

Television, mediatization, and globalization of sport: the case of the first Olympic worldwide broadcast from Tokyo 1964

Sara Virnicchi
Università degli Studi eCampus
Sara.virnicchi@studenti.uniecampus.it

Abstract

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics represent a turning point in the history of the mediatization of sport. Broadcast live globally via satellite, they marked the beginning of worldwide sports television and established a ritualistic model of collective media consumption. This article analyzes the television broadcast of the event as a “media event” (Dayan & Katz, 1992) and as the first example of globalized and spectacularized sport, analyzing together journalistic sources and vintage visual materials, through the framework of mediatization of sport (Frandsen 2020; Tirino 2019). The objective is to show how Tokyo 1964 sanctioned Japan’s rebirth in the post-war geopolitical context and laid the foundations for a new sports ritual on a planetary scale.

Keywords: Mediatization of sport, Worldwide broadcast, Tokyo 1964 Olympics, Media event.

1. Introduction

This paper intends to explore the role that the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games played in nation-building, in redefining Japanese national identity, and in the country’s representation on the international stage. In particular, the research questions guiding the analysis are three: how sport and political and cultural institutions contributed to the construction of a shared image of modern Japan, what role the media – especially television – played in disseminating this image, and to what extent these dynamics left a lasting legacy in global sports culture. To answer these questions, the paper adopts a sociological-culturalist approach based on two main directions. On one hand, the historical analysis of official sources (such as the Organizing Committee reports and media diffusion data) and historiographical reconstructions (Guttman, 1992; Guttman & Lee, 2001; Goryacheva, 2020). On the other hand, the application of (media) narrative analysis, useful for examining how the media discourses and narratives of the era contributed to shaping collective representations.

Into this framework fits the analysis of an article from *The New Yorker* and the documentary *Tokyo Olympiad*, two emblematic sources of the international and domestic narrative of the Games. The structure of the paper reflects these methodological choices. A first section addresses the theme of innovation, worldwide broadcast, and televised ritualism of the Olympics, showing how the diffusion – and partly the spectacularization – of the event was made possible by television, including colour television, and a rapidly expanding media system. This is followed by an analysis

section focused on the narratives of the era, which applies media narrative analysis to journalistic and audiovisual sources. The concluding part unfolds in two directions: on one hand, the examination of Tokyo 1964's legacy in global sports culture, and on the other, a broader concluding reflection, to understand how the dynamics triggered by the Games anticipated processes that still characterize major international sports events today.

2. Tokyo '64: historical and sociocultural context

The assignment of the Games of the XVIII Olympiad to Tokyo in 1964 was the result of a process that began in the early 1950s, when Japan, after being excluded from the 1948 London Games, sought to re-enter the Olympic community. The readmission of the National Olympic Committee in 1950 marked the start of a new phase, and the capital put forward its candidacy as early as 1952. Although the initial attempts were unsuccessful, they laid the groundwork for a more robust strategy. The decisive moment came at the end of the decade. In 1958, Tokyo hosted an IOC session in the presence of the Emperor, an occasion that strengthened the city's credibility as an Olympic host. The following year, with the election of Ryotaro Azuma as Governor, who combined a local political role with an international Olympic one, the bid was strongly relaunched. At the Munich session in 1959, Tokyo secured 34 votes out of 56, defeating Detroit, Vienna, and Brussels, and thus winning the Honour of hosting the XVIII Olympiad (Lechenperg, 1964).

The assignment triggered profound transformations. The Organizing Committee, established immediately after, created an articulated structure with commissions dedicated to logistics, facilities, transport, communications, and fundraising. The event became a driving force for urban and national modernization: numerous sports facilities were expanded or built from scratch, including the Nippon Budokan, a symbol of the link between tradition (Judo) and the modern Olympics. Urban infrastructure experienced unprecedented acceleration: the monorail to Haneda, new subway lines, large hotels, and especially the Shinkansen (bullet train), inaugurated just days before the Games, became the tangible signs of a nation in rapid transformation. As highlighted by Harald Lechenperg (1964, p. 10), the planning was designed not only to handle the logistical complexity but also to present the world with the image of a modern, peaceful, and technologically advanced Japan.

Alan Guttmann (1992, pp. 104-107) emphasizes how the Games represented the definitive transition from a post-war Japan, still marked by precariousness and social inequalities, to a nation projected towards industrial modernity. In this sense, Olympic Games were used as a "political language" to reassert national dignity and redefine the country's role on the international stage. At the same time, the interplay between tradition and innovation, which Guttmann and Lee (2001, pp. 223-227) identify as the hallmark of Japanese sport, clearly emerged: on the one hand, local cultural roots (Judo, ceremonies, imperial symbols), and on the other, the need to present itself as a modern and globalized power, in line with Western sporting and media standards.

The Japan of those years was a country undergoing rapid transformation. At the beginning of the 1960s, the city of Tokyo was still scarred by the devastating effects of the war and characterized by shantytowns (Whiting, 2020, p. 1) and precarious housing, which were giving way to what

would soon become a modern metropolis. Despite the apparent modernization, the city was divided between the urgency of progress and the persistence of rudimentary sanitary conditions. Skyscrapers, luxury hotels, new subway lines, a monorail between Haneda and the city center, and the Shinkansen – the high-speed train to Osaka – were all under construction.

The effort to redo Tokyo's urban infrastructure was undertaken in conjunction with a massive government plan to double GNP and per capita income by the end of the sixties through the manufacture and export of transistors, radios, television sets and automobiles. But it was made all the more urgent in 1959 when the city was awarded the 1964 Olympics, the first Asian country to be so honored (Whiting, 2020, p. 1).

Therefore, major public events – like the Olympics – play a decisive role in redefining national identity, especially during the period of historical transition in which Japan found itself. If nations do not exist in a concrete form but become visible and understandable through the symbols that represent them (Kertzer, 1988, p. 6), consequently, any transformation of a nation's collective image requires symbolic and visual occasions where these images can be presented, shared, and internalized (Wilson, 2012, p. 1). The event served as a form of strategic communication that staged a renewed image of the country, primarily for the benefit of the domestic audience: efficient, peaceful, technologically advanced, and open to cultural exchange. Although formally addressed to the international community, the Olympic Games' message was primarily received by the Japanese population (Wilson, 2012, p. 1). Television played a crucial role: while approximately 55% of Japanese households owned a television set in 1960, the percentage rose to over 90% by 1964, coinciding with the Olympics (Guttman & Lee, 2001, p. 223). This was also facilitated by reduced prices: from about 175,000 yen in 1953 (more than ten times the average monthly salary) to 45,000-60,000 yen in 1962, made possible by increasing family incomes (Goryacheva, 2020, pp. 156-157).

A further role was played, more specifically, by colour television, introduced in 1960 and strictly linked to the 1964 Olympics: while initially there were only 1,200 sets in Japan, the event accelerated their spread, transforming them into a new status symbol for the middle class. By 1966, coverage reached 93% of the population (Goryacheva, 2020, p. 157). This innovation also had a cultural impact: seeing the Games 'in colour' meant participating in a common, shared national experience, reinforcing pride in a technological modernity capable of placing Japan on equal footing with Western powers (Goryacheva, 2020, pp. 156-157).

Television, now widespread in millions of homes, thus made collective and simultaneous participation possible (Whannel, 2009), reinforcing the emotional and symbolic effectiveness of the visual narrative offered. In this way, the Olympics were not just a sporting event, but an act of national self-representation, designed to symbolically unify a people around a shared image of Japan's future. Thanks to this widespread presence, the collective and simultaneous participation made the visual narrative of the Games extremely effective (Whannel, 2009). The Olympics thus became an act of national self-representation, designed to symbolically unify the people around a shared vision of the future.

The games also served to sanction Japan's redemption, and reinforced a sense of national purpose and collective Japan as modern and cutting edge, while also identity, while providing a stage for Emperor Hirohito's rehabilitation. In subtle ways, the Olympics created an

opportunity to rebrand symbolically embracing a history and set of traditions that had been implicated and discredited by wartime depredations. (Tagsold, 2020, p. 1)

3. The mediatization of sport: theoretical framework

Mediatization, which permeates and transforms contemporary social, cultural, and communicative dynamics, represents one of the fundamental dimensions of the globalized society of the 21st century (Tirino, 2019, p. 151). As Krotz emphasizes: “Mediatization can be understood as a meta-process, comparable to globalization, individualization and commercialization. By meta-process I mean a long-term process which transforms society as a whole” (p. 256).

It is, therefore, a concept that does not describe a single effect of the media nor an immediate change, but a long-term series of phenomena within which media progressively reorganize social, cultural, and communicative practices (Krotz, 2007, pp. 257-258).

Mediatization impacts the way content is produced, distributed, consumed, and experienced in various social contexts – including sport. As Frandsen observes, “the audiovisual construction used in broadcasting coverage and the dedicated radio channel used for internal event communication” is central to ensuring the live transmission and public understanding of sports events (Frandsen, 2020, p. 51). Indeed, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the relationship between media and sport has developed parallel to the evolution of communication technologies: the press and radio helped build the popularity of disciplines and competitions, consolidating their symbolic relevance in the public sphere (Guttman, 1986; Bellamy, 2006).

Beginning in the post-war period, television assumed a decisive role in accelerating sport’s visibility and transforming it into a global phenomenon of collective entertainment (Whannel, 1998). Live broadcasts fostered a culture of shared enjoyment and emotional identification, creating a social ritual that turned sports events into moments of national and international aggregation.

Within the framework outlined by the theory of mediatization, two modalities assume particular importance. Firstly, there is informative mediatization, which impacts the sphere of news reporting and the transmission of sports events, where speed, immediacy, constant updates, and accessibility prevail. This logic is tied to the rapid and continuous consumption of sports content, fueled by the “liveness” of radio and television broadcasts and further accelerated by digital media. Secondly, there is narrative (Tirino, 2024) or fictional mediatization (Tirino, 2025), which intervenes in the construction of shared meanings through forms of sports storytelling, often emotional, epic, and heroic. This process is realized in a plurality of formats, ranging from cinema (sports biopics, films inspired by champions or historical events) to comics and manga (Japanese *shōnen* such as *Captain Tsubasa* or *Slam Dunk*), up to television series (such as *Ted Lasso*) and docu-series (such as *The Last Dance*).

In all these cases, sport is transfigured into a narrative, contributing to the reinforcement of myths, heroes, and shared values that transcend the competitive field to become cultural heritage. Sport, in this sense, is configured as a symbolic stage for social values, conflicts, and collective identities, where the media narrative helps to define roles, hierarchies, and modern mythologies.

In the 1960s, when the Tokyo Olympics took place, public participation was still mediated by one-way mass media, primarily television. At that time, speaking of participation did not yet mean interactivity in the digital sense, but rather the collective sharing of the media experience, lived as a social ritual. In 1964, Japanese television established itself as the central tool of symbolic mediation between the sporting event and society, allowing millions of citizens, for the first time, to watch the Olympic events live and in colour, contributing to the reinforcement of a sense of national identity and shared modernity. Although it was not yet interactive participation in the contemporary sense, the television broadcast of sporting events generated a strong emotional involvement, which was based on the simultaneity of viewing and the collective experience of the sports narrative. This first historical phase of mediatized culture is deeply rooted in the logic of television “liveness” (Dayan & Katz, 1992), that is, in the medium’s ability to create shared events in real-time, giving rise to temporary communities of spectators. Tokyo 1964 therefore represented a foundational moment for this type of mediatized sports consumption: the Japanese public first, and the global one later, though not yet digitally connected, began to build a shared experience.

4. Innovation, worldwide broadcast, and televised ritualism

The live broadcast of the opening ceremony in 40 countries created a sense of global synchronicity. Sakai Yoshinori, born in Hiroshima the day after the dropping of the atomic bomb on August 6, 1945, lit the Olympic cauldron: a highly symbolic gesture of collective rebirth. The global live broadcast of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics was made possible by the launch of Syncom III, the first geostationary orbit communication satellite. Thanks to its fixed position relative to Earth, Syncom III made the live television transmission of the Tokyo Games possible in other parts of the world, marking a historic moment: for the first time, a sporting event was shared on a planetary scale in worldwide broadcast.

Syncom III technically enabled what Dayan and Katz (1992, p. 1) would define as a “live broadcasting of history”, transforming the 1964 Tokyo Olympics into a global 'media event' and ushering in the era of the televised internationalization of sport. Dayan and Katz (1992) define *media events* as “high holidays of mass communication” (p. 1), events transmitted live that interrupt daily routines and gather a vast audience around “contests, coronations and conquests” (p. 5). They argue that such events are “integrative, narrating societies’ self-understanding and celebrating its values” (p. 9), functions that perfectly suit the role played by the Olympic Games in contemporary society.

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics perfectly embodied this paradigm, becoming famous as the “Television Olympics”. It is worth remembering, however, that the first Olympics broadcast on television were the Rome Games in 1960: an edition that paved the way for the televised visibility of sport, but which was not diffused globally. In Tokyo, however, television took on a decisive role in increasing the cultural visibility of the Games, thanks to its simplicity as a medium of transmission and its established place in domestic routines: “There is a strongly habitual nature of media uses (Silverstone, 1994), and levels of daily TV viewing indicate how the habit of

watching television (or, perhaps more accurately, having the television on) is difficult to shake, even with many competing media and activities (Rowe, 2011, p. 38)”.

The Olympic event was indeed broadcast live on television for ten hours a day, including the entire marathon, which was televised live for the first time in history for over two hours, thanks to the use of a helicopter flying over the transmission vehicle. The television audience witnessed a true real-time dramatization: an epic narrative that culminated in the victory of Ethiopia’s Abebe Bikila and the local favourite, Tsuburaya Kōkichi of Japan. Despite the dissatisfaction of many Japanese viewers – as the directing favoured Bikila, who was over a kilometre ahead of the local hero – NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) justified the choice by the obligation of international coverage, marking an important transition toward the transnational logic of the sports audience (Guttman & Thompson 2001, p. 199).

The television audience figures are eloquent: 97.3% of Japanese households with a television set watched at least part of the Olympics, with peaks of 87.4% for the opening ceremony, 85% for the women’s volleyball final against the USSR, and 83.1% for the marathon (Guttman & Thompson, 2001, 199). The domestic reach was accompanied by global visibility made possible by the Syncom III satellite, which allowed for real-time intercontinental transmission. This innovation marked the advent of worldwide sports broadcasting and contributed to creating a global market for television rights – effectively saving the International Olympic Committee from its chronic financial crisis (Guttman & Thompson, 2001, p. 200).

Sport is particularly well-suited to television, especially live broadcast, as it captures attention on dramatic events unfolding in real-time within a defined space: this stimulates a strong emotional identification, particularly during international competitions; among the media connected to sport, only television allows for “such a potent mix of ‘liveness’ and [creates] common language” (Rowe, 2011, p. 38). The scholar further explains that to acquire global status, a sport must be played in many countries and followed by a vast audience. The choice to analyze the Olympic Games proves to be exemplary. Indeed, it is the first culturally shared sporting event transmitted live worldwide via satellite, and the first in colour in Japan, thus reaching millions of spectators and becoming a powerful “ritual of national reinvention”. Tokyo 1964 was “a stunning showcase for a rising economic superpower” and “the rebirth of Japan to the world” (Whiting, 2020).

The Olympics also facilitated the mass diffusion of broadcasting technologies and devices:

In the five years preceding the Olympics, the number of television owners paying reception fees to NHK zoomed from 2 million to 16 million. Many acquired their first sets to be able to watch the games. Many who had already become addicted to the black-and-white images bought their first colour sets to watch the broadcasts that were truly *tasai* (colourful). NHK had prepared very well for the Tokyo Olympics. In 1959, it had moved its sports division from the educational department to the news department. A huge staff of 2,548 covered the games, including 42 announcers, 195 directors and producers, 146 reporters and cameramen, and 598 broadcast technicians. They used an array of equipment to create the broadcasts: 74 black-and-white TV cameras, 6 colour TV cameras, 46 videotape recorders, 600 audiotape recorders, 18 black-and-white TV broadcast cars, 2 colour TV broadcast cars, 17 generator cars, and 8 videotape recording cars (Guttman & Thompson, 2001, p. 199).

The diffusion of colour televisions represents a further tangible sign of domestic modernization: “Colour televisions were another symbol of progress based on consumerism” (Tagsold, 2020, p. 4). Many families, after having purchased black-and-white sets to follow the Crown Prince’s wedding in 1958, replaced them precisely in view of the Games, the first to be broadcast live and in colour globally. This technical achievement was not only perceived as an engineering success but as a demonstration of Japan’s ability to successfully integrate into global modernity, so much so that Tagsold (2020, p. 5) defines it as “an outstanding feat that attested to Japanese ingenuity”. Simultaneously, the event also became an opportunity to redefine the concept of post-war patriotism. While in the past it had been rooted in military successes, it now found its foundation in civil progress: “Patriotism was no longer based on military success or imperialist adventures... it now drew largely from economic and technological progress” (Tagsold, 2020, p. 5). The new national pride was not limited to Tokyo but also extended to peripheral areas, thanks to the high-speed Shinkansen network and the Olympic torch relay, which symbolically connected the regions to the heart of the event.

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics were not only a moment of technological and urban modernization but also an occasion for collective belonging. The cheering and participation, both live and via television, generated shared emotions and a strong sense of national identity. Sports symbols and rituals reinforced this cohesion, transforming victories and defeats into common experiences (Bifulco, 2019, pp. 178-179), capable of influencing the country’s mood and collective self-esteem. This sense of belonging, thanks to the television broadcast, transcended national borders and entered into the logic of global culture. Within this framework, the East presented itself to the West through the “common language” of sport, thus offering the image of a shared culture. Events like the Olympics mark a discontinuity from the ordinary programming of all nations involved: “These telecasts share a large number of common attributes which we shall attempt to identify. Audiences recognize them as an invitation – even a command – to stop their daily routines and join in a holiday experience” (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 1). Every media event, understood as a “collective ritual of public communication”, helps strengthen the social fabric. The Olympics fall under “calendarized contests”, which assume a sacralized value in the media landscape. Tokyo 1964 became the symbol of the recovery of Japanese national pride, projected onto a global scale. This media turning point – which challenges the previous idea of a “culturally poor” television – also coincided with a theoretical shift: Dayan and Katz (1992, p. 2) observe that “until very recently, television was thought to be saying nothing worthy of humanistic analysis”, but sports mega-events prove the opposite, as they convey complex texts, genres, and public rituals. In particular, when television transitioned from being a luxury good to a daily household technology, sport became directly accessible in homes, bringing the energy of the stadiums into the living room (Rowe, 2011, p. 34). This change was not without controversy, as there were fears that televised sports would reduce the desire to attend live events in stadiums, damaging not only the sports economy but also the appeal of an event that depended on the atmosphere created by the present audience. However, the televised experience of Tokyo ‘64 marks not just the beginning of a culture of shared viewing, but above all offers the opportunity to follow competitions distant in time and space.

If the media amplify the symbolic reach of sport, making it “larger than life” (Wenner & Billings, 2017, p. 13) and transforming it into a spectacular commodity: “the commodified spectacle that

the sports mega-event has become would not be possible without media” (p. 17), the sports mega-event becomes the ideal setting for this process, uniting millions of spectators in real-time and promoting values such as peace, modernity, and fair competition. Tokyo 1964 presents itself as a media staging of Japanese modernity, orchestrated according to the ritual and narrative logic of the television medium. It is a prime example of how mediatization transforms sport into a cultural, political, and symbolic (media) experience on a global scale. “But global carried other connotations when discussing media and sport that went far beyond the idea of the merely international” (Rowe, 2011, p. 1).

5. Media narrative analysis between images and discourses

5.1 Methodology

To study the Olympic edition under examination, the analysis was carried out through media narrative analysis, a methodology that focuses on the narrative forms of media products by examining their content, structure, performative dimension, and target audiences (Mihas, 2023; Riessman, 2007). This approach also makes it possible to code elements such as story type, form, genre, tone, and the purpose of the narrative (Mihas, 2023). This method allowed us to identify content classes structured according to precise parameters. In particular, for this two direct and coeval sources were selected: the article entitled “II – The Olympics. Repercussions” published in “The New Yorker” magazine in 1964, and written by E.J. Kahn Jr. and the documentary *Tokyo Olympiad* (1965) directed by Kon Ichikawa. The selection is based on the desire to compare two complementary perspectives: on one hand, the external and international narrative of a Western periodical; on the other, the internal and official representation offered by Ichikawa’s film. This comparison allows us to observe how the Games were narrated and perceived, respectively, on the global and domestic stages. Applied to the two selected sources, this methodology allows us to highlight the different discursive strategies through which the 1964 Olympics were transformed into a collective representation and symbolic heritage.

5.2 Media content analysis

As for the Japanese, while they demonstrate anew every day what consummate organizers of games they are, they have proved to be something less than flawless contestants. As far back as 1960, they set their goal for 1964 at fifteen gold medals, and to date they are eleven short of fulfilling their ambition. The enthusiasm of the local fans for their native Olympic heroes nevertheless continues unabated. The Japanese are still coming out to all events in droves and raising the rafters (or the skies, if they’re outdoors) for anyone wearing their colours who manages so much ad not to come in last in a qualifying heat. [...] Of a total of two million one hundred and ten thousand tickets to twenty sports in a dozen venues that the Japanese Olympic officials made available to their countrymen, five hundred and seventy thousand were distributed to school-children through lotteries conducted by their schools, and the lucky winners are the envy of their age group. [...] The kids generally turn up at the various events in chartered buses and march to their seats behind banners; in many cases, they wear matching hats, so they can be readily identified by their chaperons (Kahn Jr., 1964, pp. 237-238).

The perception of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics overseas is telling. In the American weekly magazine “The New Yorker”, founded in New York in 1925 by Harold Ross and Jane Grant, dated October 24, 1964, the journalist E.J. Kahn Jr. wrote a long article dedicated to the recently concluded Olympics in Tokyo, entitled “II – The Olympics. Repercussions”, featured in Volume 40, Issue 36, across pages 236–248. Ranging from a direct analysis of the Games to a narration of Japanese culture in its entirety, the journalist observes Japan’s efficiency in organizing the Games with admiration from the very first pages. The Japanese are described as disciplined spectators and serious athletes, capable of maintaining composure even during long intervals or moments of misfortune. In particular, he highlights the composed silence of the Japanese spectators during a long pause in the stadium, where no one left their seat for hours, despite the lack of ongoing competitions (Kahn Jr., 1964, p. 241). Through the lens of media narrative analysis, it is possible to identify several thematic cores that structure the narrative and contribute to delineating the image of post-war Japan in the eyes of an international audience.

Thematic Core	Excerpt / Reference	Meaning
1. Japanese Organizational Efficiency	p. 237: “they demonstrate anew every day what consummate organizers of games they are”	Narrative of order and competence: Japan is presented as a model of modernity and discipline .
2. Sporting Ambitions and Results	p. 237: objective of 15 gold medals, they missed 11.	Contrast between aspirations and actual results: the effort is worth as much as the victory .
3. Publics and Collective Participation	p. 237-238: enthusiastic spectators, children with coordinated caps.	Sport becomes a civic and educational ritual , involving the entire nation.
4. Spectator Discipline and Composure	p. 241: 2.5-hour break, audience remains firmly in their seats.	Collective behaviour as a symbolic sign of national resilience and identity .
5. Curiosity towards “Exotic” Sports	p. 238: Iran–Mexico match with a Ghanaian referee.	The Japanese people’s ingenuity and openness towards unfamiliar sports mark the process of sports globalization.
6. Architecture and Urban Modernity	p. 238: National Gymnasium as an “architectural sensation”.	The structures become a visual narrative of Japanese modernity .
7. Narrative of Sporting Emotions	p. 242: the Ceylonese marathon runner Karunananda who keeps running even when lapped.	Defeat is transfigured into a spectacle of resistance : pathos and universality.

8. Symbolic Value of Children and Youth	p. 238: 570,000 tickets allocated to schools.	Youth as a symbol of the future: sport and education interwoven in the national narrative.
--	---	---

Table 1: media content analysis of “II – The Olympics. Repercussions”

A first core theme concerns Japanese organizational efficiency, repeatedly highlighted as proof of the nation’s ability to manage a complex and imposing event. The article depicts the Japanese as impeccable organizers, capable of ensuring order, precision, and discipline: qualities that, beyond the mere reporting of facts, assume a symbolic value, testifying to the country’s rebirth and its modernization. In parallel, the text emphasizes the tension between sporting ambitions and concrete results. Kahn recalls that Japan had set the goal of winning fifteen gold medals, despite falling short of that target. This emphasis does not appear as criticism, but rather as recognition of the will to measure up against high standards: a sign of openness to international comparison, where the value of effort and determination prevails over the final outcome. Considerable space is dedicated to the audience and collective participation. Spectators are described as enthusiastic, orderly, and deeply involved. Particularly significant is the presence of children, brought to the stadiums through school lotteries and recognizable by their coordinated caps and flags: an image that portrays sport as a civic and educational ritual, capable of uniting different generations in a common national experience. The narrative also insists on the discipline and composure of the spectators, exemplified by the episode where tens of thousands of people remained firmly in their seats for hours, despite a long break between competitions. Such behaviour is interpreted as a sign of civilization and resilience, and it helps define Japan as a cohesive and patient society.

Alongside these traits of order and discipline, Kahn introduces episodes that show the audience’s curiosity towards unfamiliar sports, such as the football match between Iran and Mexico refereed by a Ghanaian. The amused and almost naive reaction of the spectators conveys the image of a country that is learning, open to sports globalization but still distant from some practices.

Another central core theme is that of architecture and urban modernity. The description of the National Gymnasium as “the architectural sensation of these Olympics” testifies to the attention paid to Olympic infrastructure, which became symbols of modernization and tools for national self-representation. Architecture, here, is narrated not only as a functional setting but as a visual language through which Japan declares its modernity. Kahn does not neglect the emotional and universal dimension of sport, giving space to episodes that go beyond mere triumph. This is the case of the Ceylonese marathon runner Karunananda, who continued running despite being lapped multiple times, applauded by the audience for his determination. Defeat is transfigured into a spectacle of resistance and sacrifice, signaling an interest in the human and narrative component of sport rather than the simple competitive result. Finally, the article highlights the symbolic role of children and youth, not just as spectators but as protagonists of a national educational project. The extensive distribution of tickets to students builds the image of a sport that becomes an integral part of civic education, a vehicle for socialization and identity construction. Overall, *The New Yorker* article performs a cultural mediation: through narrative

and descriptive choices, it transforms the 1964 Olympics into a story that presents a Japan that is disciplined, modern, and capable of projecting itself onto the international stage. Far from being simple sports reporting, the feature becomes an interpretive device which, with an admiring and sometimes ironic tone, contributes to shaping the collective image of Japan in the context of the Cold War and sports globalization.

This testimony, therefore, is useful for understanding how the internal narrative worked and thus influenced the global perception of what post-war Japan would be from then on. In this sense, the documentary *Tokyo Olympiad*¹ is an audiovisual source of exceptional relevance for the study of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the Japanese image they helped to shape. It is the Official Film of Tokyo 1964 – *Tokyo Olympic*, a 170-minute documentary produced in 1965 by the Organizing Committee for the Games of the XVIII Olympiad. It was restored in 2013 by the International Olympic Committee. Originally officially commissioned by the Games' organizing committee, but reinterpreted with great authorial freedom by Kon Ichikawa, the film constitutes one of the main examples of cinematic sports narration in the post-war period. Ichikawa (市川 崑, 1915–2008) was one of the most versatile and innovative Japanese directors of the post-war era. Active from the wartime period until the 2000s, he ranged across different genres, from social satire to historical drama, from noir to documentary. Despite being an “official” product, Ichikawa deconstructs the celebratory function of the event, offering a poetic, humanistic, and sometimes melancholic reinterpretation of the competitions and their protagonists. This very authorial choice, initially met with coolness by the Japanese authorities, makes the film particularly interesting as a subjective source rich in cultural and ideological implications.

There are many elements that make the documentary an interesting source to analyze. Kon Ichikawa, despite working on commission, produced a text that privileges the humanization of sport, the aesthetic dimension, and the construction of atmospheres over simple reporting of results, thus providing a plural and complex portrait of the Olympics as a cultural, political, and social phenomenon. In this sense, the film is particularly well suited for a narrative analysis, because it builds meaning through choices of editing, use of time, and attention to faces, gestures, and rituals, rather than through the narrator's voice or statistical data. The media narrative analysis methodology, therefore, appears the most appropriate: it allows the documentary to be broken down into its thematic cores, to investigate the compositional structures, and to interpret the performative aspect of the narrative, without losing sight of the role of the audiences, understood not only as recipients but also as actors represented within the text. This approach allows us to grasp the hybrid nature of the film, halfway between an official document and an author's work, and to highlight how it articulates the themes of modernity, tradition, the individual, and the collective in narrative form, revealing the Tokyo Olympics as a crossroads of national identities and global imaginaries.

¹ It is available on the official Olympic website, 'Olympic Channel,' and can be viewed at the link: https://www.olympics.com/it/serie-originali/episodio/tokyo-1964-il-film-ufficiale?entry_point_type=home_sign_in&entry_point_tag=BAU⁶

Thematic Core	Approximate Runtime	Technical and Stylistic Choices	Narrative and Cultural Significance
National Rebirth / Modernity	00:00–00:15	English title superimposed on demolitions, followed only after by Japanese title; use of scope and urban shots.	Cancellation of the old to build the new; projection of a modern Japan, open to the West.
Olympic Ritualism	00:10–00:25	Vigorously soundtrack, “rising sun” dawn, torch relay with voiceover, choreographic editing.	The Games as a universal founding ritual ; first journey of the flame to the East as an epoch-making event.
Humanism of the Gaze	00:25–00:40 (recurring)	Insistent close-ups, telephoto lenses, silences.	Centrality of the individual and emotions ; spectator empathy towards athletes and audience.
Aesthetics of the Athletic Gesture	00:35–01:05	Slow motion (<i>rallenty</i>), widescreen, aestheticizing composition.	Sporting gesture as a suspended dance ; aestheticization of sport as art.
Water and Lightness	01:05–01:20	Natural sounds (breathing, splashes), contemplative silences.	Sport as a sensory experience ; body as fluid writing in the water.
Grace and Control	01:20–01:35	Close-ups on micro-gestures and errors.	Narrative of precariousness ; valorization of vulnerability as part of the endeavour.
Tradition vs. Modernity	01:35–01:50	Sober shots, Judo ceremony, essential rhythm.	Judo as an identity bridge: Japanese discipline inscribed within Olympic modernity.

Collective Body / Nation	01:50–02:05	Alternating montage of team/audience, emphasis on group rhythm.	Japanese women’s volleyball victory as a metaphor for collective work and national pride .
Spectators as Protagonists	00:25–02:05 (recurring)	Alternating montage of events–audience; close-ups on fans, children, elderly people.	The spectator as a co-protagonist ; sport as a daily sociocultural phenomenon.
Endurance / Human Limit	02:20–02:45	Long shots, reduction of verbal commentary, focus on exhausted bodies.	Abebe Bikila’s marathon as a novel of fatigue ; sport as resilience and bodily time.
Melancholic Epilogue	02:45–02:50	Slowed rhythm, silence, stadium emptying.	Transitoriness of the event, memory as the only trace.
Internationalization and Media	00:10–00:25 (ceremony and report)	Insertion of journalistic data; images of the press room with 100 reporters; transmission via Syncom III satellite .	Tokyo Games as the first global sporting event , broadcast live worldwide on TV.
Global Narrative / Plurality of Modernities	00:10–00:30 (commentary on the flame arrival and opening)	Voiceover emphasizes ”games belonging to the entire world.”	Japan welcomed into the “family of nations”, but with its own modernity, both local and global.
Meta-narrative and Politics	Throughout the film; re-edits 1965 / restoration 2013	Divergence between Ichikawa’s poetic vision and the governmental desire for a triumphalist narrative.	The film as a field of tension between art, propaganda, and historical memory .

Table 2: media content analysis of “Tokyo Olympiad”

First and foremost, Ichikawa adopts an innovative cinematic language for the time, a sign both of a strong reading of contemporary society – which was constantly evolving technologically –

and of the desire to appear innovative and be innovators. In the first place, the use of the panoramic “scope” format and the recourse to telephoto lenses and slow motion (slow-motion) have the capacity to transform the competitions into choreographic visions suspended in time; the spectator is potentially led to immerse themselves in this compelling narrative, full of close-ups and interplay of silence. Secondly, the alternating montage (which intercuts sporting events and audience reactions) also helps construct this emotional, and thus non-chronological, narrative, focusing on pathos more than on the result. Consequently, the soundtrack privileges natural sounds – footsteps, breathing, roars – and often reduces or eliminates verbal commentary, underscoring a non-didactic, almost contemplative intention. The proposed table is not just a list of sequences, but an interpretive map showing how *Tokyo Olympiad* constructs meaning through the combination of narrative cores, technical choices, and cultural significance. Each block of images, in fact, does not merely record a sporting event but transforms it into a story, a symbolic representation of Japan and the world in the 1960s.

The film opens with an eloquent choice: the title credits first appear in English, “XVIII OLYMPIAD TOKYO 1964”, superimposed on images of urban demolitions, and only subsequently in Japanese. The effect is to visually signal the break with the past and the desire to present the country as modern, open to the West, and ready to welcome the world. This initial sequence immediately introduces the theme of national rebirth and modernity, which runs through the entire documentary. The monumentality of the city is juxtaposed with the dimension of Olympic ritualism. The dawn, a symbol of the “rising sun”, and the torch relay, accompanied by the narrator’s voice, travel the road alongside the runners. These first minutes are very evocative as they escort the spectator to the entrance of the Olympic Games; the commentator emphasizes the importance of the torch’s first journey to the East, not only for the Japanese people but also for the countries “from the Aegean Sea, across the scorching Syrian desert, the Iranian plateau, and passing through Southeast Asia”, which had the opportunity to witness the relay with their own eyes for the first time. The desire to emerge as part of a whole, part of the world, becomes apparent when listening to the commentary accompanying the Japanese athlete’s parade on the day of the Games’ opening, October 10, 1964, at 2:00 PM

Here are the Japanese athletes. Having overcome the hard training on the road to glory, the young Japanese athletes now march proudly. Tokyo had the chance to host the Games in 1940, but the dream was swept away by the war. Yet, ever since the announcement five years ago that the Olympics would be held in Tokyo, it seems as if every Japanese person has worked for this great day. It is the event of the century, the first time ever for Asia. The XVIII Olympic Games for peace and friendship. The journey to get here has been long and perilous.

This willingness to actively participate in the entertainment, but above all in the writing of the world’s (positive) history, is reinforced in the sense of community and national unity that this text conveys. Furthermore, the reference to the youth is a clear sign of the construction of a better future, guided by the sporting values declared on that occasion.

Another passage is certainly explanatory: “the Olympic Games have finally come to the East, demonstrating that they belong to the whole world”.

The choice of the last torchbearer is exemplary of the type of narrative Japan was weaving. Sakai Yoshinori was a Japanese sprinter, born in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 – the day the atomic bomb was dropped on the city – and he was symbolically chosen by the Organizing Committee to represent the rebirth of post-war Japan, conveying a message of peace, hope, and national regeneration through sport. Not only the Olympic Games, but also the East, is a more active part of the world than ever before, a modern world that would, from then on, draw on this experience to narrate in a completely new way not only sport, but the very idea of internationality. There was, in part, an awareness of this: “The National Stadium press room hosted over 100 reporters from around the world who reported the results minute by minute. Using the Syncom III satellite, it was possible to broadcast live on TV for the first time”.

Alongside the ritual and celebration, however, another dimension emerges: the humanism of the gaze. Telephoto lenses, close-ups, and the interplay of silence isolate the faces of the athletes and spectators, conveying the most intimate side of sport, made of tension, emotion, and anticipation. In this way, the film does not only celebrate victories, but centers the human body as a place of vulnerability and expressiveness.

With the same logic, the aesthetics of the athletic gesture, rendered through slow motion and panoramic compositions, transforms running, jumping, or throwing into suspended choreographies, true visual artworks. The core theme dedicated to water and lightness insists on another register: swimming and diving, accompanied by natural sounds and silences, become almost contemplative experiences, where water becomes the body’s script. Artistic gymnastics, on the other hand, stages the fragile balance between grace and control, highlighting error and precariousness as an integral part of the sporting endeavour.

A special place is occupied by judo, a Japanese discipline making its Olympic debut. The sober shots, the ceremonial aspect, and the attention to mutual respect make this sequence a representation of the continuity between tradition and modernity. Conversely, the women’s volleyball victory by Japan recounts the strength of the collective: the alternating montage between the team and the public stages national pride through teamwork and gender participation. The constant focus on the public – children, families, the elderly – confirms another fundamental core theme: spectators as protagonists. Ichikawa devotes considerable attention to reactions and gazes, thereby transforming the publics into an active participant in the narrative. Sport is shown as a shared experience rooted in the daily life of Japan.

Abebe Bikila’s marathon becomes the culmination of the reflection on the human limit. Long, silent, and marked by fatigue and endurance, this sequence compels the spectator to share the duration and the suffering, transforming the race into a moral parable. The film concludes with the melancholic epilogue of the closing ceremony: the stadium emptying, the silence descending, the awareness that the event is already memory. Alongside these core themes, the table recalls two other crucial elements. On one hand, the role of the media and internationalization: for the first time, the Olympics were transmitted via satellite, and the Tokyo press room hosted over a hundred journalists from around the world. On the other, the political meta-narrative: the film was re-edited because it was considered too poetic and not triumphalist enough, but the full restoration by the IOC in 2013 restored Ichikawa’s original version, reasserting its artistic and

documentary value. In this intertwining of innovative techniques, aesthetic choices, and symbolic representations, *Tokyo Olympiad* does not merely document sport: it tells the story of a country's modernization, its desire for international legitimacy, and its identity suspended between tradition and innovation. The table, in this sense, shows how every sequence becomes chronicle, narrative, and cultural interpretation all at once. Within the broader framework of the narrative mediatization of sport, *Tokyo Olympiad* demonstrates how the symbolic, narrative, and technological potentials of the television medium are mobilized to transform the Games into a shared cultural event. In doing so, the film not only frames athletic performances but also structures the audience's (and publics') experience, turning viewers into active interpreters of collective meaning. At the same time, it endows the Olympic spectacle with a memorial function, preserving it as a cultural archive in which sport becomes a vehicle for negotiating identity, memory, and symbolic power. This perspective allows us to explore the ways in which sport is not merely represented but reconfigured through the very structures of media storytelling.

Tokyo Olympiad allows us to delve into various aspects. Among these are:

- The aestheticization of sport: The athlete's body is shown not as a winning machine, but as an instrument of human expression, encompassing effort and vulnerability.
- The spectator as the true protagonist of this documentary: Ichikawa dedicates ample space to the publics and their emotional participation; this is a clear sign of the event's sociocultural importance in the daily life of Japan at the time.
- International rehabilitation through sport: While not explicitly propagandistic, the film is part of the broader Japanese government project to restore the country's image on the international stage following the defeat in World War II and the American occupation.

These choices make the documentary a source that reflects not only what happened in Tokyo in 1964, but also how it was intended to be represented and internalized within the context of Japanese post-war reconstruction. It must be specified, however, that *Tokyo Olympiad* was subject to censorship and re-editing: the Japanese government disliked the film's poetic and reflective tone, preferring a triumphalist narrative in line with the image of the "modern Japan" reborn after the war. Nevertheless, the complete version of Ichikawa's film was restored in 2013 by the International Olympic Committee, which recognized its unique artistic and documentary value. The article published in *The New Yorker*, cited just above, offers a point of view that perfectly dialogues with Ichikawa's vision. Where the journalist observes the composed and curious reaction of the Japanese audience (Kahn Jr. 1964, p. 238), Ichikawa films them with the same contemplative gaze: not as passive spectators, but as bodies participating in the event, driven by emotion, silence, and respect. Another point of contact is the centrality of error and vulnerability. Ichikawa shows the effort, exhaustion, and falls, just as the reportage describes the clumsiness of a Japanese diver who botches a jump, hits his head, and resurfaces amid general confusion (Kahn Jr. 1964, p. 241): moments that reveal the human and fragile aspect of sport.

Although they share the thematic cores, and the global narrative appears linear, they diverge profoundly in the way they tell the story. Ichikawa translates sport into visual poetry and a reflection on the human condition, while the article offers a political, social, and journalistic

account. Together, the two sources allow us to grasp the dual nature of the 1964 Olympics: an aesthetic and spectacular event, but also a historical and geopolitical chronicle. On one hand, the film conveys the sensory and collective experience, centered on gesture, face, and memory; on the other, the article highlights the concrete implications of modernization and international politics. The intersection of these perspectives demonstrates how the Tokyo Games were not only a sporting stage but also a laboratory of cultural representations, capable of revealing the identity of a country in transformation and the role of the media in the construction of a global and plural modernity.

Thematic Core	<i>Tokyo Olympiad</i> (Ichikawa, 1965)	<i>The New Yorker</i> (1964)	Key Differences
National Rebirth / Modernity	Opening with demolitions, English title, modern Tokyo filmed in scope ; poetics of reconstruction.	Description of urban transformation and new infrastructure as a sign of progress.	Ichikawa aestheticizes and symbolizes; <i>The New Yorker</i> reports and provides socio-political analysis.
Olympic Ritualism	Dawn, “rising sun” torch relay, and ceremony as a universal ritual of peace .	Opening ceremony narrated as a political and mass spectacle .	Poetic and symbolic vs. analytic and political.
Humanism of the Gaze	Close-ups of athletes and spectators, pathos of gestures, slow motion.	Athletes viewed as disciplined national heroes, focus on records.	Ichikawa privileges emotions and vulnerability; <i>The New Yorker</i> focuses on results and discipline.
Endurance / Human Limit (Marathon)	Long, contemplative sequence of Bikila’s exhaustion, the body as a moral parable.	Account of Bikila’s victory and the Ethiopian record.	Aesthetic contemplation vs. sports reporting.
Internationalization and Media	Press room, Syncom III satellite, Games as a global event.	Detailed analysis of the role of media and satellite technology.	Convergence on the theme, but different registers: immersive film, informative article.

Table 3: parallel media content analysis between the article and the documentary

In particular, Kahn emphasizes how Japanese patriotism is present but also devoid of excesses. On several occasions, the absence of nationalistic ostentation is noted, such as during the medal ceremonies where, although the public warmly applauded the Japanese athletes, a respectful tone was maintained even toward their opponents (Kahn Jr., 1964, pp. 240-241). The journalist

highlights Japan's desire to be recognized as part of the international community, rather than as a hegemonic power. This willingness is also evident in Ichikawa's narrative, across various aspects. In conclusion, Kon Ichikawa, with *Tokyo Olympiad*, offers a complementary and critical visual source to "The New Yorker"'s journalistic account. Both materials convey the complexity of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics: not just a national celebration, but a space for global encounter, charged with cultural, human, and narrative tensions.

These representations and written accounts of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics reveal to us how the Japanese were readmitted to the family of nations. But as we have seen, many Japanese and foreigners left the Games knowing that the Japanese were somehow different, for the modernity which emerged was of their own making, one which successfully coupled both local and global worlds. We are coming to realize that there are many modernities in Asia, and that the world is not all the same. [...] Media representations of the Olympics provide a window to understanding how host nations portray themselves (Low, 2004, p. 48).

In conclusion, Tokyo 1964 is not just a successful sporting event, but a true cultural and media paradigm: a moment of transition between modern sport and postmodern sport, which inaugurated the global sport economy, transnational spectacularization, and mediatized diplomacy. The worldwide broadcast became a foundational element of a shared global ritual: the spectator is no longer just an audience, but part of a worldwide emotional and economic experience; it is here that the mediatization of sport consolidated itself as a cultural and geopolitical device, which still underpins major contemporary sporting events.

6. Conclusion. The legacy of Tokyo 1964 in global sports culture

Starting with the experience of Tokyo 1964, the mediatization of sport paved the way for a change: the progressive replacement of the unidirectional process of internationalization and Western cultural export (Rowe, 2011, p. 4). During this period, television became the central pillar of a global-scale sports-media cultural complex (Rowe, 1999, 2004). The entry of the television medium into the sporting field determined a relationship of mutual dependence between media and sports institutions (Tirino, 2025): television continually demanded events capable of ensuring spectacle and attractiveness for its schedules, while sport progressively found in television an unprecedented source of visibility and, above all, constantly increasing revenues (Boyle & Haynes, 2009). The 1964 Tokyo Olympics represent a decisive transition: they not only sanctioned Japan's return among the peaceful powers but also inaugurated a new paradigm where sport, politics, economics, and identity are intertwined in a complex manner. As Pound (2004, p. 28) observes, "the modern Olympic Games were fortunate to have developed during the emergence of mass communication... The media, and especially television, have provided the Olympic Movement with a global stage".

Tokyo 1964 is also one of the first fully modern examples of a Mega Sport Event, defined by Roche (2000, p. 1) as "large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance". Thanks to the transmission via the Syncom III satellite, the Games became the prototype of a planetary event capable of intertwining the sporting dimension with the geopolitical one. It is in contexts like the

one analyzed that what Martelli (2014) described as the SMS triangle (Sport–Media–Sponsor) would take shape in the future – that is, the mutual interdependence between sports organizations, media organizations, and sponsors in Western elite sports. The global spectacularization of events, which Whannel termed “international spectacle” (1992, p. 115), found its first prototype in Tokyo: sport became both the content and the container of political, cultural, and economic meanings. It is no coincidence that Whitson and Macintosh (1996) emphasize how mega-events dissolve the boundaries between sports and commercial promotion. The Japanese Olympics were, in fact, used to communicate to the world an image of a modern, peaceful, and technologically advanced nation, ready to re-enter the international community (Larson & Park, 1993).

This function is part of the second phase of sports globalization identified by Giulianotti and Robertson (2004, 2007), the “expansionist” phase (1949–1989), characterized by the integration of sport with fashion, tourism, and media. Japan, through a skilful use of soft power, succeeded in combining tradition and innovation: from the opening ceremony that showcased performance arts to the launch of the Shinkansen, a symbol of efficiency and the future. It is no coincidence that Pound (2004, p. 28) emphasized how the IOC is called upon to balance the enormous potential for visibility offered by the media with the safeguarding of Olympic values, a balance made increasingly delicate by the expansion of commercialization. On the infrastructural level, Bellamy (1989) notes how, already in the 1960s, sports leagues understood the strategic value of national television contracts, capable of transforming the local public into a transnational community of spectators. The live television broadcast of the Tokyo Games, supported by technological innovations and government investments, thus consolidated the collective ritualism that Dayan and Katz (1992) would describe as typical of media ceremonies. Finally, the political dimension cannot be overlooked. As Low (2009) recalls, the Olympic bid must be interpreted as part of a broader Japanese cultural policy, aimed at reasserting the country’s international legitimacy. Similarly, Aizawa *et al.* (2017, pp. 143-145) point out how the Games reinforced the image of a peaceful and modern Japan, also supported by the involvement of businesses and sponsors who integrated themselves into the national narratives.

The decade in which the 1964 Olympics took place thus ushered in a new era, in which sport ceased to be a phenomenon rooted exclusively in local or national contexts and established itself as a media construct of global scope (Roche, 2000). The *media logic* of television redefined the boundaries of sport as a cultural experience: competitions and events are narrated, packaged, and perceived through codes specific to the television language – from the editing of shots and replays, to the use of specific formats (live commentary, in-depth programmes, magazines), up to the combination of live broadcasts, technical analyses, sideline interviews, and studio discussions.

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics were not just a sporting event, but a cultural and political device that permanently defined the imaginary of contemporary mega-events. As Rowe (1999, 2004) observes, the codification of the forms of representation and consumption that we now associate with the Games – spectacular ceremonies, synchronized television direction, and the construction of global narratives – finds its origin in that edition.

According to Tagsold (2009, p. 1), the Tokyo Olympics should not be interpreted as a total break, but rather as a moment of “symbolic evolution”. The new infrastructures, erected in areas connected to the former empire or the military past, redefined the urban space as the stage for a regenerated nationalism. The infrastructural modernization – the Shinkansen, highways, monorails – did not erase tradition, but rather re-inscribed it within a new framework of legitimation: Japan could present itself to the world as modern without denying its roots.

In parallel, Aizawa *et al.* (2017) show how Tokyo 1964 acted on the social level through a set of public policies and structural interventions. With the Sport Promotion Act of 1961 and the founding of the Japan Junior Sport Clubs Association in 1962, the State used the Olympics to promote sports participation and transform it into an educational and civic tool (Aizawa *et al.*, 2017, p. 4). The success of the women’s national volleyball team, watched by millions of television viewers, generated a genuine “Olympic cohort effect”: entire generations were inspired to participate in sports thanks to the role models provided by the Olympic athletes. Thus, the event was not confined to the capital but became a national phenomenon, contributing to the birth of a new mass sports culture. A further crucial aspect of the legacy of Tokyo 1964 was the construction of its visual image, entrusted to the designer Yūsaku Kamekura. A leading figure in Japanese modernism, Kamekura (1915–1997) is considered one of the pioneers of post-war Japanese graphic design. Trained at the Institute of New Architecture and Industrial Arts in Tokyo, he helped introduce the language of international modernism to Japan, with an innovative use of typography, photography, and colour. His international fame is primarily linked to the official poster for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, in which he combined the Olympic rings with the red disc of the Japanese flag for the first time, creating an icon destined to redefine the visual identity of the Games. His official poster for the Games immediately became an icon: for the first time, the interlaced Olympic rings were associated with a national symbol as strong as the red disc of the Japanese flag.

This operation was not a mere aesthetic exercise but a political and cultural gesture. Kamekura managed to condense the tension between the particular and the universal into a single image: on one hand, national identity, and on the other, belonging to the global Olympic movement. Furthermore, his graphic design broke with the illustrative style of previous posters, imposing the language of photography and industrial design as the new code for Olympic communication. The impact was immediate and long-lasting. Kamekura inaugurated a model that would be adopted and reinterpreted by subsequent organizing committees, demonstrating that an Olympics was not just a collection of competitions but a global cultural brand to be disseminated through logos, posters, mascots, and signage. In this sense, the Tokyo Olympics was not only the first Olympic event broadcast live and in colour via satellite, but also the first to construct a coherent and recognizable visual image, capable of functioning as an international language. Ultimately, the legacy of the 1964 Games lies in its ability to have integrated sport, politics, media, and design into a single narrative project. From that moment on, every Olympics would be called upon to measure itself not only by the sporting dimension but also by the aesthetic, communicative, and symbolic ones. Tokyo 1964 thus set a paradigm: the mega-event as a global

ritual, television spectacle, vehicle for cultural diplomacy, and, at the same time, a powerful device for marketing and national identity.

The analysis conducted shows how sport, through major events and the narrative forms that accompany them, has become one of the main symbolic languages of contemporary times. From urban and infrastructural transformations to social and cultural effects, and the construction of a recognizable visual grammar, the case studies highlight how sport is never neutral but acts as a device for collective representation. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics represented a turning point in the history of contemporary sport, demonstrating how it can function as a political, spectacular, and technological instrument. The worldwide broadcast marked by satellite transmissions inaugurated a new phase, in which sport transformed into a language of collective and diplomatic representation (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Rowe, 2011).

On that occasion, Japan staged its rebirth, integrating urban modernization, technical innovations, and a symbolic communication that spoke to both the national audience and the international community (Tagsold, 2009; Aizawa *et al.*, 2017). The strength of this event lay in its ability to connect diverse spheres – politics, economy, culture – within a single narrative framework. The construction of the image also played a decisive role: the work of Yūsaku Kamekura, with the famous poster that united the Olympic rings with the red disc of the Japanese flag, established an aesthetic destined to become a model for subsequent Games. The Tokyo Olympics were thus not only competition, but also identity representation and a global brand.

In summary, 1964 marked the birth of a new way of conceiving sport as a global phenomenon. Since then, every Olympics has measured itself against the legacy of Tokyo: not just competitions, but a media spectacle and a shared narrative, capable of both reflecting and constructing the transformations of global society.

References

Aizawa, N., et al. (2017). Long-term impact of the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games on sport participation: A cohort analysis. *Sport Management Review*, 21(1), 1–12.

Bellamy, A. J. (1989). *Television and the remote control: Grazing on a vast wasteland*. New York: Guilford Press.

Bellamy, A. J. (2006). Whither the responsibility to protect? Humanitarian intervention and the 2005 World Summit. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 20(2), 143–169.

Bifulco, L. (2019). Il tifoso, lo spettatore, il consumatore. In L. Bifulco & M. Tirino (Eds.), *Sport e scienze sociali. Fenomeni sportivi tra consumi, media e processi globali* (pp. 176–191). Roma: Rogas.

Boyle, E., & Haynes, R. (2009). *Power play*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Dayan, D., & Katz, E. (1992). *Media events*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Frandsen, K. (2020). *Sport and mediatization*. London & New York: Routledge.

- Gillen, J. (1994). The political economy of the Olympic Games. *Media Information Australia*, 72(1), 16–21.
- Gillen, J. (1995). The Sydney Olympics: The politics of an Olympic bid. *Culture, Sport, Society*, 1(1), 1–18.
- Giulianotti, R., & Robertson, R. (2004). The globalization of football. *British Journal of Sociology*, 55(4), 545–568.
- Giulianotti, R., & Robertson, R. (2007). Recovering the social: Globalization, football and transnationalism. *Global Networks*, 7(2), 166–186.
- Goryacheva, E. (2020). History of television broadcasting development in Japan (from experimental broadcasting to nationwide broadcasting in the 1960s). *Humanitarian Vector*, 15(6), 151–161.
- Guttman, A. (1986). *Sports spectators*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Guttman, A. (1992). *The Olympics: A history of the modern games*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Guttman, A., & Thompson, L. (2001). *Japanese sport*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hutchins, B., & Sanderson, J. (2017). The primacy of sports television. *Media International Australia*, 164(1), 32–43.
- Kertzer, D. I. (1988). *Ritual, politics, and power*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Krotz, F. (2007). The meta-process of 'mediatization' as a conceptual frame. *Global Media and Communication*, 3(3), 256–260.
- Larson, J. F., & Park, H. S. (1993). *Global television and the politics of the Seoul Olympics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lechenperg, H. (Ed.). (1964). *Olympic Games 1964: Innsbruck–Tokyo*. New York: A. S. Barnes; London: Thomas Yoseloff.
- Low, M. (2009). Japan, modernity and the Tokyo Olympics. *Humanities Research*, 33–51.
- Martelli, S. (2014). Sports mega-events (2002–2010) and Italian TV audiences. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 11(3), 227–252.
- Mihas, P. (2023). Qualitative research methods: Approaches to qualitative data analysis. *International Encyclopedia of Education*, 4, 302–313.

- Pound, R. (2004). A new Olympic life form: The beginning of Olympic television. *Journal of Olympic History*, 28(3), 12–19.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Roche, M. (2000). *Mega-events and modernity: Olympics and expos in the growth of global culture*. London: Routledge.
- Rowe, D. (2011). *Global media sport*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Tagsold, C. (2009). The 1964 Tokyo Olympics as political games. *Asia-Pacific Journal*, 7(3), 1–7.
- Tagsold, C. (2020). Symbolic transformation: The 1964 Tokyo Games reconsidered. *Asia-Pacific Journal*, 18(11), 1–8.
- Tirino, M. (2019). La mediatizzazione dello sport: Network, audience, organizzazioni sportive. In L. Bifulco & M. Tirino (Eds.), *Sport e scienze sociali. Fenomeni sportivi tra consumi, media e processi globali* (pp. 148–175). Roma: Rogas.
- Tirino, M. (2024). Go AFC Richmond, Go! *Metis*, 31(1), 61–87.
- Tirino, M. (2025f). *La mediatizzazione dello sport. Attori sociali, processi culturali, forme medialì*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Wenner, L. A., & Billings, A. C. (Eds.). (2017). *Sport, media and mega-events*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Whannel, G. (1992). *Fields in vision*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Whannel, G. (2009). Television and the transformation of sport. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 625(1), 205–218.
- Whiting, R. (2020). The 1964 Olympics. *Asia-Pacific Journal*, 18(12), 1–18.
- Whitson, D., & Macintosh, D. (1996). The global circus: International sport, tourism, and the marketing of cities. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 20(3), 278–295.
- Wilson, S. (2012). Exhibiting a new Japan: The Tokyo Olympics of 1964 and Expo '70 in Osaka. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31(6), 789–804.