

Left off the Podium: President Jimmy Carter, the United States Olympic Committee, and the Boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow, Russia

by Lacey Lebleu

In the late 1800s when Baron Pierre de Coubertin of France began his quest to reestablish the Ancient Olympic Games into the modern era, he never could have imagined the success and advancements that would come from the Olympics. International sport was revitalized with the beginning of the Modern Olympic Games and offered the world a way to interact outside of politics or war. The Olympics have been a staple in the world of sports since 1896, through unsuccessful years such as the Games held in 1904 as a part of the World's Fair in St. Louis, to the positively spectacular Games held in 1936 Berlin. The only exceptions being their cancellation throughout the duration of both World War I and World War II.¹

The importance of the Olympic Games remains apparent in today's world, with the Games becoming more and more extravagant every four years. The Cold War, though never a physical war, delivered the Olympics with tensions not seen in the half-century prior. These tensions culminated in a rather tumultuous decade in the 1980s, composed of major Olympic participants boycotting. Countries had refused to attend the Olympics prior to the summer 1980 American boycott, but never had a major world power, and Olympic competitor, refused to attend an Olympiad on any grounds. The American boycott of the 1980 Summer Games held in Moscow, Russia gave way to many changes within the International, and United States Olympic Committees, and the role governments played in the lives and careers of their athletes, as well as the role of athletes in American diplomacy.

The political and ideological differences between the United States and the Soviet Union beginning during World War II created a bipolar world. This division effected all aspects of international relations, including the Olympic Games. Following a three-decade absence from the Olympics, Soviet Russia rejoined the International Olympic Committee in 1952 and the Cold War Era of the Olympic Games began in Helsinki, Finland.² The Cold War changed the focus of the Olympics from individual merit and competition to countries competing against one another. National security and the ever-

¹ Allen Guttman. *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

² Nicholas Evan Sarantakes. *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War*. (New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 22.

present rivalry with the USSR became the most important aspects of political aspirations for the American government throughout the Cold War. The relationship between the American and Soviet athletic organizations came in April 1980 with the official vote held by the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) to not participate in the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow, Russia.

In late December 1979, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan causing the United States and the United Nations to prepare against a full military invasion in Afghanistan. This invasion prompted President Jimmy Carter to act by way of international sport, rather than military aggression.³ The 1980 Winter Olympics were scheduled to begin February 14 in Lake Placid, New York, the first Olympiad held in the United States following Russia's reentry as a participating Olympic country.⁴ The Winter Olympics in the United States, as well as the Summer Olympic Games to be held in Moscow, Russia, aided President Carter's diplomacy regarding the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. The first mention of an Olympic boycott was during a press conference on January 4, 1980, where the president offered the Soviet Union a list of ultimatums to prevent the American non-participation of the 1980 Summer Games. The first ultimatum proposed on January 20, 1980, noted a possible relocation of the Games, or cancellation altogether, if the Soviet Union remained in Afghanistan after February 20, 1980.⁵

After publicly announcing he believed the United States should not participate in the Summer Olympic Games, President Carter continued with the necessary actions in order to enforce this non-participation by the United States Olympic Committee. President Carter proposed his boycott on January 4, 1980, and then took the topic to the United States Congress on January 20. This support came from both houses of Congress, with the House of Representatives approval "by 386 to 12 a motion urging USOC to press for the Games' transfer or cancellation," while the "Senate overwhelmingly approved the boycott."⁶ Following the congressional support, and the successful Winter Olympic Games held in Lake Placid, which the Soviet athletes attended, President Carter and Vice President Walter Mondale began petitioning the United States Olympic Committee to support the boycott.

³ Many sources note the invasion beginning on Christmas Day, while others mention December 27th as the official invasion date.

⁴ According to the International Olympic Committee website, from 1924 until 1992, the Winter and Summer Olympic Games were both held in the same calendar year. This occurred every four years and was referred to as an "Olympiad." The International Olympic Committee voted in 1986 to separate the Winter and Summer Olympiads to the current schedule used, where the Winter and Summer Olympics rotate every two years. The schedule used since 1992 keeps the Summer Olympics on the original schedule (pre-1992), and moves the Winter Games to the even numbered year between Summer Olympics. (<http://registration.olympic.org/en/faq/detail/id/132>)

⁵ Jimmy Carter, "Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents," (Washington, DC: US Printing Office, 1980), 106.

⁶ Christopher R Hill, *Olympic Politics*. (Manchester, England: University of Manchester Press, 1996), 123.

Prior to President Carter's plan to not compete in the 1980 Summer Games, the relationship between the United States Olympic Committee and the US government was symbiotic, with both parties supporting one another. As a non-political international group, the USOC had jurisdiction over the American Olympic movement and acted as sole liaisons to the International Olympic Committee from the United States. Following stipulations made with the Olympic and Amateur Sports Act of 1978, the USOC was considered the governing institution of American Olympic involvement. This allowed the United States government little interference with the Games, and also held the USOC accountable for the decision to participate or not participate in any Olympic Games on acceptable grounds. President Carter's option to boycott the Olympic Games caused tension between the United States government and the USOC because of these governing rules.

The Olympic and Amateur Sports Act of 1978 gave these Olympic candidates the right to challenge the USOC due to a violation of their rights as American athletes. The act, written in 1978 describes, in detail, the role that organizations play in protecting and enabling athletes to participate in international sporting events, such as the Olympics. The first ninety years of the Modern Olympic Games were only open to amateur athletes with very strict rules regarding the professionalism of an athlete. Because of this stipulation, no athletes that participated from 1896 until 1986 were protected by a professional organization. This amateur rule of the Olympic Games caused countries such as the United States to pass acts in order to protect the athletes participating for their home countries. In 1980, this act was tested in *DeFrantz v United States Olympic Committee*. The athletes stated the USOC violated the purpose of the organization, which was clearly written in the Olympic and Amateur Sports Act of 1978. According to the act, one of the purposes of national athletic organizations is "to promote and support amateur athletic activities involving the United States and foreign nations;"⁷ because the USOC had not deferred to the athletes before their vote to boycott the 1980 Summer Olympic Games, the athletes believed their right to participate in international competition was violated.

Throughout this time, President Carter continuously attempted to prevent the boycott and other, more militaristic tactics by offering the Soviet Union ultimatums. Following the Soviet resistance and their continued presence in Afghanistan, and the successful Winter Olympic Games in Lake Placid, President Carter continued his mission to execute the American-led boycott of the Summer Olympic Games. Despite the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union during these first months,

⁷ The Olympic and Amateur Sports Act of 1978. Public Law 95-606. 95th Cong. November 8. U.S. Code Title 36, Subtitle II, Part B, Chapter 2205, Subchapter I, § 220503. This act was revised in 1998 in order to encompass the change from amateur to professional athletes competing in the Olympics. The act is now often referred to as the "Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act of 1998" in reference to the Alaskan senator who sponsored the act.

the Soviet Union sent an Olympic delegation to Lake Placid, and participated in one of the most dramatic moments in Olympic history, the gold medal hockey match between the United States and the Soviet Union, resulting in an American victory. The experiences of the athletes at the Lake Placid Winter Games did nothing to better the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, or the United States and the USOC. According to the Carter Administration, a boycott remained the most important retaliation to the Soviet Union's military action.

From his initial suggestion in early January 1980, until April 1980, when the decision was officially supported by the USOC, President Carter never seemed to consider the feelings and reactions of the Olympic athletic candidates. This blatant disregard to the people whose lives were most affected by the non-participation, caused the tensions within both the United States Olympic Committee, and various other athletic organizations, such as the Amateur Athletic Union. These ill feelings toward the diplomacy the Carter administration executed are most notable in various athletes who took legal action, or were later used by the Carter administration to appeal to other nations regarding an Olympic boycott. Athletes such as Muhammad Ali were used as diplomats in this tactic to persuade nations to support the American Olympic boycott movement.⁸

Tension between the United States Olympic Committee and the United States government continued throughout the first four months of 1980. Following the vote in Congress, the White House sent representatives to the USOC headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado in order to begin persuading the USOC President, Robert J. Kane, and the Secretary General, Colonel Donald Miller, to consider non-participation. The government, despite the positive support from both houses of Congress, realized the only group who had the power to officially not attend the Olympics was the United States Olympic Committee. Throughout these early months of 1980, the USOC and various members of the Carter administration, notably a member of the house counsel, Lloyd Cutler, who acted as a liaison between the President and the USOC executive board, deliberated alternate solutions to the Moscow Games. One of these choices was to host an alternative competition in the United States, with invitations to countries who supported the American-led boycott. This and other alternatives, including postponing the Games until Soviet troops evacuated Afghanistan, were vehemently opposed by the International Olympic Committee.

The tensions and insecurity were present in many speeches given by both President Carter and Vice President Walter Mondale throughout 1980, including the speech given by Vice President Mondale on April 12, 1980 before the final vote by the United States Olympic Committee. In his speech to the USOC, Vice President Mondale stated, "We must not – and cannot – break that link between America's power to check

⁸ Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*. (New York City, NY: Macmillan, 2010).

aggression, and America's call for an Olympic boycott. Your [USOC members] vote is a test of our will, our confidence, our values, and our power to keep the peace [with Soviet Russia] through peaceful means."⁹ This speech instilled the idea of using the Olympic Games as a means to prevent a physical conflict with Russia following the invasion of Afghanistan. This tactic, persuading boycott support by means of a peaceful attack on Russia, was the main force exhibited by the Carter administration and dealings with both American Olympic candidates and the USOC throughout this time period.

After months of deliberation and arguments, the USOC began to waver in their defense against the boycott. They were under constant pressure from the United States government and the outside disapproval of the International Olympic Committee, who never supported the idea of non-participation. Throughout the months before the official USOC vote on April 12, President Carter and his administration chose many different paths to persuade the Committee to not compete. According to Steven R. Weisman, a sports journalist for the *New York Times*, the Carter administration raised the pressures on the USOC in late March and early April. The pressures "ranged from blunt warnings by top Defense and State Department officials that failure to boycott the games would damage national security to suggestions to corporate contributors to the Olympic movement that they use their influence on behalf of the boycott."¹⁰ These added pressures finally came to fruition, with the aid of Vice President Mondale's speech prior to the vote, when the USOC House of Delegates voted 1,604 to 797 to abstain from the 1980 Summer Olympic Games. This vote consisted of 275 delegates, many of whom were able to vote more than once due to the stipulations of the USOC voting rules.¹¹

In an article written by American journalist George F. Will, for the Associated Press, Will discussed the implications American Olympic non-participation would have on various entities, including the United States, the USSR, the International Olympic Committee and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) - notably disregarding the athletes. The President and many members of Congress only viewed the Olympics as a political affair, and as a direct response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the non-participation tactic offered a peaceful reaction with little direct human harm. In the article written by George F. Will, he discussed this idea of the Olympic boycott as a retaliation to the invasion, as well as the president's diplomacy and motives. In

⁹ Walter Mondale, "Remarks of Vice President Walter F. Mondale, U.S. Olympic Committee House of Delegates, Colorado Springs, CO, April 12, 1980" (speech, USOC Headquarters, Colorado Springs, CO, April 12, 1980).

¹⁰ Steven R. Weisman, "New Olympic Boycott Drive: Carter Decision to Press Harder for U.S. Backing On Moscow Could Alienate a Key Domestic Panel." *New York Times* (New York City, NY), April 5, 1980.

¹¹ Nicholas Evan Sarantakes. *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War*. (New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 193.

reference to the boycott, Will stated the refusal to attend the Olympic Games would be a major movement forward for the Carter administration in relations with the Soviet Union and, "more important, boycotting the Olympics will help put an end to the dangerous delusion that, regarding the Soviet Union, the period of maximum danger has passed."¹² George Will offered his support of the American-led non-participation as it could pose a significant aid to the American government in the constant shadow of the Cold War arms race.

The president's crusade to refrain from attending the Olympics was viewed by many people in the world of sport to be unnecessary and overstepping the boundaries between international sport and the leaders of countries. In 1980, under the leadership of Michael Morris, better known as Lord Killinan, the International Olympic Committee was in a brand new position. The Cold War Era of the Olympic Games had been riddled with boycotts from varying African nations throughout the 1970s but the American-led refusal in 1980 officially brought a vital contender to their attention. According to Christopher R. Hill, a leading scholar in the political aspects of the Olympics, "Several speakers in the [United States] Congress and in the [British] House of Commons made the same point, that there had been opposition to Moscow [hosting the Games] from the start, both outside and within the Soviet Union."¹³ Hill further explains this unrest between participating Olympic Countries and the International Olympic Committee in order to punctuate President Carter's quick decision to attempt an American-led boycott.

An American-led boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games had an effect on a variety of parties involved in the Olympic movement. No longer were athletes the only people being cheated by the American decision to not participate, but the USOC, the International Olympic Committee, the United States, and the Soviet Union all lost something. As with many international events as large as the Olympics, money was a major factor to all parties involved. The United States, the IOC, and the Soviet Union all lost monetarily with the American decision to not participate in the Games. However, the largest deficit in the 1980 Summer Olympic Games was the lowering of the level of competition within the Games. All of these factors led many leaders to disagree with the American decision to not attend the Olympics.

Internationally, President Carter's diplomatic moves within the United States were often questioned by political leaders, as well as athletic leaders. In his 1983 memoir titled *My Olympic Years*, the president of the International Olympic Committee Lord Killinan, discusses his unhappiness over the interference with the Olympic Games by the United States by stating, "Everything in our lives is governed by political decisions. We have varying degrees of freedom, but that freedom is obtained by

¹² George F. Will, "Let's Boycott the Olympics." *Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), January 7, 1980.

¹³ Christopher R. Hill, *Olympic Politics*. (Manchester, England: University of Manchester Press, 1996), 121.

political decision. What we in sport and the Olympic movement need is the interest and support of politicians, not their interference.”¹⁴ This disdain for the actions of the Carter administration was shared throughout the athletic community, both internationally and within the United States. The Olympics, nor any other international sport, had ever sparked such government interference by a major world power.¹⁵

In the winter of 1979, many American Olympic candidates were continuing their training while maintaining a presence at their full-time careers. One of these candidates was Anita DeFrantz. DeFrantz was a lawyer in Princeton, New Jersey and a member of the United States Rowing Team, with hopes of attending the Summer Olympics in Moscow the following summer.¹⁶ These plans began to unravel when President Jimmy Carter announced a possible boycott of the Olympics in January 1980 following the Russian invasion of Afghanistan the month prior. DeFrantz, like many other Olympic candidates would not agree with the president’s decision to not attend. Unlike many other candidates, Anita DeFrantz had the knowledge and skills to offer herself and other athletes a retaliation method, by taking the United States Olympic Committee to court.

Following the official vote by the United States Olympic Committee on April 12, 1980, Anita DeFrantz, with eighteen other Olympic candidates and selected team members, filed suit against the USOC on grounds of violating the athletes’ “constitutional rights, an amateur sports law and its own [USOC] constitution.”¹⁷ These athletes, who varied in background and sport, believed that the USOC was denying them the right to compete in international sport, as stated in the Olympic and Amateur Sports Act of 1978.¹⁸ This act outlines the purpose of amateur sports associations, such as the Amateur Athletic Union and the United States Olympic Committee, as well as the inclusion of the rights of member athletes within these associations.

The athletes took this unrest to a Washington DC court and oral arguments between the athletes’ lawyer William Allen and USOC lawyer Patrick Sullivan began May 24, 1980. In an Associated Press article published on May 14, 1980, attorney William Allen questioned the judgment of the USOC on the decision to boycott the Olympic Games, causing the Committee to violate the rights of the American athletes.

¹⁴ Lord Killanin, *My Olympic Years* (London: Secker and Warburg Ltd., 1983), 3.

¹⁵ Many African countries boycotted the 1976 Olympics following the 1976 New Zealand Rugby Union Tour of South Africa. South Africa had formally been removed from the international Olympic participating countries because of apartheid and human rights violations. This tour by New Zealand supported South African apartheid, which many of these countries believed violated the International Olympic Committee’s human rights rules.

¹⁶ “President Anita L. DeFrantz.” LA84 Foundation, <http://anitadefrantz.net/> accessed February 9, 2015.

¹⁷ “U.S. Athletes File Suit Over Boycott,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel* (Santa Cruz, CA), April 23, 1980.

¹⁸ The Olympic and Amateur Sports Act of 1978. Public Law 95-606. 95th Cong. November 8. U.S. Code Title 36, Subtitle II, Part B, Chapter 2205, Subchapter I, § 220503.

The article explains the reactions of the athletes, and their attorney, and also discusses the United States Olympic Committee's argument. The arguments included in this article pinpoint disappointment of many American Olympic hopefuls or team members. In his rebuttal, USOC attorney Patrick Sullivan, "claimed the 1978 law does not decide if the United States will take part in the Olympic Games."¹⁹ This would remain the defense throughout the case.

US District Court Judge John H. Pratt decided on May 16, 1980 in favor of the USOC and the right to not participate in the Olympic Games on the grounds that according to the Olympic and Amateur Sports Act of 1978, the United States Olympic Committee, as a legal corporation, had full control over the decision of allowing or barring athletes within the delegation to participate in international events.²⁰ Despite the fact that the official decision of the court was in favor of the United States Olympic Committee, this unprecedented tactic used by American athletes helped change the role they had in both their organizations and within the United States. By becoming legally involved in the decision to boycott or attend these Games, the athletes became more important to the United States Olympic Committee in the future. Following the official ruling on May 16, 1980, the USOC had one final piece to submit to the International Olympic Committee to formally announce non-participation of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. May 24 was the deadline for countries to formally accept or deny the invitation to the Summer Olympic Games. The United States Olympic Committee officially denied the invitation.

The American athletes, both former and current members of the Olympic team as well as Olympic candidates had varying opinions regarding the official vote by the USOC, many of which were shared with the general public.²¹ These opinions and their reactions offered the athletes a new place within American diplomacy and government interference in international non-political organizations. One notable reaction against the boycott is found in the *New York Times'* article published March 9, 1980. Journalist Stephen Daly interviewed Olympic candidate rower, Dr. Lawrence Klecatsky, who said, "The Olympics are supposed to be above all that. It's man against man, not country against country."²² This sentiment, of this being an issue between countries rather than individual athletes, was shared among many candidates and selected team members. The athletes' role had unofficially changed from individual competitor on a team to an individual competitor with a direct responsibility to their country. The shift from

¹⁹ "Judge promises ruling within several days," *Index-Journal* (Greenwood, SC), May 14, 1980.

²⁰ *DeFrantz v United States Olympic Committee*, Civ A. No. 80-1013 (1980).

²¹ Members of this delegation are referred to as candidates because the Summer Olympic Games involve multiple trials and tryouts for many teams, some teams such as the US Rowing Team, had already been selected while Track and Field teams had not yet chosen team members.

²² Dr. Lawrence Klecatsky quoted by Stephen Daly in "Athletes Differ on Olympic Boycott: Olympic Candidates: Views on a Boycott." *New York Times* (New York City, NY), March 9, 1980.

individual to national teams had begun with the reentry of Russia into the Olympic campaign, supported by the Cold War separation of the United States and Soviet Russia.

Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis discusses the importance of smaller nations throughout the Cold War in his book *The Cold War*. Gaddis notes that third-world nations had a great effect on diplomacy of both the United States and the USSR throughout the Cold War.²³ Without the involvement of these non-aligned states such as Afghanistan, the United States may have avoided a boycott of the Games. This non-alignment aspect of world politics was also used by President Jimmy Carter with his attempt to gain support of many African nations in his crusade to refuse to attend the Olympics. The Cold War Era was a time of unrest in many African countries, as well as between countries within the continent. One of these problems was the idea of Apartheid in South Africa, which many other African countries did not support. This tension caused a major rift between many African countries and South Africa, which led to these countries boycotting the 1976 Summer Olympic Games in Montreal, Canada. President Carter attempted to use this divide to garner the support of these African nations.

In an attempt to gain the support of the athletes and of other participating countries for the boycott, President Carter used former Olympic boxer Muhammad Ali as his own personal diplomat. Ali, an athlete known globally, and an Olympic gold medal winner, African American, and Muslim, seemed to be the right man for the diplomatic mission to Africa in Carter's eyes. This mission soon began to falter following Ali's arrival in Tanzania, the first stop on his African tour in early February 1980. Ali had not been informed of the reasons, nor was he aware of Soviet Union aid in Africa at the time, both of which led to faults in his reasoning for supporting the American-led boycott of the Moscow Games.

A final factor that hindered Carter's campaign to gain African backing was the lack of support the United States had offered in 1976 when many African countries had not attended the 1976 Montreal Summer Games due to human rights violations by South Africa at the time. The attempt to gain support from the African nations was a failure, and many African diplomats and leaders expressed their disappointment in the Carter administration for sending a mere athlete rather than an official diplomat. This failure is explained by many contemporary journalists across the United States, notably, *Washington Post* sports columnist Shirley Povich. In a February 5, 1980 editorial, Povich places the failure of President Carter on his selection of Ali, rather than on Ali. Povich argues, "much of the blunder can be traded to the White House, where the president unforgivably overrated Ali as a diplomat. Carter was mistaken in thinking Ali's charm and popularity as an international black personality could be persuasive factors in

²³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2007), 124-128.

Africa.”²⁴ Ali would be the only American athlete to be an official diplomat in 1980, but offered a new role to athletes in the future.

As a result of the 1980 American-led Olympic boycott, sixty-five nations refused to participate in the Olympic Games, leaving eighty-one nations to compete in Moscow. Sixteen nation’s athletes participated in the Games against their country’s advice under the Olympic flag rather than their home country flag. One of these countries was Great Britain. This American non-participation hindered both the Olympic movement and the progress of Olympic sport. According to a White House press release from May 24:

Of the national Olympic committees outside the Soviet bloc which have made their decisions [to boycott], one-half (58 of 116) have decided not to send teams to Moscow. The decision of 17 additional committees are not yet known...Those national teams and sports federations not participating in Moscow won 73% (58 out of 80) of all the gold medals won at Montreal in 1976...²⁵

This US State Department analysis in May 1980 notes the possible weakening of the overall contest with the boycotting of certain countries. These athletes who had trained for months, and in many cases, years, were unable to compete in the most important competition of their lives; this not only affected the athletes but also the sport as a whole.²⁶

The Cold War had an effect worldwide. No country or way of life was free of the burden of a bipolar world. It did not matter what aspect of life was involved, most people were directly affected by the ever-present ideological war being waged between the United States and the Soviet Union. Athletes with dreams of participating in the Olympics were no exception, with the American and Soviet boycotts of the 1980s. Despite the overwhelming presence of the Cold War, American athletes were given a new control over their place in both the sports world and the new role as faces and diplomats to the world.

For the American athlete, many facets of sport and international rivalry were changed throughout the Cold War, with the most notable and visible changes occurring in the aftermath of the American-led boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow. The Cold War, and the constant opposition between the Soviet Union and the United States pushed athletes into a greater role both diplomatically and competitively. Athletes began to compete as members of a team for their country, not simply for

²⁴ Shirley Povich. *Washington Post* (Washington, DC), February 5, 1980.

²⁵ US Department of State, “The Hopes of the White House: Department of State Analysis, May 24, 1980.” *Department of State Bulletin* (US State Department, Washington, DC), June 1980. 30.

²⁶ Alfred Senn, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999), 184-185.

themselves; the burden or glory of a nation seemingly sat on their shoulders. Athletes not only had this added pressure of competing for their nation and representing their home country on the playing field, court, or in the pool but rather, outside of the world of sports as well. Muhammad Ali and his failed trip to Africa offered a learning experience for future American presidents and diplomats. Athletes following the 1980 boycott were more susceptible to speaking on behalf of the United States, whether it be formally or as a delegate to the US Olympic Team. Athletes became heroes in many ways to the American people, in times of disorder throughout the world, they come together, under the flag of their nation, to compete in sport as a means of international order.

The changes for athletes did not come at a low price, nor at a fast pace, but they are visible in the way the United States Olympic Committee uses athletes as public ambassadors today. Beginning in 2008, twenty-eight years after the first attempt to use an Olympic athlete as an American diplomat failed, the USOC began an ambassador program for American Olympic candidates and team members. This facet of the USOC offers athletes with the knowledge and skills to present themselves as diplomats and ambassadors to the United States as a representation of an Olympian. Other organizations such as LA84 also provide Olympic athletes with the ability to defer from sports in order to better themselves and the world.

The diplomacy exhibited in regards of the 1980 Olympic Games by United States President Jimmy Carter was unprecedented and unfavorable to many different groups, including American athletes, the United States Olympic Committee, and the International Olympic Committee. No other major world power, barring the Soviet Union's retaliation boycott of the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles, California, has refused to attend the Olympic Games. The Olympics have become a place Baron Pierre de Coubertin envisioned in the 1890s when his grand plan of revitalizing the Olympic Games came to fruition. The Games are now a place, not entirely void of politics, with their own governance, and little governmental oversight. Both the Summer and Winter Olympics continue to provide international athletes with the chance to compete and honor their country both on and off the Olympic stage. The 1980 Olympic boycott allowed changes and advancements to be made for the American athlete, despite stripping many of their chance to win gold.