

## **Rome 1960**

### **The Olympics That Changed the World**

**By David Maraniss**

**Simon & Schuster; 478 pages; \$26.95**

If there were Olympic medals for meticulous research, rich storytelling and a grand narrative, David Maraniss' new book, "Rome 1960: The Olympics That Changed the World," would be as good as gold.

In his remarkable telling of the 1960 Summer Olympics, Maraniss, who has written biographies of Bill Clinton, Vince Lombardi and Roberto Clemente, puts the games in the context of political theater and Cold War tensions, as well as taking into account the bold social and cultural changes that were on the horizon.

Like Maraniss' other books, "Rome 1960" displays tireless reporting, a sharp focus on character and high drama. The thoughtful considerations of history and politics make this book, like the author's others, a complete package.

The athletes themselves are compelling enough. Among them: light-heavyweight champion Cassius Clay, in rehearsal in Rome for his debut as a professional, who in four years would become Muhammad Ali; the unbeatable runner Wilma Rudolph, who at 4 endured polio and for several years was saddled with metal leg braces; decathlon winner Rafer Johnson, the first black athlete to walk in front as flag carrier for the U.S. Olympic team; and Abebe Bikila, the barefoot palace guard from Ethiopia who ran the streets and cobblestones to win the marathon, finishing at the Arch of Constantine 25 seconds before the bronze winner.

There were many more competitors who fell short while doing their best. Joe Faust was a high-jumper who finished back in the pack. Maraniss found him nearly a half century later, at his small house in Los Angeles. Out back was a mattress on the ground, two poles and a bamboo crossbar. Faust, in his mid-60s with a sore knee and a long memory, was still jumping.

And there's the Bay Area's Pete Newell, the gold-medal-winning basketball coach, and 15-year-old Anne Warner Cribbs, the gold medal winner in the 400-meter medley relay who trained in Mussolini's pool and whose career was essentially over when she returned to Menlo-Atherton High School, there being no college athletic scholarships for women in 1960.

There wasn't much of a celebration for Anne. Her principal took her to lunch, "and that was it," writes Maraniss. (Full disclosure: I'm thanked in the book's acknowledgements for alerting Maraniss to Warner Cribbs' story.)

The fortunes of female athletes would change, of course, and in Rome in 1960, Maraniss found the outlines of the old way of doing things in sports giving way to the new, even as Cold War spies and dispensers of propaganda shared the ancient city and the times with the world's best athletes.

In May 1960, before the Games, an American U-2 reconnaissance plane piloted by Gary Powers was shot down over Soviet airspace, and he faced espionage charges. Separately, the Soviets vowed to defend socialist Cuba with missiles if need be, and there was tension in Berlin, where the wall would subsequently be erected separating East and West. It was hardly a climate in which sports could be neatly removed from the social and political vortex.

There were also several firsts in the Rome Games: It was the first televised Olympics. CBS tapes were flown on Alitalia Airlines flights from Ciampino to Idlewild. The late Jim McKay, who went on to become the face and voice of the Olympics after he went to ABC, was not in Rome but in a CBS studio in New York making do, writing his own scripts and editing tapes with a razor blade.

The first doping scandal occurred in Rome, when Danish cyclist Knud Enemark Jensen fell on the course and died. And it may have been a first when the CIA recruited a U.S. sprinter, Dave Sime, to try to persuade a Soviet broad jumper to defect, to no avail.

Maraniss, an associate editor at the Washington Post and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting in 1993, is particularly taken by Johnson, the great UCLA athlete from Kingsburg (Fresno County) who was the most respected member of the U.S. team. He had an epic battle in the decathlon with fellow Bruin Chuan-Kwang Yang, and eight years later, with help from NFL lineman Roosevelt Grier, would wrestle from Sirhan Sirhan's hand the gun used to kill Robert Kennedy.

Rudolph and her female teammates from Tennessee State returned to Nashville with six gold medals in track. Maraniss found in Rudolph an inspirational character. Upon her return to Clarksville, Tenn., when the town fathers announced they wanted to hold a parade and banquet in her honor, Maraniss writes, Rudolph said she would attend only if all the events were integrated.

The banquet at the town armory marked the first time black people and white people in Clarksville sat together for an official event, he writes. Rudolph said that night: "In every effort I

have been motivated by one thing: to do justice to those who believe in me and to use my physical talents to the glory of God and the honor of womanhood."

But Bikila is the book's most unexpected hero. A palace guard in King Haile Selassie's army had won in Rome, the capital of a country that had invaded his homeland twice. The route of the marathon took him past the Axum Obelisk, the fourth century monument that Mussolini's army looted from Ethiopia in 1937. {sbox}

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