of each event. Openings and closings, a sample of personal interview segments, and a typical day in an event were analyzed using these approaches. A purposive sample of athletes from 31 competitions also was analyzed using content analysis. Chi square statistics were generated in order to test for significant differences between groups; only those findings significant at $p < .05$ are reported in this report.

Sample

We sampled seven different events that had been produced and aired by various American television organizations since 1988. We assumed that a sample of productions from a variety of sources would be more representative of American sports television than any one or two networks or organizations. We were aware that the 1990 Goodwill Games, the 1991 Pan American Games, the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, the 1993 World University Games, and the 1993 World Track and Field Championships were racially and ethnically diverse. We also knew that the 1988 and 1992 Olympic Winter Games featured mostly White athletes. For these last two events, therefore, we sampled the women's figure skating programs which included a racial and ethnic cross-section of competitors.

Members of the interdisciplinary research team (four chief investigators, a research associate, and two research assistants) initially reviewed an estimated 340 hours of videotapes in order to assess production forms and content. Quota sampling procedures were then devised to study three key aspects of these televised productions.

1. Descriptions of Athletes in Competition: We generated a quota sample of 161 athletes in 31 competitions. The sample then was examined to determine whether the content of commentator descriptions and visual portrayals varied by race, ethnicity, or nation. The logic of quota sampling was guided by the overarching need to select competitions in which participants varied by race, ethnicity, and nation. For example, inclusion of women's platform diving (1992 Barcelona Games and 1993 World University Games), men's platform diving (1993 World University Games), and men's springboard diving (1992 Barcelona Games) provided visual and verbal descriptions of Asian, Hispanic, and White athletes. The resulting sample of athletes was balanced by race, ethnicity, and nation in order to allow for comparative analysis and statistical testing of key hypotheses.

2. Personal Interviews: A quota sample of 30 personal interviews was drawn from three of the events in this study: the 1990 Goodwill Games, the 1992 Barcelona Games, and the 1993 World University Games. These segments mix genres and draw upon the conventions of sports reporting, news, documentary, human interest, drama, myth, and marketing. The personal segments in our sample typically used imported (pre-taped) footage which presented biographical profiles of individual athletes who were usually, but not always, leading competitors in their sports. Profiles usually included an interview with the athlete. In some cases, however, the complete narration was done by voice-over. The personal segments were prime material for analyzing representational practices in commercial television sports programming because they contained long descriptive segments, used formulaic elements in framing athletes stories, and usually featured visually rich footage.

3. Openings and Closings: A sample of five openings and closings was selected for study because these ceremonies frame each event, establish its unifying themes and metaphors, and produce the look of the event. We examined the openings and closings of the 1990 Goodwill Games, 1992 Barcelona Games, 1992 Winter Olympics, 1993 World University Games, and 1993 World Track & Field Championships. We wanted to observe how and to what extent racial and ethnic diversity were treated in these segments.

The Problem of Defining and Measuring Race

Coding for race raises both methodological and ethical problems. Past academic studies of representations of race in televised news and drama have used visual cues to attribute race. We followed this precedent in some of our coding even though there are significant problems with this method. First, race is a cultural and political construct, not a discretely definable biological entity. Second, visual coding of race is highly subjective. Third, the race of athletes is rarely mentioned outright in televised international athletic events, although themes of racial and cultural diversity are often featured.

In the case of United States athletes, we used the census categories African-American, Asian, Caucasian, and Hispanic. We discovered that in a fairly significant number of U.S. cases, race was basically indeterminate. Athletes of indeterminate race were not included in the sample. In the case of non-U.S. athletes, we used geography to impute race. For example, if an athlete was competing for Japan, we assumed she or he was Asian unless there was some specific indication in the narrative that indicated otherwise.

Finally, though we recognize that this study might raise concerns about perpetuating racial stereotypes, we also believe that this research benefits the cause of responsible media representation of race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity need to be defined if we are to attempt responsible evaluation of programs and policies. Race remains an indisputable social fact because people continue to impute attributes to groups based on presumed physical differences. The maintenance of socially structured silences around these attributes historically has served the status quo of racial inequality and injustice.

References

Bellamy, Jr. R. V. (1993). Issues in the internationalization of the U.S. Sports Media: The emerging European market-

place. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 17(3):168-180.

Dates, J. L. and Barlow W. (Eds.) (1990). *Split image: African Americans in the mass media*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.

Gerbner, G. (1993). *Women and minorities on television: A study in casting and fate*. A report to the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Radio and Television Artists, June.

Jackson, D. Z. (1989, January 22). Calling the plays in black and white. *Boston Globe*.

Jhally, S. & Lewis, J. (1992). *Enlightened racism: The Cosby show, audiences, and the myth of the American dream*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Lule, J. (1993). *Ritual, sport and politics: The 1992 Barcelona Games opening ceremonies*. Paper presented at meetings of the International Communication Association, Washington, D.C..

Maguire, J. (1993). Globalization, sport development, and the media/sport production complex. *Sport Science Review*, 2(1), 29-47.

Melnick, M. and Sabo, D. (1994). *Sport and social mobility among African-American and Hispanic athletes*. In Eisen, G. and Wiggins (Eds.), *Ethnic Experiences in North American Sport*. NJ: Greenwood Press, pp. 268-299.

Montgomery, K. C. (1989). *Target Prime-time: Advocacy groups and the struggle over entertainment television*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Myrdal, G. (1944). *An American Dilemma*. New York: Harper.

Rainville, R. E. and McCormick, E. (1977). Extent of covert racial prejudice in pro football announcers' speech. *Journalism Quarterly*, 54(1):20-26.

Real, M. R. (1989). *Super media: A cultural studies approach*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Sabo, D. and Jansen, S. C. (1994). Seen but not heard: Black men in sports media. In Messner, M. and Sabo, D. *Sex, violence, and power in sports: Rethinking masculinity*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, pp. 150-160.

Tunstall, J. (1977). *The media are American: Anglo-American media in the world*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Whannel, G. (1992). *Fields of vision: Television, sport and cultural transformation*. London: Routledge.

Copyright: Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, November 1995.

Reproduction is permitted for educational purposes only. Any reproduction should cite the Amateur Athletic Foundation as publisher and copyright owner.

The sale of this report, or any portion thereof, in any format, is prohibited.

Research funded by the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.
