

The Olympic Boycott

Using the documents provided and your own research, consider the following focus questions:



What were the main features of the boycott debate in Australia? How did the debate affect the Australian Olympic athletes?



ICT approach: Here you could use Microsoft OneNote and the sources provided and your research to produce notes about the developments in the boycott debate. You can also use the Side Note function to write down your thoughts on the topic before beginning a presentation or group or class discussion.

Support guide for Microsoft OneNote:

[http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/LRRView/9225/index.htm?Signature=\(82fa9f74-04a1-4fe4-a7a9-6cad8ee09c5d\)](http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/LRRView/9225/index.htm?Signature=(82fa9f74-04a1-4fe4-a7a9-6cad8ee09c5d))

Sources:

Boycott – First Signs (HG)

Boycott – Fraser’s Letter (HG)

Boycott – Debate in Australia (HG)

Boycott – the Media Role (LF)

Boycott – Govt pressure on sponsors (LF)

Boycott – P.M.’s telegram to AOF and response (LF)

Boycott – trade union support for athletes (LF)

Boycott – Chris Warlaw’s opinion (LF)

Boycott – the final AOF decision (HG)

Boycott – the final Australian team (LF)

Extension Research

The role of the media and government in the boycott debate in Australia.

This is intended for a more detailed study and requires wider reading and analysis. Here is one source:



<http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/SportingTraditions/1985/st0102/st0102d.pdf>

The United States coverage and viewpoints -

http://www.gilderlehrman.org/historynow/03_2010/pdfs/lp3_US_Media_Coverage.pdf

The US State Briefing March 1980 (declassified) -

<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/54946DF5B8C9414090D61BEF52C0A80E.pdf>

How did the US State Department see the boycott debate going in March 1980?

The History of Olympic Boycotts

<http://boycottlondonolympics.com/The-1980-Olympic-Games-Biggest-Boycott.html>

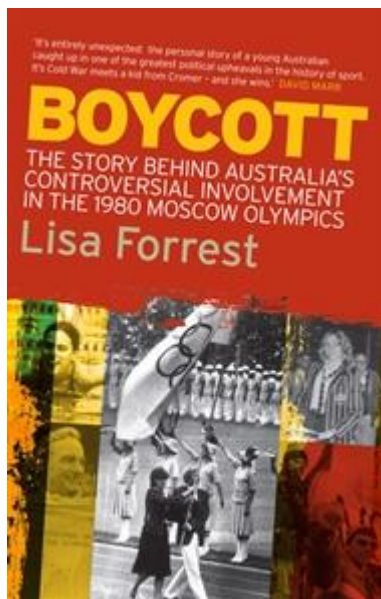
What other Olympic Games have been boycotted and why? Are their connections with the 1980 Moscow Olympics?

Lisa Forrest – a Personal perspective

In 1980 Lisa Forrest was a teenage student at Cromer High school in Sydney. She was supposed to focus on her studies and daily swimming training for the Olympics but suddenly had to also deal with opinions which politicised Olympic sport and questioned her loyalty to her country.

Explore one athlete's memories of the controversial debate surrounding the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

One student asks Lisa whether writing History challenges memories and another asks her about how she collected the evidence for her writing. These are key issues about remembering and recording the past. Lisa Forrest used newspaper articles, interviews with other athletes and officials and her own recollections to piece her story together.



Listen to Lisa Forrest discuss her book *Boycott* in an audio file -

<http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/find/webcasts/poligov>

Masterclass video

In Lisa Forrest's Masterclass interview by a group of students, she discusses her personal recollections as a 16-year-old Olympic swimmer and those memories of other athletes, sport and political figures caught up in the controversy surrounding the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Olympics in Moscow.

[http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/Web/7704/index.htm?Signature=\(4e5cb78b-e738-4c93-aab0-8d5bd8f96abd\)](http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/Web/7704/index.htm?Signature=(4e5cb78b-e738-4c93-aab0-8d5bd8f96abd))

Lisa Forrest's personal views from her book *Boycott*:

Boycott- Lisa Forrest perspective 1 ([Link 3k to Extract](#))

Boycott- Lisa Forrest perspective 2 ([Link 3l to Extract](#))

Boycott- Lisa Forrest perspective 3 ([Link 3m to Extract](#))



Lisa Forrest arriving at Moscow airport

Boycott – First Signs

In late January 1980 a Manly municipal council meeting was interrupted by an attendant. He whispered to the mayor, Bill Manning, who then announced: "Alderman Grange, the prime minister is on the phone. He wants to talk to you." Malcolm Fraser was ringing Syd Grange, as president of the AOF, to ask him to consider withdrawing Australia's team from the Moscow Olympics. He explained that he was deeply concerned about the Soviet Union's recent invasion of Afghanistan, and felt that one of the most effective ways of expressing opposition to it was by an effective boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games. President Carter, he said, had urged the United States Olympic Committee to refuse to attend the Games if the USSR did not withdraw its invading troops within a month. Grange recalled in 1992 that Fraser had been very friendly, and "the way he spoke he just felt I could do this without much trouble". At the time he replied: "Prime Minister, I must tell you that decisions like that are made by the Australian Olympic Federation. I have no power to withdraw the team. However, I will bring this under notice, and get back to you as soon as I can."

That phone call represented the beginning of an argument which was soon to engulf the Olympic movement, and the entire Australian community. It amounted to a classic collision between the interests of sport and those of politics, and, because it was portrayed at the time as an issue of huge significance to the security of the nation and to world peace, it forced some agonising choices between loyalties. It was a traumatic and utterly divisive episode, one that wrecked careers and provoked animosities that endured long after their cause had been buried in old newspaper files.

Source: Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), Page 323.

Boycott – PM Fraser’s letter

On 22 January, Fraser released to the press the text of a letter he had sent to the AOF. It said in part:

I am writing to ask that the Australian Olympic Committee join with the USOC and other National Olympic Committees to express to the International Olympic Committee the strong view that if Soviet troops do not withdraw as suggested, Moscow will become unsuitable as a site and that the Games should be transferred to another site or sites or be cancelled for this year.

In the same letter he referred to a federal government contribution of \$700,000 to the Olympic appeal. The first \$200,000 had been used for pre-Olympic competition, and the remaining \$500,000 was due to be handed over within a few days. Fraser wrote that it was the earnest wish of the government that the money be used to allow athletes to “engage in peaceful competition” with athletes of other countries, and he added: “It is difficult to do this in a country where the government of that country has so recently violated the basic principles upon which the peace and goodwill of nations depends.”

Grange was presented with the cheque in Canberra by the minister for home affairs, Bob Ellicott. Then, some days later, the acting minister, Tony Staley, wrote to the AOF “to remove any doubt” about the prime minister’s intent: the \$500,000 was not to be used in any way to help send Australian competitors or officials to Moscow. The AOF complied; it spent money from its investment reserves on sending the team away, and used the government’s grant for the purchase of a building in Melbourne.

On 25 January the AOF replied to Fraser’s letter, advising that his views would be placed before the IOC at its meeting on 8 February at Lake Placid, California, by an AOF delegation headed by its vice-president, McKenzie. On his way to Lake Placid, McKenzie made his own opinions very plain in an address to an assembly of national Olympic committees in Mexico City: he declared that nothing short of total war should prevent the Olympics from going ahead in Moscow. In Lake Placid, accompanied by his fellow IOC member Kevan Gosper and the Australian winter team’s manager Geoff Henke, he dutifully presented Killanin with a copy of the Fraser letter. For McKenzie, the spokesman, this was very much an exercise in going through the motions, fulfilling an undertaking given to Fraser by the AOF. He made it clear that the views contained in the letter should not be seen as reflecting the opinions of the AOF.

The IOC decided unanimously at that meeting that the Olympics would go ahead in Moscow. That caused President Carter to intensify his international



campaign against the Moscow Games: he lobbied more than one hundred heads of government with personal letters, and eventually influenced twenty-six nations not to compete. Apart from the United States, the absentees included Japan, West Germany, Canada and the People's Republic of China. Two prime ministers who pledged their strong support for Carter were Margaret Thatcher and Malcolm Fraser, neither of whom was ultimately able to persuade their respective national Olympic body to stay away from Moscow. Fraser seemed to regard the task as a crusade rather than a campaign, at times using tactics that some saw as coming close to moral intimidation.

Source: Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p 323-324.

Boycott - The Debate in Australia

The Labor Party argued against the boycott, but most newspapers were stridently in favour of it. The Australian, observing that Australia was dividing dangerously into two camps, offered a slightly melodramatic view on what the argument was all about: “It is not about athletes winning medals. There are no medals for the dead in Kabul, only bullet holes in the chests of those who are fighting for their freedom ... With hindsight, it is apparent that a boycott of the 1936 Berlin Olympics might well have changed the course of world history.” In the face of a sustained and overwhelming flow of opinion laced with emotion, it was hardly surprising that the Australian community did split bitterly, much as it did during such painful episodes as the Vietnam debate and the conscription battle of 1917. The division was fairly even. In February a Gallup poll showed that forty—eight per cent of Australians agreed with a boycott, and forty—six per cent disagreed. By June, fifty-two per cent favoured a boycott and forty-one per cent felt a team should go to Moscow. Great athletes like Herb Elliott and Dawn Fraser became involved; he appealed to athletes to stay away from the Games, and she claimed that if the boycott went ahead it would destroy the Olympic movement. In one memorable piece of correspondence, Dawn Fraser exchanged sharp letters with another Fraser, the prime minister. A number of athletes and officials received hate mail and even bomb threats, and on one occasion police were called to Phil Coles’ office at Sports House in Sydney to defuse what turned out to be a fake letter bomb.

On 19 April the AOF met, approved a team of 273 for Moscow and then listened to arguments from the deputy prime minister, Doug Anthony. It was the last conference scheduled before the Games, and Anthony was standing in for the prime minister, who held the traditional post of patron of the federation. He told delegates that the Soviet Union wanted control of Middle East oil, that it had destabilised the Indian Ocean, that world peace was at risk; he also suggested that any division between the United States and its allies (on the issue of a boycott) would amount to a devastating victory for the USSR. He asked the conference to make a decision not to send a team to Moscow. The AOF decided instead to buy some time, and deferred a decision until a meeting of the executive board on 23 May, the day before the deadline for acceptance of entries for the Olympics.

Source: Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p325.

Boycott – the Media role in the debate

Different views

In the lead up to the vote the Daily Telegraph gave its opinion:

In February we said: There can be no equivocation. There can be no ifs and maybes and no attempts at compromise. Anything less than a positive decision to withdraw from the Games would be a betrayal of the democratic principles on which Australia is founded and by which we live ...

Like Mr Fraser the Daily Telegraph has been unwavering in its support for a boycott. We believe it would be morally wrong for Australia to be represented in Moscow so long as the Soviet invaders remain in Afghanistan. And we have yet to hear a convincing argument from the athletes, from Mr Hayden and other members of the Labour Party or from anybody else who has spoken out in opposition to the boycott, which has caused us to change our opinion ...

Maybe there are still those among them who are swayed by the arguments of the athletes – the trite clichés about sport and politics not mixing, and the apparent hypocrisy of the Government still trading with the Soviet Union on many levels.

But they must not be swayed. Because the argument is not about sport and politics. It's about world peace and letting the Soviet Union know that we will not sit back while it tramples on democracy by its invasion of a small and virtually defenceless nation

Let our sportsmen and sportswomen bear in mind that the sacrifice we are asking of them today is nothing to the sacrifice we asked of our youth in 1914 and again in 1939. Then, as now, the cause was the same: the preservation of our way of life and our freedom in the face of international aggression.

If we sit back and do nothing now about the invasion of Afghanistan the Russians will take our inaction as acquiescence. Nothing would stop their advance until they controlled most of the Middle East and with it the bulk of the world's oil.'

The AOF officials should bear in mind when they make their decision that any Australian who goes to Moscow will become a tool of the Soviet propaganda machine. If the Games succeed the Russians will see themselves as having achieved a major moral victory over the West. That would almost certainly encourage them to further military adventurism because such is the Russian nature. We must see that they do not succeed.

'Why we must not go to Moscow', Daily Telegraph, 20 May, 1980,p6.

But for the first time in the debate the media were being challenged – by their own. Journalists were on strike and producing a regular newspaper called The Clarion. On the morning of the vote, veteran Olympics commentator Ernie Christensen writing for the alternative paper gave his own opinion.

Boycott or no boycott the Olympic Games will be held in Moscow this year ... and in Los Angeles in 1984 ... and on and on.

The present boycott attempt is the greatest challenge yet to the Olympians and it will fail to be effective. Of the 54 nations which split the medals for placing in the 1976 Montreal Games less than a dozen will be missing from Moscow. And more nations will compete in the USSR than in Montreal.

The present challenge to the Olympics would not have occurred had this not been a presidential election year in the United States ...

The 11 members of the Australian Olympic Federation executive meet today to decide whether a team should go to Moscow. The AOF appointed by sporting people to administer sport should do its utmost to see that Australia is represented at the Games ...

The charter of the AOF calls for it to organise and send teams to the Olympic Games. That is what it should do this year and it should be just as firm as it was in Montreal when the Government wanted the teams to join the boycott.

Then the enemy was not the Russian Bear but the normally inoffensive Kiwi.

The Government wanted the Australian team to join the black African nations who made a late withdrawal from Montreal as a protest against the NZ All Blacks rugby union team's to visit South Africa...

Australian's know their sport and for this reason the News Ltd campaign against the Olympic team has made little impact on the public which still wants the team to go.

In Sydney, News Ltd publications have carried over 40 leading articles attacking the Olympics since January and no doubt would have topped the half-century but for the suspension of The Australian journalists.

Nobody in the free world favours aggression against smaller nations ... the stronger nations not going to the Games are not going to alter international opinion of the Soviets ... but their absence will be a huge plus domestically for the USSR. The host country will win far more medals than in normal competition as will its chief support East Germany. All of which can hardly be expected to stress to the Russians generally that theirs is not the best way of life.



The Western powers would be better served from a propaganda angle by sending their most powerful swimmers, runners and athletes and proving their might before the Russian crowds.

Otherwise the Games will end with the hosts raising their glasses of vodka – in keeping with the old theory that winners can celebrate and losers can suit themselves.

‘Games Boycott won’t work’, The Olympic Report, *The Journalist’s Clarion*, 23 May 1980, p28.

Source: Lisa Forrest, *Boycott – Australia’s controversial road to the 1980 Moscow Olympics*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2008, p151-152.



Boycott – Government pressure on sponsors

But the intense campaign being waged by the government on sponsors was having the desired effect. The AOF's first attempt at raising corporate dollars to assist Australian Olympians was described by The National Times as *may be the marketing fiasco of the decade*. When Olympic fever – and sales – should have been raging, products from Darrell Lea gold medal chocolates to Stubbies shorts with Olympic logos couldn't be given away. Australia Post abandoned plans for commemorative stamps. Kellogg Australia's plans for a glossy 112-page book called Australia at the Olympics (with space for proud owners to record results of the Moscow Olympics) to run as a \$3.99 special offer on Corn Flakes and Rice Bubble packs had to be changed. Print numbers were slashed and it was re-scheduled as a give away after the Olympics were over. Long-standing supporters of the movement were losing hundreds of thousands of dollars. Some of the sponsors were putting on a brave face, insisting that their contribution was to Australian sport and no matter what happened with the boycott, that support still stood. But others were angry that a heavy investment was not being realised. The only company that could report phenomenal sales was Bullion Sales International – its six medal series in gold, silver and platinum were in hot demand because people felt 1980 might be the last Olympic Games as we know them.

Of the 17 major national sponsors who paid \$50 000 in cash or kind for the marketing rights to the Olympic symbol four withdrew support: Foodland Stores Pty Ltd, the Commonwealth Bank, the Australian Women's Weekly and Thomas Hardy and Sons Pty Ltd.

Source: Lisa Forrest, *Boycott – Australia's controversial road to the 1980 Moscow Olympics*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2008, p126-127.

Boycott - PM's telegram to AOF and response

Mr Fraser might as well have been in Australia for all the time spent drafting letters. In a telegram sent to all AOF members before they met Fraser said;

The Government has today reaffirmed its view that because of the continued Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and the continued oppression of the people of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, it is in Australia's best interest to stand with other countries who have condemned this action and not send a team to the Moscow Olympics. The Government confidently expects that the decision made by the United States Olympic Committee will be followed by other countries and that there will be an effective boycott. I ask that as a delegate to the Australian Olympic Federation you support a decision not to send an Australian team to Moscow. Because of the unsustainable situation in the Persian Gulf which the Soviet Invasion has caused, and the implications for other countries, the Government's view is that it is not in the interests of national security for Australia to take part in the Moscow Olympics. I strongly urge you to take these national interests fully into account and support an immediate decision by the Federation not to go to Moscow.

Malcolm Fraser Prime Minister

The telegram did not impress delegates. Phil Coles likened the tactics to those used by President Carter in influencing the US Olympic Committee's House of Delegates. *I find it difficult to believe that four days before the vote is due to be taken it suddenly becomes a national security risk. (Daily Tele 16/4 Fraser grabs the Games row initiative)*

Source: Lisa Forrest, *Boycott – Australia's controversial road to the 1980 Moscow Olympics*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2008, p104-105.

Boycott – Trade union support for athletes

The most consistent supporters of the Australian team throughout the boycott debate were the Australian trade unions. When they weren't black-banning shipments of wool from Malcolm Frasers' Nareen property to the USSR they were raising money – lots of it.....

The more corporate Australia withdrew the more the Seamen and other unions like them were called on for help. *When Shell froze their final instalment of funds to the Australian team John Coates thought if we could raise equivalent amount of money, with the help of the public, then it might help convince the Executive with the way it should vote, Geraghty tells me.*

We probably did tell Pat that, Coates says now.

Eventually the Seamen's Union raise more than \$50 000 for the 1980 Olympians. The last time Pat Geraghty ran into John Coates he was coming out of a lift in a city building. Geraghty tells me that Coates introduced him to his companion as *the man who saved the 1980 Olympic team*.

Source: Lisa Forrest, *Boycott – Australia's controversial road to the 1980 Moscow Olympics*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2008, p125.

Looking back

AOF honour Union support for the 1980 Olympics

<http://corporate.olympics.com.au/news/unions-honoured-bitter-olympic-struggle-remembered>

Report in *The Age* Newspaper – An Unlikely friendship

<http://www.theage.com.au/sport/unlikely-friendship-formed-under-fire-20100514-v4fj.html?skin=text-only>

Boycott – an athlete’s opinion

If Australian athletes didn’t have *a total grasp of the situation* at the beginning of the year (1980) they quickly caught up. Although from his first letter to The Age newspaper – in respect of early proposals of an alternate Olympics – marathon runner **Chris Wardlaw** was never anything less than informed and eloquent.

At the outset let me say I have trained this morning and will train again this afternoon, as usual, regardless of pronouncement by politicians about possible boycotts, and by Olympic officials about possible uncertainty and its affect on athletes in training.

The Olympics are important to an athlete who has devoted many hours, by choice, but their existence is not in any sense the sole motivating factor towards the pursuit of excellence in any sporting endeavour.

I participated in Montreal in 1976 and have aimed for the past four years to be at Moscow. I don’t not believe sport is above politics, nor is education, the “arts” or indeed anything which involves individuals and their interrelationship with society. Sport and the Olympics can be considered a tool towards harmony and peace but never considered above oppression and imperialism.

Mr Fraser and the Australian Government (along with Mr Carter and Mrs Thatcher) have repeatedly said politics and sport should be separated, but in this case clearly they have decided that their politics are at issue so therefore a boycott is permissible.

Imagine a juxtaposition of Los Angeles back in 1964. Would the Russians be correct in calling for a boycott in the face of intervention in Vietnam under precisely the same terms in which the Russians have intervened in Afghanistan? Would Mr Fraser in power, theoretically, have supported the Russian boycott? Of course not – politics may be in sport as long as it is “ours” which are involved.

If selected in the Olympic team in 1980 I would have to seriously consider participating in an alternative Free World Olympics since that would only be siding with one of the imperialist forces and its variation of freedom.

The Olympics must be political but not necessarily Political, that is an extension of foreign policy for imperialist powers and their satellites. (The Age Jan 26 letters page ‘when the PM speaks about politics in sport he means ‘ours’)

Source: Lisa Forrest, *Boycott – Australia’s controversial road to the 1980 Moscow Olympics*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2008, p 40-41

Boycott – The Final AOF Decision

Fraser, accompanied by Anthony, Ellicott and foreign affairs minister Andrew Peacock, spent 135 minutes with the eleven AOF men, seeking to persuade them to change their minds. At one stage during this last-ditch meeting, Fraser predicted that a third world war would start in the 1980s, probably within three years. "It was very heavy," Coles said later. "He gave the impression that soon we would all be in khaki." Afterwards the executive reaffirmed its decision to take part in the Games, but conceded that the team would march behind an Olympic flag, so that the national flag would not be dipped before Soviet leaders.

Although athletes who gathered outside the Sheraton greeted the AOF's 23 May decision with hugs, kisses and cheers, there were many casualties during the weeks of torment before and after it. The swimmer Tracey Wickham, holder of two world records and regarded by many as the nation's top gold medal hope, withdrew from the team, saying the mental pressure had wrecked her training program. Raelene Boyle, winner of three Olympic silver medals, also pulled out, declaring that "part of me has been slowly crushed and stamped into the ground".

Other individual withdrawals came from the runner John Higham, the swimmer Mark Morgan, the archer Terence Reilly and the fencer Alex Watson. The head swimming coach, Forbes Carlile, decided not to go, and the governing bodies of yachting, men's and women's hockey, equestrian sports, volleyball and shooting withdrew their teams. It was later revealed that the sports federations concerned received large sums of money from the government in compensation, and that the six individual athletes (but not Carlile) received grants of \$6000 apiece; this caused the federal opposition to accuse the government of having engaged in bribery as well as bullying tactics. Although the Australian Shooting Association had withdrawn, the rifle-shooter Yvonne Hill waged a valiant battle in court for the right to go to Moscow, and finally won it.

Source: Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p 329.



Boycott - The Final Australian Team

The team which finally competed for Australia in Moscow included 123 athletes, 27 of them women. They left the country wearing casual clothes rather than official uniforms, which were packed in their luggage; mostly, they were in small groups. The basketballers departed more than two Weeks earlier than planned, because of fears that their passports might be confiscated. "We actually sneaked out of the country," Coles said later. "It was a sad way to go. The idea was not to draw attention to the various departures, because there were fears about demonstrators coming to the airport." In an effort to symbolise unity, Coles decided that for the first time ever Australia would have two flag—carriers supporting a single banner in the opening ceremony in the Lenin Stadium. He chose the sprinter Denise Boyd, who went on to finish seventh in the 200 metres final, and the swimmer Max Metzker, who won bronze in the 1500 metres freestyle. The opening was a spectacular affair, dominated by an inflatable bear called Mischa ...

Source: Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p330.

Boycott - Lisa Forrest's perspective 1

In the prologue to Lisa Forrest's book, *Boycott – Australia's controversial road to the 1980 Moscow Olympics* (2008), she gives a personal context for 1980, the debate over a boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games and what ideas and issues faced all the Australian athletes, sporting bodies and officials.

PROLOGUE

I was about to turn 16, a Year 11 student at Cromer High School in Sydney, when I got caught up in an international political crisis.

It wasn't my intention. I just wanted to go to the Olympic Games – in Moscow, 1980. But in the last days of 1979 the USSR invaded Afghanistan. The Soviets claimed it was by invitation. The West didn't believe them. By the end of January 1980, many of the world's leaders agreed with U.S. President Jimmy Carter that the most effective way to demonstrate that the West would not tolerate a blatant act of Soviet aggression was for its athletes to boycott the Olympics.

It wasn't the first time the Olympics had been used politically. But it had been a tumultuous decade for the movement. Not only because of outside political forces. Internally it was wracked with problems. The Olympic ideal of the glorious amateur athlete striving for excellence was, in all practical ways, a joke. The pursuit of gold medals to promote a political ideology or a corporate multi-national was revolutionising the Olympic arena and the International Olympic Committee was struggling to keep up.

So were Australians. Our results at the 1976 Montreal Olympics – the first time we failed to win a gold medal in four decades – only proved the modern reality.

Despite years of neglect, by the time he asked Australian athletes to boycott the 1980 Olympics, Malcolm Fraser's Federal Government had begun building a national Institute of Sport. A trickle of government funds had assisted athletes in pre-Olympic competition. Now the debt was being called in.

I'd been swimming for Australia since I was 14. In March 1980 I was named **women's** captain of the Australian Olympic swim team. I knew the imperatives. The wish list for Australian athletes could only be achieved by winning Olympic medals – preferably gold ones. I was consistently ranked in the top 5 in the world. And I was lucky. I was at the peak age for a woman to compete at the Olympics. Moscow was it.

Yet throughout our entire preparation for the Olympic Games we were told repeatedly that the premier event for youth of the world to meet in the spirit of peace and in the name of excellence was nothing more than a Soviet propaganda parade. Any western athlete who wanted to go to the Olympics was considered by many to be a traitor.

We fought back against this assault on our dream and we made it to Moscow. But it was a moment unlike any other in the history of Australian sport.

Source: Lisa Forrest, *Boycott – Australia’s controversial road to the 1980 Moscow Olympics*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2008, xiii-xiv.

Link 3L

Boycott - Lisa Forrest perspective 2

Unlike the other papers The Daily Telegraph decided to feature one of the Soviet apologists on its front page. Next to its report on the Prime Minister’s national address a 15 year old, smiling Sydney school girl, bathed in sunlight, kicks up water in a backyard pool to celebrate the IOC’s decision.

Only one thing will wipe the infectious smile from Lisa Forrest’s beaming face – an Australian boycott of the Moscow Olympics, the newspaper told its readers.

“My life ambition has been to compete at these Olympics – if that’s taken away from me I’d feel terrible,” Lisa 15, said yesterday in the middle of what for her is a typical 16-hour day.

She’s the little girl who learned to swim in a rock pool at Sydney’s Collaroy Beach when she was nine.

Her feelings epitomise the attitude of young Australian athletes to the on-again off-again Moscow affair.

“I figure I’ve only got one chance to swim at the Olympics – I don’t think I’ll still be swimming competitively in another four years,” she said.

So with her single shot at glory in mind Lisa pushes herself through a tough daily routine to get ready for Moscow.

At 4.40 every morning except Sunday’s she brushes away dreams of next week’s Fleetwood Mac concert and her 16th birthday next month.

She gears herself for the grind of training. It starts 20 minutes later at Killarney Pool under the coaching of former Olympian Terry Gathercole.

Lisa pounds up and down the pool for two hours. Then her father Carl picks her up for breakfast.

Less than one hour later, she's on a bus with her packed lunch to Year 11 classes at Cromer High School.

A bright student she gained good passes in last year's School Certificate despite the absences for swimming.

Eventually she would like to be a journalist, preferably with a fashionable women's magazine. Lisa studies hard in the hope that she will make it.

When school's over it's homework time for Lisa. Then it's another gruelling session at the pool. Lisa is home by seven, later on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Understandably she's in bed by 8.30pm.

"You say to yourself: I miss out on a lot like not being able to go out a lot to places with friends ... but swimming has enabled me to visit a lot of places overseas and that's something my friends haven't done."

Lisa only "knew" she was good at swimming last year when as the baby of the Australian team at 14 years and three months she won the silver medal in the 200m backstroke at the Edmonton Commonwealth Games.

She was ranked fourth in the world for that distance last year. With natural progression, she'll be pressing for a gold at Moscow.

It was the first opportunity I'd had since early January to be part of the boycott discussion and I wanted to make amends.

Under normal circumstances a photographer and journalist might come to the pool half-an-hour before training, I'd be asked questions and smile when told. A little later they'd be on their way and I'd jump into the pool. But on this occasion journalist Geoff McCamey and photographer Geoff Henderson wanted to take a bit more time, go somewhere that was quiet, where the light was good. Hence the backyard pool of one of the men. Mum must have let me have the morning off school – she would have agreed it was worth it. No one except the journalist and the photographer accompanied me. Unlike many other athletes in a similar position over the next few months I was not asked if I felt like I was a traitor, nor did I get any impression that the either men felt that I was. The aim of the day was to take a series of good photos that would accompany a story about the IOC's decision. There is a photo of me at school laughing with my girlfriends so maybe they took me to school later. And Geoff Henderson achieved his aim – a photo of me grinning and winking at The Daily Telegraph readers would win him a Rothman's National Press Award for Portrait the following year.



My original position that we should do what's best for the country was quickly abandoned when it was obvious *what's best* should be shouldered solely by Australia's amateur athletes. The early generosity had been consumed by injustice. Everyone I knew felt the same. From my Dad's perspective it was simple. The Soviet invasion had nothing to do with the Olympics. His support came in the way it always had. Not only did he drive me to and from the pool as he always had, he'd also taken up the 70's mania for road-running. Often he'd complete his own run of some 10km in the morning while I trained in the pool and then run a few kilometres more with me after school as I pushed myself for that extra edge in fitness.

But my mother was, is, deeply political. She eats the news, particularly politics, for breakfast, lunch and dinner. A transistor radio of varying sound quality has crackled with talk-back radio opinion in our home ever since I can remember. Forty-five years ago, isolated on Sydney's northern beaches with no car, radio journalists like Brian White and later George Moore, Mike Gibson, Mike Carlton, were my Mum's adult company as she did the housework and looked after three young children. The Sun newspaper was read in our house – unless of course I featured elsewhere. ...

Source: Lisa Forrest, *Boycott – Australia's controversial road to the 1980 Moscow Olympics*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2008, p 54-56

Boycott Lisa Forrest perspective 3

At the Warringah Aquatic Centre the media swarmed around us. In the three months since I'd been made captain of the Olympic team I'd given my opinion over and over again. I appreciated the principle and I understood what the Russians had done in Afghanistan. But I believed it was hypocritical and wrong for the world's politicians to use the Olympics and us, the athletes, to protest against the Soviet action. I never considered withdrawing. But it didn't mean I was coping.

The combination of being over-trained and straight-jacketed in the Brisbane camp – during the last three weeks of heightened anticipation while waiting for the AOF vote – had wrecked me. On the following Monday morning (according to my log book) I went training, went to school long enough to do an English exam, threw up and then came home. I did not get in the pool for the rest of that awful week after the 6-5 vote. As I lay on the couch, cocooned in my family home, the toll mounted. In the middle of it all I opened the front door to find my Deputy Head-Master, Hilton Mace and two other teachers on the doorstep. They were worried that I was avoiding school because I didn't feel safe. So they came to my house to reassure me that I had the school's full support. Mr Mace even went to the local paper, The Manly Daily, and berated the public, for branding me a traitor and un-Australian, and the Federal Government for a policy that seemed specifically designed to push Olympians like me and my family to breaking point. Gradually back in the protective environment of my home and all who supported me I rallied and went back to training with Coach and my home squad for two weeks.

On the eve of the Sydney camp my parents made a decision that would ensure that they were forever, legends. Split Enz had just released their classic album True Colours and the band was performing at a local pub, The Manly Vale Hotel. Split Enz was to be supported by Australian Crawl. Australian Crawl were punks and Split Enz were mad. It was a night not to be missed. School had buzzed with whose parents would let them go, underage as we were, and whose would not. My parents, avid watchers of Countdown themselves, agreed I could go with my best friend Anne Thomson, escorted by Anne's older brother Sean.

Entry to the venue was on a first-come-first-served basis. Despite getting there well in advance, the queue seemed endless, meandering around row after row of parked cars. We were more worried that the number of people, rather than our age, stood between us and the best night of our lives. But we got in. As the years have gone on the night has become more remarkable. With phone cameras and gossip columns encouraging the public to spot celebrities the media now would have crucify me. Not to mention my parents. Mum and Dad might not have thrown me overboard but they would have been publicly humiliated as the parents of a Russian apologist *and* an out of control teenager.

Australia and the Olympic Games

Cold War

Historical Context



Source: Lisa Forrest, *Boycott – Australia’s controversial road to the 1980 Moscow Olympics*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2008, p192-193.