

Olympian Neuroticism

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[Shekhar Deshpande](#)

The Olympics are over! Let the games be forgotten!

It is hard to see what the Olympics are about. We were told they were about improving China's image. That did not seem to work too well, with the deceptions about lip-synching at the opening ceremony, age falsification of its gymnastics players, and the silencing of dissent. We are also told that the great spirit of the games is to bring nations together. But these games allowed Vladimir Putin of Russia to strut about as an elegant diplomat while his army razed through Georgia. And our smirking Pres. George W. Bush? Why he took a vacation to get pictures taken with the babes of beach volleyball.



We marveled at just how easily world records are broken. So many new records were established at this year's Olympics that one has to believe that many athletes are into performance enhancing drugs or technological aides.

The Olympics are also a demonstration of the dominance of the few, of their obsessive, neurotic pastimes that the rest of the TV watching world accepts as "games." How else could you make sense of "synchronized" swimming? Didn't that end with the Busby-Berkeley musicals of the 1930's? There are dozens of different forms of martial arts. But only a few (and why those at all?) get to be Olympic sports.

Why call them sports? Isn't water polo a hobby? Don't rhythmic gymnastics belong in your hometown ice rink? And beach volleyball? Isn't it like athletic Baywatch? And curling and luge? Did we lose our minds?

Whatever their original purpose, the games have now become a two-week TV extravaganza, an indulgence of rich countries to force their hobbies on the rest of the world. Indians have long argued for the inclusion of Kabbadi as an Olympic sport. And galli-danda. Why not? Many of the current games hardly ask for endurance, while there are plenty of others that do and are deserving of inclusion.

Then there are the disproportionate number of medals allocated to individual sports over team ones: 42 in gymnastics; 100 in swimming; 142 in track and field, as opposed to just three in each team sport, like hockey or baseball.

It is little wonder that the medals are distributed disproportionately around the world. Some countries do not get any at all, while others hoard awards as a result of what is clearly an advantage in investment and resources. Just five countries, United States, China, Russia, Great Britain and Australia hogged up 40% of all Olympic medals at the Beijing Games and the Top 8 countries won more than half. Half the participating countries won absolutely none.

It is time to make the Olympics a truly world event and not an exhibition of the neuroticism of the few imposed on the many.

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