

# 6

## From Athens to Melbourne: British Olympic Diplomacy during the Formative Years

### 6.1 Introduction

The formative years of the modern Olympic Movement, during which time successive Olympic Games played a role in the institutionalization of modern sporting forms, were also the years during which so-called Old Diplomacy fell into disrepute, resulting from failure to provide an effective framework through which to manage mounting tensions between the Great Powers. The drift toward a more open form of diplomacy, referred to as 'New Diplomacy' (Hamilton and Langhorne 1995); signalled the adoption of a form of discourse which was reputedly more open and subject to the emerging democratic processes of modern nation states. Against this backdrop, the chapter examines the emerging interplay between diplomacy and the Olympic Games. It suggests that while there has been a formalization of diplomatic activity as it relates to the Games, a surprising number of features are recognizable from the early Games. This includes both diplomatic support for the staging of an international event and recognition of the significance of sporting contacts in terms of managing foreign relations. Beyond a consideration of British state diplomacy, the chapter refers to the gradual development of the IOC and other non-state actors as they developed linkages with international organizations such as the League of Nations and the Council of Europe.

There are long established references by historians of sport, concerning the political dimension to the Olympic Games. Accounts of political involvement in sport generally, suggest increasing opportunities for international sport to act as a conduit for diplomatic discourse (as sport moved toward the centre ground of public policy). Hazan (1982) for example, refers to the broadening of the diplomatic agenda to embrace sport and the increasing number of individuals and organizations with capacity to influence the diplomatic process. With regard to the experience of Britain, which forms the basis for this chapter, Holt and Mason (2000) contend that until the 1950's sport in Britain was seen as part of 'civil society', and so generally outside politics; 'apart from a few sensitive moments in the 1930's ...'. They argue that it was not until the

1950s that this attitude began to change. Change was articulated through increasing incidences of public policy interventions through sport, the development of the national sports infrastructure and the frequency of government pronouncements concerning the environment within which international sport takes place. Yet it is possible to over-emphasize aspects of change when considering diplomatic engagement through sport. The agenda of diplomacy linked to the Games continues to be driven by a series of core concerns, which have been apparent to varying degrees since the pre-war Olympic Games. These 'continuities' have been discussed in Chapter 1 and include the pursuit of key foreign policy objectives (for example the development of commercial and cultural interests), support frameworks for athletes travelling abroad, engagement of international sports organizations in the political and diplomatic processes and efforts by a range of sub-state and non-state actors to secure competitive advantage through the Games.

## **6.2 British state diplomacy and the Olympics: The formative years**

While there has been an increase in state diplomacy relating to successive Olympic Games, this increase has not been linear and has been shaped by the geo-political context within which each Games take place. The context for the 1936 Games, did for instance, generate a particularly intensive burst of diplomatic activity (discussed in Chapter 5). The quadrennial nature of the Games does mean that, while diplomacy relating to the Olympic Movement is ongoing, the level of activity is much more intense in the period immediately prior to and during the Games. In that sense it is also episodic, regardless of the general trends in Olympic diplomacy. The sharply contrasting cultural and political contexts within which the Games take place, will also influence the nature and pace of diplomatic activity.

### **6.2.1 British state diplomacy and the pre-war Games**

Prior to 1908, the embryonic Olympic Games of 1896, 1900 and 1904, provided little opportunity for British state diplomacy of any kind. It would take time for their political significance to enter into the political consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Polley (1996, pp.98, 99) does note however, that reference was made to the efficiency of planning of the 1896 Games by a British Minister, Egerton. By the time of the 1906 (intercalated) Games, the BOA was in existence and the Olympics was gradually increasing in prominence if not in organizational success. A request was forwarded by the Greek envoy in London to Grey, for an official British representative to be present at the Athens Games. The response indicated indecision as Ministers and diplomats struggled to comprehend a novel situation and attempted to unpick the difference between the attendance of athletes and of representatives. The FCO noted that 'we have never had such an invitation before. In a

previous case of an archaeological dig where representation was requested, this was done after consultation with the Board of Education'.<sup>2</sup> It suggested that the same action was taken on this occasion. The Board of Education was duly contacted on 14 February.

In a FCO Minute dated 27 February, reference is made to the response from the Board of Education and their suggestion that a Mr. Bosanquet, Director of the British School in Athens, 'would be a suitable representative'.<sup>3</sup> A further minute of 6 March refers to a letter from a Mr. Elliot in Athens who suggests; 'His Majesty's Government could delegate to represent them, one or two members of the English Committee [presumably the BOA] if they propose to attend the Games, or failing that, one or two competitors of good standing, such as Lord Desborough'. He noted that the German Ambassador in Athens had also been consulted by his government and proposed to make similar recommendations.<sup>4</sup> A Minute dated 14 March noted further correspondence from Mr. Elliot agreeing with the idea of using an athlete as the official representative. Regarding the application of 'someone on the spot' he did however, suggest himself over Mr. Bosanquet since 'the greater relative importance' of his post was significant in terms of protocol.<sup>5</sup> He pointed to the appointment of an American representative in this respect. Elliot's suggestion was overruled however. The final decision to send Lord Desborough – an athlete of 'good standing', being the Chairman of the BOA as well as a member of the British epee team – as the First Representative and Mr. Bosanquet as the second, appeared a satisfactory compromise.

A report from Elliot to Grey dated 3 May, provided an overview of the Games. It noted that:

The number of British competitors was relatively small, no government assistance having been given, as was the case with most other countries, notably America, whose athletes were numerous and successful. A fair number of prizes were however, carried off by the British, the race from Marathon in particular, being won easily by W. Sherring of Hamilton, Canada.<sup>6</sup>

The report went on to note that; 'the British colonial athletes have expressed to me their deep gratitude for the kindness and hospitality extended to them by Mr. Bosanquet, the British delegate'.

Britain came fourth in the medal table, behind France, the United States and Greece. Polley (1996, p.100) suggests that their performance was not as good as had been anticipated by the BOA and served to establish the notion of British under-achievement. This argument was presented most forcefully by Cooke (1908) who was concerned about the lack of funding for the 1908 Games, which had by then been fixed for London.

The lack of prominence given to the 1908 Games is reflected in Foreign Office minutes, which did on more than one occasion, omit reference to

sporting events as part of the Olympic programme, instead referring to them simply as part of the programme of the Franco-British exhibition, of which the Games played a part. At this stage in the development of the Games, there was no clear indication that they would become a permanent aspect of the emerging programme of international sport.

In his commentary on Britain as the 'Mother of international sport', Cooke noted the appropriateness of London as the host city of the 1908 Games; acknowledging however, that the opportunity had been somewhat belated.<sup>7</sup> The British perception of being 'wronged' in terms of the delay in providing it with the opportunity to host a Games, did manifest itself – albeit in muted form – in an article in *The Times* in July 1908.<sup>8</sup> In the article detailing arrangements for the 1908 Games, displeasure is expressed that Great Britain; 'the mother of athletics', would not have been permitted to act as hostess until 1920 or later, but for the withdrawal of Rome. Given the British perception of their role in the development of modern sport and the undoubted influence of the organization of sport in England, on the original proposals by Coubertin concerning the 'revival' of the Olympic Movement, this is not surprising.

There was then, some appreciation of the significance of the Games to diplomacy and the need for Britain, given her unique standing in relation to the development of modern forms of sport, to ensure a high quality of provision and hospitality. At the same time, there was a sense of a community of interests both inside and outside government, adapting to a new situation.

The Stockholm Games of 1912 represented a considerable progression in the Olympic Games. Greenberg (1997, p.21) argues that; 'at the Stockholm Games, the Olympic Movement finally came of age'. Japan was among the countries that attended for the first time and he notes that the Games were; 'beginning to achieve the world-wide support originally envisaged for them'. The most significant political tension relating to the Games was the requirement that the Finns competed under the Russian flag. This symbolizing of their lack of independence created rancour among the Finnish athletes, some of which went on to excel in the Games.

Concerning the quality of facilities and organization of competitions, while this generally attracted a positive response from commentators at the time, an article in *The Times* noted that; 'the Olympic Games are taking place somewhat dispersedly ... the stadium is in the centre of Stockholm however football is three miles to the north-west and shooting three miles to the south-east, particularly inaccessible except by car'.<sup>9</sup> A report in *The Times* in July commenting on the 'international aspect of the [1912] Games', noted the French protest regarding the separate entry of cycle teams for Scotland, England and Ireland.<sup>10</sup> It also commented on the significance of the presence of separate teams for Austria, Hungary and Bohemia. The Games became noted for the increase in the number of female competitors and they were the first occasion when electronic timing was used.<sup>11</sup>

Foreign Office and Board of Trade correspondence during the period leading up to the Games does make reference to the issue of whether or not duty should be levied on literature 'sent out for the purpose of advertising the Olympic Games'. It is clear from this correspondence that there was lack of clarity as to which body should take responsibility for the decision concerning whether or not duty should be paid when imported into the Dominions. This is symptomatic of a more general lack of clarity on a range of operational procedures relating to the Games. What is perhaps more surprising is the extent to which such apparently minor misunderstandings remained a feature of British diplomacy as it relates to the Olympic Games, for many subsequent Games.

An apparent lack of understanding of the fundamentals of the Olympic ideal as it was articulated through the evolving regulatory framework was clear from correspondence relating to the early Games on a number of occasions. There was for example, misinterpretation of how diplomatic representation could be arranged in relation to the Games. Even the principle of IOC officials representing the interests and objectives of the Olympic Movement internationally (rather than promoting their national interests within the Olympic Movement), seems not to have been acknowledged. In a letter to Grey at the Foreign Office, in June of 1912, Cooke offered his services as a 'representative of this country during the progress of the Games in Stockholm'. He noted that he would be there in any case, as one of the British representatives on the IOC. Any notion of a possible conflict of interest seems not to have registered, either with Cooke or with the Foreign Office.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, there appears in the reply from the Foreign Office, either a wish to retain their distance from the Games or to avoid further dealings with the problematic Cooke. Noting that; 'the Swedish Government have not invited HM Government to send official representatives', it comments that arrangements regarding British participation in the Games; 'were in the hands of the BOA, with which HM Government have not official connection'.

### **6.2.2 British state diplomacy and the inter-war period**

The Olympic Games of the 1916 were scheduled to take place in Berlin, but were cancelled due to the outbreak of the First World War. Immediately after the War Antwerp, although badly affected by hostilities, was given the opportunity to host the 1920 Games. Germany and her allies were excluded from the event and the new regime in Russia was not recognized. British diplomacy in relation to the 1920 Games was particularly controversial in that it appears correspondence confirming participation of the British team in the Games was mistakenly sent by the Foreign Office without the knowledge of the BOA (Polley 1991). This provided the pretext upon which additional pressure could be brought to bear on government, to provide financial support for the British Olympic effort.

A number of government departments were contacted in relation to the 1920 Games as the British Olympic Committee struggled to secure sufficient

funding and support to enable them to compete. Laffan wrote to Churchill at the War Office on 1 April in an attempt to secure Armed Forces support through provision of catering in Belgium, concluding the letter with the remark:

I am therefore writing to ask that our request may have your support when it comes to the Army Council. I do so on the ground that an adequate representation of British athletes at Antwerp is, in view of the King's express desire and the action of the Foreign Office, a matter of National importance, that to this adequate representation there is only one obstacle which appears insuperable; viz: that of catering; and that this obstacle can be removed by your kind intervention.<sup>13</sup>

No further correspondence is on record concerning this request and it is assumed that support was forthcoming. The trend of calling on armed forces support through provision of resources was to re-merge on a number of occasions thereafter. Indeed their input, particularly in athlete preparation for the Winter Olympics, continues to be significant.

In relation to the level of diplomatic activity, the Games of 1924 and 1928 continued to be characterized by an apparent lack of clarity as to the appropriateness of diplomatic involvement in various aspects of the Games. This was reflected in a Foreign Office minute in March 1924, which noted an approach made by the Organizing Committee of the Paris Games, concerning the proposed artistic exhibition relating to the Games. The exhibition organizers – the 'Association Francaise d'Expansion et d'Exchanges Artistiques' – required submissions of work by British artists. Clearly bemused by the request for nominations, the Foreign Office wrote to the BOA suggesting that; 'as this matter does not lie within the scope of this department, I am to suggest that your Association should, if they see fit, return a direct reply to the Association Francaise'.<sup>14</sup> The BOA replied on the 26 March indicating that information about the event had been sent by them, to all interested parties in the UK, however, there had been some difficulties in making judgements as to who should be approached on the matter. The reply goes on to say that; 'we have on this side, done our best'.

From a position of fourth in the 1920 and 1924 Summer Games medal tables, Britain had slipped back to eleventh behind Canada in the 1928 Games in Amsterdam. It appears that the 1928 Games attracted little attention from the Foreign Office; even in the context of the re-integration of Germany into the Olympic Movement. It is noteworthy however, that this lack of attention did not necessarily signify a loss of interest by the Foreign Office in the diplomatic significance of sport. Both Polley (1991) and Beck (1999) draw attention to Foreign Office interest in football contacts between Britain and Germany during this period. In particular, Beck (1999, pp.114–115) refers to a complaint made by Lord Kilmarnock – the Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commissioner – to the War Office about the poor standards of play and behaviour displayed by British footballers visiting the occupied zone. On the basis of the under-

lying 'political considerations', but unsure as to the appropriate action, the War Office had contacted the Foreign Office, which inclined toward the view that no governmental action was appropriate since it was a 'sporting matter'. The News Department however, subsequently took a more direct interest on the basis that British interests and image in the wider world were damaged by incidents of bad behaviour and poor performance of British sports men abroad. This caused a number of departmental exchanges concerning the nature of the problem and the appropriate action. The Foreign Office remained unsure about taking official action and ultimately opted for a combination of; private informal exchanges with the football association, complemented by news briefings which generated media pressure through highlighting the damage done to British prestige by; 'incompetent or ill-balanced teams' playing overseas.<sup>15</sup>

The 1932 Summer Games in Los Angeles took place in an atmosphere of worldwide economic depression. Imaginative fund-raising techniques enabled the organizing committee to overcome what appeared to be formidable difficulties and it was generally judged to be a 'successful' event. Athletes benefited from subsidized transport and, for the first time, a specially constructed 'Olympic village'.<sup>16</sup> The Games were significant in the sense that it was characterized by major improvements in the level of performance of the athletes.<sup>17</sup>

The Los Angeles Games has attracted relatively little attention from sports historians. The international political environment within which it took place was not as highly charged as would be the case four years later in Berlin. Reporting of the event was at a much lower level than in 1936 and Foreign Office interest again appeared limited. Yet the seeds of the regional – and ultimately international – crises of the late 1930s had already been sown. Mussolini's Fascist regime in Italy was well established. The spectacular performance of the Italian team (coming second in the medal table, behind the USA) convinced those within the regime, who still needed convincing, of the propaganda value of sport. It was later, to influence the views of the Nazi regime in Germany as they prepared for the Berlin Games.

It is noteworthy that Germany had in 1932, been vying with Spain for the opportunity to host the 1936 Olympics and the announcement that Berlin was to be the venue for the Summer Games was made just prior to the commencement of the Los Angeles Games. There was considerable nervousness in the German camp, that political upheaval – the Weimar Republic was by this time disintegrating – would rob them of the opportunity to host the Games as it had done in 1916. However plans did get under-way with members of the German Olympic Committee travelling to Los Angeles to study the organization of the event.

The level of British diplomatic activity in the lead up to the 1936 Games was significantly higher than activity relating to any previous Games. This is reflected in the volume of Foreign Office correspondence relating to the Berlin Olympics, although strangely the same cannot be said regarding the

level of media attention in the run-up to the 1936 Games. The intense diplomacy surrounding the build up to the Berlin Games is of particular significance to this investigation, given the pressure from some quarters, to institute a boycott of the event. This aspect of diplomatic activity has been dealt with in detail in Chapter 5.

Whilst retrospectively it may be clear that by 1936, international sport and politics were interwoven, it cannot be assumed that such a perception was shared by British politicians and diplomats at that time. Evidence suggests that thinking and consequently policy, was somewhat contradictory regarding the political implications of participation in international sport and concerning the way in which such participation should be regulated and supported. The principles of amateurism while clearly open to abuse and misinterpretation did encourage the perception of sport as 'above' politics and commerce and inappropriate as a subject for political discourse. On the one hand this was articulated through the reticence of the British government to provide support for British Olympic athletes at a time when such support was increasing dramatically in other states. Nevertheless policy decisions and diplomatic activity particularly as it related to the 1936 Games, demonstrate a degree of opportunism in terms of the separation of politics from sport. Governmental 'neutrality' in relation to the Games provided on occasion, an effective smokescreen for certain aspects of foreign policy. In addition it provided cover when general uncertainty had frustrated attempts to define a policy. It is noteworthy that active diplomacy was evident where a clear foreign policy benefit could be ascertained (discussed in Chapter 5).

### **6.2.3 State diplomacy and commerce: The early Games**

While there is a considerable body of literature which assesses recent developments in economic diplomacy (Lee 1999), there is a long record of diplomatic discourse aimed at the promotion of commercial activity. An assessment of British Foreign Office Archives demonstrates that concerns with commerce featured in diplomatic exchanges, early in the development of the modern Olympic Games. Attempts to attract increased commercial activity through the Games, directly involved the Foreign Office and the diplomatic service. In this, the potential beneficiaries are not the athletes directly, but the business community. While clearly diplomacy relating to the commercial dimension of the Games has increased in importance over the past two decades in particular, understanding the characteristics of early activity provides valuable insights into the nature of contemporary challenges facing the diplomatic community.

The pre-war Olympic Games were, by default, closely linked to commercial activity. The 1900 Paris Games and the 1904 Games in St. Louis were both hosted in conjunction with international fairs. While this relationship did not necessarily enhance the profile of the Games, it could be argued that the proximity of the Games to the trade fairs heightened awareness of the potential for links between sport and commerce.

A perusal of archive material relating to the 1908 Games indicates that even at that early date, the events provided an important focus of a range of commercial activity.<sup>18</sup> The Games were again linked to a trade fair – this time the Franco-British exhibition. A consideration of diplomatic correspondence relating to the 1908 Games indicates that, while the Foreign Office provided a focus for diplomatic activity, other government Departments did become involved. The Board of Trade and HM Customs and Excise had a considerable interest due to the links with the Franco-British exhibition. Correspondence between the Board of Trade and the Foreign Office concerning the commercial potential of involvement by British businesses in an international field sports exhibition in Vienna in 1911 provides further evidence of an acknowledgement of the link between commercial diplomacy and the sports industry.

The 1916 Games were cancelled due to the outbreak of war and surviving records of the Games of the 1920s do not contain reference to any significant commercial activity relating to the Games. Evidence of significant commercial activity linked to international sport does exist in relation to the Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1932. The Games were particularly successful – despite a worldwide recession – and served as an indication of the potential of private capital in the funding of such events. The burgeoning North American film industry took a particular interest in the Games and an ‘Olympic village’ was built for athletes, despite the lack of government support for the Games. No evidence has emerged from research of British diplomatic correspondence, concerning the Olympic Games being linked in any way to the development of British commercial interests abroad. It is clear that sport in general and the Olympic Games in particular, were viewed as at best ‘peripheral’, given the social and economic problems which pervaded Europe after the First World War.<sup>19</sup>

While the London Games of 1948 took place against the backdrop of post-war austerity, nevertheless, there are indications of the significance of the Games to the economic development of the city and its surrounds. Early in the process of planning for the Games, the Travel and Industrial Development Association of Great Britain and Ireland – a government sponsored organization – was consulted and had offered their; ‘whole hearted support, especially with the shipping companies and the matter of publicity’.<sup>20</sup> This, along with central government and municipal authority interest, does indicate an increased activity in the commercial opportunities offered by the Games. It also highlights the role, albeit limited, of non-governmental organizations in the politics of the early Olympic Games.

### **6.3 British diplomacy and the Olympic Games: Shifting post-war focus**

Shifts in Britain’s position in the international order during the course of the twentieth century were profound. To some extent, these shifts are

reflected in the focus of diplomatic activity relating to the Olympic Movement. In this respect, the 'retreat from Empire' and its implications for British foreign relations, is of particular significance. In many respects, there was not however, a causal relationship between British diplomatic activity as it related to the Olympic Games and the themes that dominated diplomatic discourse during that period.

Archive evidence repeatedly provides illustrations of tensions between representatives of national organizations during the early Olympic Games. It is however, unhelpful to view these as a direct reflection of wider tensions in international relations. In this sense there are limitations to the argument that the Olympic Games may be viewed as a 'microcosm of international society' (Espy 1979, preface). Organizations within the Olympic Movement, although clearly open to the influence of general developments in international relations, did have their own agenda and pre-occupations.

Regarding the management of foreign relations in the post-war era, the Cold-War tensions which were increasing in the 1950s soon became a key feature of diplomacy as they related to the Olympic Movement. The Helsinki Games of 1952 were significant in that they were the first Games in which the Soviet Union took part. The delicate nature of the situation was made potentially worse given animosity between the Soviet Union and the host country Finland. The closing report from the British Legation in Helsinki – addressed to the Foreign Secretary Antony Eden – indicated that an overriding concern prior to the Games was possible conflict which might surround the participation of the Soviet Union. It went on to comment that after initial fears resulting from Soviet demands for training facilities, concerns in terms of the organizers, were largely unfounded.<sup>21</sup> Relations between athletes and officials from the Soviet Union and their counter-parts in Western Europe were, to the surprise of many, generally good.

The activities of other Eastern Bloc countries in relation to the Games did draw considerable interest from the Foreign Office. A letter from the British legation in Budapest to the Foreign Office dated 15 January 1952 referred to a rumour in diplomatic circles that the Hungarians were planning to send a team of:

no less than 250 people to the next Olympic Games in Helsinki. We assume that this includes many officials etc ... We do not know the standard of Hungarian athletes in running and jumping, but their best football teams could play without disgrace in our first Division.<sup>22</sup>

Clearly the interest of the Eastern Bloc countries on the potential diplomatic value of international sport was increasing. Whilst this interest has since been extensively documented, it appears to have caused considerable surprise at the time.

As with the aftermath of World War One, re-admission of the defeated powers into the Olympic Movement after World War Two was viewed as a significant phase in their re-integration back into the international community. Dissension concerning German representation at the 1952 Olympic Games was evident in the lead up to the Helsinki Games. A number of concerns about representation were expressed in a report sent from the office of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) in the British sector of Berlin to the Foreign Office in February 1952.<sup>23</sup> By July however, the tone appears to have changed at least in some quarters. A telegram from the British Sector in Germany to the Foreign Office, noted that the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs intended to send an official to Helsinki for the duration of the Games. It further noted that; 'although present in a private and unofficial capacity, he will be available to assist German visitors and competitors in case of need' and that; 'the Ministry requests that her Majesty' legation [in Helsinki] assist him in the unlikely event that this proves necessary'.<sup>24</sup> While it appeared that the mood toward Germany was shifting, complications resulting from the subsequent emergence of the 'two Germanys', were however to take a number of years to resolve due to difficulties over representation in international sports organizations, in particular, within the Olympic Movement.

Tension surrounding the 1956 Games was inevitable given the reaction of the international community to the Suez crisis and to the Soviet invasion of Hungary, both of which took place in that year. In view of boycotts by the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland (in response to the Soviet invasion of Hungary) and by Egypt and Lebanon (in response to the Franco-British invasion of the Suez) the 1956 Games experienced considerable disruption (discussed in Chapter 5). Apart from these boycotts, the intrusion of other developments in international relations into the 1956 Games was marked. The late withdrawal of the People's Republic of China because of the decision to permit nationalist China (Taiwan) to compete was of particular significance.<sup>25</sup> Given these tensions, it is in one sense surprising that the Games took place at all.

A report on the Games in the *Observer* newspaper in December 1956 identified a number of pressure points during the Games. It noted in particular, the soccer final between Russia and Yugoslavia; 'the last 20 minutes [of which] would have seemed rough to an all-in wrestler. They were punctuated by flagrant acts of assault and counter-assault'.<sup>26</sup> Such developments drew the attention of the British press and were of interest to political commentators and policy makers observing the nature of relationships in an increasingly unstable international political environment.

### **6.3.1 New priorities: Diplomacy and hosting the 1948 Olympic Games**

British Foreign Office correspondence relating to Olympic Games in the post-war period continued to provide mixed messages concerning the willingness

of the state to use sport as a conduit for diplomatic discourse. There was an acknowledgement of broader political implications of decisions by the Soviet Union and other eastern Bloc countries as to whether or not they would compete in the Olympic Games. At the same time there was evidence of an underlying commitment to retain a distance between political discourse and sport and to as far as possible, respect the 'amateur' credentials of the Olympic Movement. Nevertheless, with the decision to locate the 1948 Olympic Games in London, it was inevitable that government and the related machinery of diplomacy would be drawn into the frame.

The aftermath of the World War Two was clearly uppermost in the minds of the international community in 1948, nevertheless it was determined that the Games should go ahead, albeit without German representation and, perhaps more controversially, without Japan. The BOA had in 1936, under the guidance of Lord Burghley, put forward a proposal for staging the 1940 Olympics in London.<sup>27</sup> This was however, awarded to Tokyo.<sup>28</sup> The 1940 Games were transferred to Helsinki as a result of the Sino-Japanese war in 1938. The Soviet invasion of Finland and the outbreak of World War Two resulted in a total cancellation. Meanwhile a successful bid was prepared by the BOA for the 1944 Games to be held in London.<sup>29</sup> Again, cancellation took place as a result of the war. Hostilities had not been formally concluded in the Pacific when a meeting of the Executive of the IOC on 21–24 August 1945 decided that the Olympic Games should be resumed in 1948.<sup>30</sup> A number of suggestions had been received regarding the hosting of the 1948 Games – amongst these Lausanne – however Lord Aberdare reported to the BOA on 5 November 1945 that; 'the [IOC] Executive had decided to arrange a Postal Vote, the members of the IOC being recommended to choose London, though Lausanne was not ruled out'.<sup>31</sup>

The justification for government involving itself in the Games and indeed for the Games to be held in London at all is on record as being challenged by a number of establishment figures. Concerning dissension over hospitality being extended to Polignac, a French member of the IOC who had been a wartime collaborator, Sir Oliver Harvey, the British ambassador to France warned of the potential damage wrought should he be invited to any official Olympic functions. He noted that such concerns confirmed his view that; 'the Olympic Games are a great deal more trouble than they are worth'.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast, supporters of the Games and of London being used as the location, focused on the event as having the potential to begin the process of healing divisions created through the war (Espy 1979, p.24). An indication of support from economic and political interests, for the hosting of the Games can be identified, however their significance is difficult to gauge. At the inaugural meeting of the BOA on 5 November 1945, Lord Aberdare (the Hon. Secretary of the BOA) noted that he had already contacted the Travel and Industrial Development Association of Great Britain and Ireland, a Government sponsored organization, who had offered their 'wholehearted

support, especially with the shipping companies and in the matter of publicity'.<sup>33</sup> He had also spoken to a Minister of State; 'who was personally strongly in favour and felt sure he could get the support of his colleagues'.<sup>34</sup> The Lord Mayor's Office also indicated their support for the event.

Focusing on the wish by some members of government, to ensure government influence in the organization of the Games, Polley (1991, p.298) notes that an inter-departmental committee was envisaged as a; 'co-ordinating body for hotel development, the improvement of the catering industry, the establishment of cheap rail packages, the restoration of London's museums and the simplification of the visa process.' Such a committee was to draw representation from a wide range of government departments as well as the Civil Aviation Authority, the Arts Council and the Standing Council on Museums. Whilst discussions about the relevance of setting up such a committee is noteworthy, most significant is the final decision not to form such a committee but instead, to initiate a 'small executive agency'.

The Games when they did take place, were organized on a limited budget with a considerable level of responsibility being handed to a commercial operator; the Wembley Stadium Company.<sup>35</sup> Competitors were housed in temporary military encampments and a temporary running track was laid at Wembley arena.<sup>36</sup>

Given the proximity of the Games to the end of World War Two and its continuing ramifications in terms of rationing across Europe and the occupation of Germany and Japan, a clear policy line on attendance of the defeated powers at the Games seemed an essential element of foreign policy at the time. Unsurprisingly, no question appears even to have been raised concerning German exclusion from the Games. This is however, not the case in relation to the other Axis powers. In the case of Japan, the question of Japanese participation appears to have been first raised in June 1948 when the Foreign Office suggested this to be most undesirable. In any event they noted, it was most likely that Allied Command in Japan would refuse travel visas for Japanese athletes wishing to leave the country.<sup>37</sup> The Foreign Office was clearly taken aback in July 1948 however, by the strength of the Japanese insistence that they should be permitted to enter a team in the 1948 Games. A strongly worded telegram from the British Liaison Mission in Japan to the Foreign Office (with a copy to Washington) pointed out that apart from Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan (SCAP) not being willing to grant the required visas, the IOC had decided in 1946 that Germany and Japan should not be invited to the 1948 Games.<sup>38</sup> In contrast however, there is no indication of Foreign Office concerns regarding Italian – or indeed Finnish participation.<sup>39</sup> Concerning Italy, Kanin (1981) notes that their 'switching sides' in 1943 was enough to ensure their inclusion.<sup>40</sup> Both Italy and Finland sent teams to the winter and Summer Games and performed surprisingly well.<sup>41</sup> A message from the Foreign Office to the War Office dated 22 July and marked 'secret', referred to four Finnish army officers travelling to London for the Olympic Games and requested that hospitality be extended to

them.<sup>42</sup> The only correspondence with the Foreign Office regarding Italian participation in the Games was an August file note from the British embassy in Rome to the Foreign Office giving clarification of the Italian Anthem.<sup>43</sup>

A key concern in British foreign policy at the time was how best to manage relations with the Soviet Union. It is therefore not surprising to note that Foreign Office monitoring in the lead up to and during the Games, was focused on Soviet commentary and activity relating to the Games. It is also noteworthy that there was a general concern within an essentially conservative Olympic Movement, about the implications of including teams from communist states.<sup>44</sup> At the time of the 1948 Games, the Soviet Union was in relative international isolation, focusing on maintaining ideological 'purity' and consolidating power over its satellite states. Kanin (1981, p.61) notes there was considerable evidence to suggest that; 'the Soviets were not sure what their policy would be toward the organs of sport in the first years after the war.' Yet in considering their place in international relations, it was beginning to take note of such international institutions.

The Soviet Union had made unofficial inquiries with regard to sending a team to the Games in 1948. At the same time however, it maintained a barrage of propaganda against the Games; presenting it as a bourgeois activity; the Olympic Movement being a creature of the Capitalist West. A letter from the British embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Office dated 13 February 1948 made reference to a Soviet newspaper article which accuses American aid to Olympic teams elsewhere in the world and support for the Games generally, as a reflection of their imperialist tendencies. At the same time the letter noted that the Soviet Union had been making inquiries about the possibility of involvement in the 1948 Games. One Foreign Office official added a file note to the effect that a group of, 'twelve or so Russian observers were present at St Moritz', the winter Olympics held in January/February 1948.<sup>45</sup>

What was interpreted by the Foreign Office as a cynical eleventh hour attempt by the Soviet Union to create a diplomatic incident concerning the Summer Games, did create a tension in British/Soviet relations. A note from The British embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Office on 4 August alerted them to the fact that a party of 13 Soviet athletes were intending to attend the Games.<sup>46</sup> After hurried negotiations between the two, the Soviet Ministry for Foreign affairs received a curt note dated 6 August, from the British embassy, pointing out that the Soviet Union, despite having been informed in the previous year as to the procedure for sending a team, had not taken the necessary steps to form its own National Olympic Committee and could therefore not participate. It was further pointed out that, in addition to the non-existence of an NOC, applications to compete in specific events had not been submitted within the agreed time-scale thus rendering participation impossible:

... in view of the advanced stage already reached in the Games [with a number of events by then already well underway] it would in fact be

impracticable for the Soviet team to compete even if the international rules had been complied with.<sup>47</sup>

A further note at the time pointed out that two of the Soviet athletes were registered as 'Basketball players' and that since this number was somewhat short of a full team, it did suggest a certain cynicism on the part of the Soviet authorities. What is particularly noteworthy about this case is that the correspondence to the Soviet Authorities came directly from the British embassy and not from the Organizing Committee for the Games; ostensibly on the basis that it was an area of concern for passport control. Whilst concern over the issuing of entry visas may have been justified, it is still somewhat surprising that the Organizing Committee did not feature more prominently in the related discussions.

Notwithstanding evident tensions at the time, British policy toward the Soviet Union was dominated by an attempt to foster good relations. Whilst on the one hand there appeared to be concerns about the general Soviet approach to sport, there did not appear to be outright opposition to Soviet membership of the IOC. A Foreign Office file note of July 1947 reported on the success of a visit to Moscow by Lord Burghley concerning Soviet involvement in the Olympic Movement.<sup>48</sup> It was noted at that time, that Soviet membership of the IOC appeared to be close and no alarm or concern was expressed at the prospect.

Ultimately the 1948 Games were considered successful and remained surprisingly free from the influence of political interests. Government did however, demonstrate a willingness to become directly involved in the organization of the Games where it appeared, there was a political advantage. Post-war political realities shaped the event, although it was a matter of fine political judgement concerning which defeated powers should be permitted to participate. Beyond recognition of the increased number of visitors who would be attracted to the capital, any notion that preparation for the Games could contribute to the re-construction of London in the post-war situation was, it would appear, given little thought. This is unsurprising given the scale of a Games that did not require significant infrastructure development and which continued to reflect the characteristics of a sporting event framed by the codes of an earlier amateur era.

### **6.3.2 Post-war Olympic diplomacy: The development of state–non-state relations**

A central theme in writing on the history of twentieth century diplomacy is the notion of a general 'opening up' of the diplomatic process. At international level, increasing levels of multilateral diplomacy, particularly through the medium of the League of Nations, was part of the determined effort of established and emergent nation states to create an international system, which was capable of avoiding future conflict on such a scale. Yet the

reality of inter-war diplomacy was the continued supremacy of bi-lateralist deals within or outside the framework of multilateral institutions. At the same time, the continued dominance of 'Western' diplomatic culture and institutions was reflected in its adoption, even by the most extreme of the inter-war regimes.<sup>49</sup>

Accepting the state-centred nature of diplomacy, there was however, some evidence of the role played by non-governmental groups in international diplomacy, early in the history of the Games. Of particular significance was the internationalist aspect of Coubertin's thinking which quickly tuned into the post-war internationalist aspirations advocated by the League of Nations. There was a belief within the IOC, however misplaced at times, that it had the capacity to influence international relations.<sup>50</sup> This has continued to be the case throughout the history of the modern Olympic Movement and where British interests are affected their activities are recorded as coming to the attention of the Foreign Office.

IOC interests in wider political and diplomatic developments in post-war Europe also soon became evident. The UK Foreign Office noted in 1952, attempts by the Council of Europe (COE) to influence the decision by the IOC relating to rights of individuals with refugee status, to participate in the Olympic Games. The correspondence provides an illustration of the interaction of sports organizations with both intergovernmental institutions and with government, regarding a significant regional issue (whereas such scenarios are generally considered as characteristic of late twentieth century regional and international politics). On this occasion the sports organization – the IOC – resisted attempts to persuade it to change its guidelines on the criteria governing participation. The Foreign Office, for its own reasons, was clearly satisfied with this outcome.

A document dated 25 May 1952 contained a draft resolution from the COE (Special Committee to watch over the interests of European nations not represented in the Council of Europe) which:

REGRETS that since the IOC recognizes only one governing body from each member country, many individuals who are refugees from their own country are thus precluded from taking part in the Games. OBSERVES that it is contrary to the rule that no discrimination is allowed against any country or person on grounds of colour, race or politics. EXPRESSES the hope that the IOC will consider suggestions which will enable political exiles to take part in the Games in future years.<sup>51</sup>

Further file notes made during June indicate the UK Foreign Office were aware the matter would be brought up; 'at the second part of this year's session of the Assembly which is due on 15 September'.<sup>52</sup> They referred to the importance of producing appropriate guidance 'for the leader of our delegation', and noted that the matter had been discussed with the BOA.<sup>53</sup>

The response of the IOC to these early representations is outlined in a letter from the IOC (Lausanne) which indicated that the idea of attributing special category status was ruled out. The Foreign Office report prior to the deliberations of the COE Consultative Assembly (15 September 1952), outlined the arguments put forward by the COE regarding participation of political exiles in the Olympic Games. It set out the IOC rules on citizenship and participation and went on to note that:

These regulations, although they may cause hardship in a very few cases, appear to be entirely reasonable, and the IOC have declared in a letter to the Special Committee that they cannot contemplate any revision of them. This would seem a wise decision since any alteration to regularise the position of certain categories of refugees would inevitably involve the Olympic Committee in endless embarrassment with the risk of undesirable incidents in the Games themselves. It would be unfortunate, therefore, if the consultative Assembly took any initiative which might disturb the harmonious atmosphere which at present surrounds the Games.<sup>54</sup>

Participation of refugees in the Olympic Games was debated at the inaugural meeting of the UK 'Parliamentary Sports Committee' on 27 March 1952 where it was noted that certain Members of Parliament had raised the issue.<sup>55</sup> At the meeting Lord Burghley, BOA President at the time, stated that refugees could not compete as individuals as had been suggested, since all entries had to be certified by an NOC which had the approval of the IOC. It would therefore be necessary for refugees to assume the nationality of the country where they were resident, and this could be achieved only by taking out naturalization papers. It was noted that it was not within the competence of either the BOA or the Parliamentary Sports Committee to alter the IOC ruling in order to accommodate athletes who were currently not eligible due to their refugee status.

While increase in the pace of change in diplomatic discourse relating to the Olympic Movement has not been linear, this period does then suggest, increasing engagement of non-governmental organizations in diplomatic discourse in pursuit of collective interests. Such activity it would appear, is not limited to the latter years of the twentieth century.

#### **6.4 The diplomacy of support: Continuity and change**

Central to the role of the diplomatic service is the protection of the interests of its citizens abroad. This is manifest for example, in British Foreign Office correspondence throughout the duration of the modern Games and so presents a theme of continuity. Typically such activity relates to a range of issues concerning the movement of people and goods across borders, as well as accommodation for goods and people. This includes the crucial

issue of the organization of passport and visa arrangements. The logistical complexities of travel are not limited to humans. They are particularly acute in relation to the movement of horses for equestrian events. This was brought into sharp relief in relation to the organization of equestrian events as far back as the 1956 Games, when a misinterpretation of Australian quarantine laws meant that the events could not be held in Melbourne and had to be re-scheduled to take place in Stockholm.<sup>56</sup> It should be noted that arrangements for the transport of horses continues to present particular challenges for Olympic teams and Organizing Committees.<sup>57</sup> In relation to the movement of people, the 'sovereign' status of the Olympic site during the Games, presents an operational challenge for the Organizing Committee and for the participating nations, in terms of controlling the international movement of people to and from the Games. Given that the Games are taking place within a state, which has its own pre-occupations concerning the control of its borders, tensions inevitably arise between the procedures of the Organizing Committee, the host country and the visiting teams. This is particularly the case since international sports events have become the scene of high profile defections in the past, with often serious diplomatic consequences.<sup>58</sup>

The organization of transport has itself become an area of controversy throughout the history of the modern Games. One particularly revealing exchange of correspondence between the Ministry of Transport, the Belgian ambassador and the Foreign Office reflected lack of appreciation at the level of domestic politics, of the diplomatic significance of the Olympic Games of 1920. The Belgian ambassador had requested that officials and athletes travelling to the Games in Antwerp be given special travelling facilities within Britain. The reply from the Ministry of Transport, sent via the Foreign Office, comments; 'I am to suggest that the Belgian Ambassador be informed that owing to the present position of the railways in the United Kingdom, His Majesty's Government regret that it is not possible to grant [these] special travelling facilities'.<sup>59</sup> Procedural arrangements were clearly not conducive to facilitating the request however there is no indication that the diplomatic implications of such a response were given any serious consideration. Such was the price of a 'hands off' approach by government.

Concerning operational issues relating to attendance at the Games, the Foreign Office again became involved in the lead up to the 1924 Games. Correspondence between the War Office and the Foreign Office, took place relating to the travel arrangements for uniformed officers who were competing in the Games.<sup>60</sup> A similar request was made for the Foreign Office to contribute to the travel and visa arrangements for a military pipe band who were travelling to Paris to fulfil a ceremonial role. The Foreign Office had in March, been made aware of an unofficial approach to the King in order to secure the presence of Prince Henry at the Games. It was noted that:

In recent years the Olympic Games have received a measure of official recognition – at least in the countries where it was held ... Provided Lord

Crewe [British embassy in Paris] agrees, I do not think there can be any objections from the Foreign Office [to the Prince travelling to the Games].<sup>61</sup>

Crewe's reply to the Foreign Office (addressed to Ramsey MacDonald) indicated that; 'in my opinion the proposed visit of his Royal Highness would be highly desirable'.<sup>62</sup>

It would appear then, that as the Games became established as a quadrennial international event during the inter-war years, expectations that the machinery of diplomacy and consular services could be mobilized to provide logistical support, was growing. At the same time, such processes inevitably began to place additional pressures on these services. Nowhere is this more clearly documented than in the area of international travel.

#### **6.4.1 Controlling travel: Passports, visas and Olympic Games**

The embryonic aviation industry and rapid improvements in the speed of marine travel, alongside expansion in transnational railway networks, facilitated the movement of many more people to the growing range of international sporting events. Diplomatic and consular services were required to respond to this new scenario and the attendant issues of administering the movement of increased numbers of people.

In March 1932, the Foreign Office became engaged in a prolonged debate concerning the administration of passport and visa facilities for participants and officials connected with the Los Angeles Games. The discussion highlights the issue of the relationship between the Foreign Office and other government departments, as well as more general concern relating to the 'sovereignty' of the Olympic Games. The central issue was the production of an identity card by the Organizing Committee of the Games; for use by competitors and officials. The initial guidelines issued by the Los Angeles Organizing Committee with the identity cards suggested that:

If the proper Department of the Government of your country will complete page 3 of the identity card, thereby approving the card as a valid travel document issued to a citizen or subject of your country, it will be unnecessary for the person to whom the card is issued to have in addition a passport or other travel document, and upon establishment of non-immigrant status by the applicant the consular officer of the United States to whom application for a visa is made will issue a temporary visitor's visa for which NO FEE will be collected.<sup>63</sup>

The secretary to the BOA had written to the Home Office in February, requesting clarification as to whether or not; 'these identity cards are sufficient to allow British competitors and officials to return to this country after the Games, and further what procedure I must adopt so as to have them signed by the proper Department of the Government'. The Home Office took the issue up with the Foreign Office, suggesting that due to the cost of certifying each

identity card; 'the US government be invited to dispense with this [request for certification]', as they apparently had done in the case of the Winter Games. The Passport Office registered their grave concerns regarding the notion of their certifying the identity cards; noting that:

For us to countersign them would be tantamount to certifying to the accuracy of their contents. If the US government insist on such countersignature I think the Home Office will have to undertake it themselves – or the travellers must have proper passports.<sup>64</sup>

The Foreign Office agreed both with the Home Office suggestion of dispensing with the countersignature and with the Passport Office suggestion that, should the US government be insistent on countersignature – the permits having already been signed by the BOA – this should be undertaken by the Home Office. In addition, the observation was made that:

The US government have afforded generous and exceptional facilities to participants in the Games without any request for reciprocal treatment. The Foreign Office are in the position of having to refuse again and again applications of one kind or another for reducing the irksome barriers to international travel, and I would submit that this is a case in which we can and should throw our weight in the other direction. So long as Great Britain participates in the Olympic Games, I think we should do all we can to give official encouragement to our representatives, who in many cases make heavy personal sacrifices for the sake of securing the best representation for the country.<sup>65</sup>

A letter requesting dispensing with the countersignature was subsequently forwarded to the US embassy and since no further reference is made to the issue within Foreign Office correspondence, it is assumed that the request was granted.

It would appear that such logistical difficulties were at least in part, due to poor communication between government and Civil Service departments, unwieldy administrative procedures and an incremental approach to decision making. There certainly seemed to exist at the time, lack of clarity as to how the difficulty should be addressed and by whom. At the same time there was an acceptance of the wider political implications of the issue. Similar concerns and difficulties regarding travel documentation frequently resurfaced in subsequent Games, particularly during the Cold War years. The symbolism connected with the refusal or delay in granting of necessary visas or entry papers to athletes was not lost on the Foreign Office. Shielded where necessary, by claims of technical difficulties, it has frequently been possible to communicate a political message to the domestic population, the host country or to other observers.

#### 6.4.2 Diplomatic protocol: Enduring concerns

*In the world of liberal tastes, it must be supremely difficult for national leaders to oppose convention by abstemiousness. Even Muslim and African leaders, when thrown into international society find it more expedient to conform to custom.*

Kirkwood (1974, p.233)

The requirement to provide hospitality to British athletes and officials as well as the management of relations between participants and hosts has, throughout the history of the Games, formed a significant dimension of diplomatic relations in the context of the Games. The opportunity such events provide to 'press the flesh', heightens their broader diplomatic significance. An investigation of archive material throughout the history of the Games indicates a range of opportunities and challenges to pursue foreign policy interests through such diplomatic discourse.

While the political implications of a range of issues relating to protocol have been evident from the pre-war Olympic Games, archive evidence indicates for example, that at the time of the 1936 Games, they did generate a great deal of debate within and beyond the Foreign Office. They indicate familiar difficulties which existed in relation to the management of foreign relations in the context of the Olympic Games. Issues such as the appropriateness of wearing military uniform when in a foreign country, or the appropriate specifications for flags of the British Empire being flown at the Games, generated considerable anxiety within the Foreign, Colonial and War Offices. The observation of protocol was balanced alongside the possible impact on wider foreign relations. A particularly clear example of this is evident in the reaction from both the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister's office to the invitation extended by Lord Burghley – president of the BOC – to Antony Eden to attend the BOC dinner, at the time of the Berlin Games. Eden whilst agreeing in principle did seek advice as to the implications of attending. A minute from the Foreign Office (Major Dugdale) dated 28 February suggested that Eden should attend. The Prime Minister's Office in a minute to the Foreign Office dated 7 March, subsequently requested further information on other dignitaries who would be attending. A file note dated 25 of March – the last recorded on the subject – commented that the Foreign Office 'sees no objection to the Prime Minister attending', however yet again asks for deferment on the final decision,<sup>66</sup> particularly in view of the anxiety surrounding the possible attendance of the German ambassador.

Similar correspondence concerning the 1948 London Games contains intermittent reference to what were appropriate ticket allocations for diplomats and other important visitors, and suggests considerable indecision on the matter. In a letter dated 31 March 1948 from the Government Hospitality Fund to the Foreign Office, it was noted that a pool of tickets had been purchased, which could be utilized by relevant departments. These departments

were providing hospitality for important overseas visitors – Dominion, Colonial or foreign – ‘who were in the country on business during the Games and who would like to attend’.<sup>67</sup>

The significance of managing relations at this personal level, an aspect of diplomacy rarely acknowledged outside the memoirs and biographies of diplomats and their partners (for example, Kirkwood 1974, Feltham 1988, Hickman 1999), remains an issue central to diplomatic discourse as it relates to the Olympic Movement. The widely differing cultural contexts within which the Games take place, adds to the significance of the role played by other embassy and consular staff, as supportive of the activities of the Olympic attaché. This is reflected repeatedly in archive material relating to the social and ceremonial events that accompanied the Games.

## 6.5 Conclusion

There was little expectation among either the general public or the political establishment during the pre-war years, that the Olympic Games would become a permanent feature of the international environment. The scale of the early Games was very limited and the regulatory framework for the competitions only emerged incrementally, gradually bringing with it an air of permanence. Despite this there is evidence, albeit limited, of awareness among politicians and diplomats from the 1896 Games, regarding the political significance of engaging in international competition. A range of diplomatic activities rapidly crystallized around the Games. In relation to Britain, these involved from the onset, other government departments as well as the Foreign Office, particularly with issues where operational support was required. At the same time, ambiguity regarding the appropriateness of diplomatic engagement with the Games (to become a peculiarly British hallmark), quickly became evident. This ambiguity was frequently evidenced in the relationship between Olympic diplomacy and foreign policy.

There were elements of both continuity and change in diplomatic discourse as it related to the Games. From the onset of the modern Games, diplomats were involved in the organization and delivery of operational support for the British team, although this was frequently hampered by a lack of understanding of the principles by which the Games were organized. Commercial activity relating to the Games did exist, although ‘commercial diplomacy’ remained at a relatively low level. The Games, throughout the inter-war and early post-war years, slowly increased in size and complexity. The level of diplomatic activity also fluctuated, reflecting general trends in international relations. Diplomatic activity in the lead up to the 1936 Games in Berlin was exceptionally intense and reflected even then, a willingness by government, to forego notions of non-intervention in sport when the need arose.

Regarding the ‘agents’ of diplomacy, there is no evidence to suggest a linear increase in the involvement of non-governmental organizations in

activity relating to the Games. Their engagement was episodic across the first 60 years of its history. The internationalist aspirations of the IOC 'fitted' with the broader internationalist thought evident in the early inter-war Games and encouraged their attempts to engage in international diplomacy (discussed in Chapter 2). In the early post-war years, British Foreign Office correspondence indicates involvement of the IOC in questions relating to the rights and status of the many refugees circulating in Europe during that period. There are also indications from correspondence, of the IOC attempting to hold the moral high ground in regarding the appropriateness of Berlin hosting the earlier 1936 Games.

While the Olympic Games were from the onset, a forum for British diplomatic activity, there is a danger in assuming a causal relationship between foreign policy generally and Olympic diplomacy specifically. It is noteworthy for instance, that in the lead up to the 1912 Games, there is no suggestion from any quarter that the expansionist behaviour of Germany and its engagement in an armaments build-up should be countered by a consideration of boycotting the Games. Even in the lead up to the 1936 Games, there was considerable resistance to making the connection.

The clear focus on amateurism throughout the early years of the Olympics was important in a number of respects. In addition to shaping the nature of the sporting contests, it drew into the Movement, establishment figures who competed and who subsequently became sports administrators. This also helped to establish a form of 'private' or 'unofficial' diplomacy with sportsmen being presented as 'ambassadors' for their country; an idea recently (and erroneously) presented as a 'new' phenomenon. In this context, Lord Desborough was not just considered as an ambassador for sport but also for his country. Desborough was also the president of the London Chamber of Commerce and was later mentioned in relation to its hosting of the 1912 Congress of Chambers of Commerce of the Empire. There were then, clear links with the political establishment, which ensured that fundamental conflicts of interest did not pose a threat to the development of the Games. This compensated somewhat, for the lack of overt political support in terms of funding for the Games (given the social and professional status of BOA officials, the argument of elite hegemony is relevant since there was clearly the potential for such individuals to secure objectives in the policy arena, without recourse to the formal political process). These formative years laid the foundations for a sports movement which, while making much of its political autonomy, was intimately connected with the diplomatic process at a number of levels; a contradiction consistently reflected in the British relationship with the Olympic Movement.