

How the IOC turned Andrew Jennings into a cult figure



By Steen Ankerdal

When Norway's Gerhard Heiberg told the Play the Game conference that - although he didn't agree with all the views of Andrew Jennings - he was in complete agreement 'with Andrew's suggestion' to ban boxing from the Olympics, any final doubts disappeared. Jennings - the biggest thorn in the IOC's side - was at last being taken seriously by members of the committee!

Few, however, believe that this new found comradeship could ever extend all the way to Juan Antonio Samaranch. Especially after Jennings documented the IOC president's alleged fascist past in such exacting detail. Nor could the comradeship extend to many of Samaranch's close colleagues whom Jennings has had no qualms in referring to as "those old Nazis."

Andrew Jennings is the International Olympic Movement's most vehement critic. Over the past decade, the English journalist has become known across the world for his revelations on corruption in the IOC. Now, he says, it's time for others to take over

However, amongst the younger, reform-minded IOC members, the so-called "good guys" like Gerhard Heiberg and Canadian Dick Pound, Jennings is accepted - not least because he does his homework. Like the best in his profession, Andrew Jennings is able to back up his allegations with qualified arguments borne out of painstaking research - and for this he has earned the respect of his peers.

As Dick Pound, tipped as a possible successor to Samaranch, commented recently: "Jennings is the only real opponent the IOC has ever had."

During the Play the Game conference, Jennings found plenty of time to chat with Pound. However, such civilities between the 54-year-old journalist and an IOC member would have been unthinkable eight years ago, when Jennings released his book *The Lords of the Rings* - a series of damning revelations that shook the Olympic movement, first in print and later as a TV documentary.

It was during the build up to the Barcelona Olympics that I first met Jennings. He had a sharp sense of humour, a healthy lack of respect for authority and conformity, and an enthusiasm that inspired his fellow journalists.

At that time, the "old boys" of the IOC would probably have liked to have seen Jennings burnt at the stake together with his books, his co-author Vyv Simpson and their like-minded colleagues in the press. However, at that time, the feeling among the IOC members was that the accusations would end - that when the athletes began to perform, interest in Jennings and his "fellow fantasy writers" would disappear. However, they reckoned without Jennings' perseverance. When they denied him press accreditation to the IOC session immediately before the Olympics were due to begin (as they had done at the three previous games), it only served to publicise his allegations further.

After many rejections, Jennings was finally accredited to the IOC's conference in Lausanne in 1999. His explanation of the committee's change of heart - that they "daren't keep me out any longer" - didn't go down too well.

A couple of months later, two senior IOC members met Jennings in the bar of the Hotel Palace in Lausanne, and asked him directly to investigate corruption in the amateur boxing association, the AIBA. Despite their lofty positions, the IOC members could not - or dared not - take their suspicions further.

But Jennings, they reasoned correctly, had both the method and the will. His subsequent book *"The Great Olympic Swindle"* clearly detailed the corruption endemic in amateur boxing. Jennings documented Uzbek IOC member Rakhimov's mafia links so convincingly that the Australian government denied him an entry visa, forcing him to sit out the Sydney Olympics.

Andrew Jennings' original investigation into Olympic corruption should have ended in 1992 - but he is still pursuing it today. And in this capacity, Jennings' work across the globe has assumed mythical proportions.

However, Jennings is now becoming tired of hearing himself tell the same old stories about the "same old criminals." »The villains are the same, and it is becoming more and more difficult to find something new« he says. »I intend to stop completely before I begin to bore myself.«

This summer's selection of a new IOC President could be a natural cut-off point. After then, the reporters that Jennings has inspired must take over his attempts to get a truthful reply to the question: »Why are the lying bastards lying?«

Whenever he chooses to say a final farewell to his friends within the IOC, Jennings' place in history will be assured as the first journalist to expose a catalogue of widespread corruption within that body. ♦





The IOC

The International Olympic Committee chooses its own members. It currently has 127 members and 20 honorary members. Around forty percent are from Europe. The IOC is governed by an 11-man executive committee. Since 1980, Spain's Juan Antonio Samaranch has been chairman. The 80-year-old Samaranch is expected to step down in Summer 2001. The IOC's primary role is to supervise the organisation of the summer and winter Olympic Games.

Tales from the dark side



The International Olympic Committee is still doing all it can to live up to its bad reputation, says Andrew Jennings

By Jonna Toft

You can't help paying attention when English journalist Andrew Jennings begins to speak about his investigations into the IOC. Words like corruption, bribery and favour fly through the air, and you get the feeling that the small, grey-haired man with the sparkling eyes and nose for critical journalism knows exactly what he is talking about. Over the past ten years, Jennings has carried out exhaustive research into the lives of the IOC leaders and written a number of critical books detailing what he claims is widespread corruption in the movement, the latest being *The Great Olympic Swindle*. Andrew Jennings' entertaining address to *Play the Game* was based on his disclosures surrounding the IOC.

He related that after Atlanta's victory in the race to stage the 1996 games, the IOC received so many protests from the rival cities concerning the activities of their members that they held a private hearing to examine the complaints. The Toronto team produced a detailed report of the abuses they'd suffered. They calculated they had been ripped off to the tune of at least 800,000 dollars. One of the tricks they claimed had been played on them was a ticket racket that had apparently been worked for years by some members. The Toronto team

claimed that IOC members cashed in air tickets provided by the bidding city and either bought cheaper tickets or didn't even bother to visit. »This practice is illegal,« said Jennings. »And because it is a racket that had been practised by so many for so long - it qualifies as an organised crime.«

»There is no democracy in the IOC,« he continued. »The power and the money is controlled by Samaranch, and most of the members are hand-picked by him.«

Massive freeloading

»Serious evidence about IOC freeloading and corruption has been found in bidding countries nearly every year since 1986,« he said. »The IOC's newly-formed Ethics Commission has received evidence of massive freeloading and exploitation of the Atlanta bidding team. But last year - after considering the evidence in private - the commission decided there was need for further action. And the IOC has come to the same conclusions regarding complaints from a dozen or more other bidding cities. Can you blame the IOC for covering up?« he asked. »Far too many journalists don't look behind the public face, and are satisfied with the press releases from the IOC's public relations bureau.«

In Sweden, an investigation is underway into whether the Stockholm bidding team used

bribery in its failed attempt to secure the 2004 Olympics. If a court case results, it could pave the way for other former candidate cities to blow the whistle in public, says Jennings. He asserts that bribes are made regularly, and no city can expect to host an Olympic games without paying money under the table. For example, he claims that the civic and business leaders of Salt Lake City, in their successful bid for the 2002 Winter Games, paid 60,000 dollars just to find out which individual IOC-members were open to bribes.

»As journalists, it is our responsibility to look behind the facade of the organisations that control our lives,« he said. »Politicians and governments will not do more to reform international sport if we do not carry out our work correctly and reveal the private face of sports organisations. There is more than enough to be getting on with.«

Although Jennings is certainly one of the people that the IOC would like to see removed from the face of the Earth, he has never felt personally threatened as a result of his journalism. However, he faces court action at regular intervals and some years ago was sentenced to five days in a Lausanne jail.

Read more in Andrew Jennings' books *"The Lords of the Rings"* and *"The Great Olympic Swindle."*

