



In the first of a two-part series, **Ray Algar** looks at the idea of an Olympic 'legacy', and asks what exactly needs to be done ensure London delivers

## 2012 – After the golden show

Three years have already passed since London narrowly pipped Paris by 54 votes to 50 to secure the right to host the 30th summer Olympic and Paralympic Games. Paris was strongly tipped to secure the vote in Singapore with Madrid, London, New York and Moscow making up the numbers. Paris had submitted a compelling bid and possessed the experience of delivering Olympic Games in 1900 and 1924, and yet, London came from behind to win. Commentators and analysts began debating what had made the difference for London.

Some pointed towards the 'inspirational' video that formed part of the London bid showing how any child with a dream, regardless of their background, can become an Olympian. Alternatively, was it Princess Anne inviting International Olympic Committee (IOC) members to Buckingham Palace should London be awarded the games. We will never know why 54 IOC members chose to vote the way they did, but I am sure that the words of Seb Coe, chairman of the London Organising Committee, made a significant difference.

### A window to a new world

Coe told the story of how as a 12-year old he and the rest of his class were put in front of a small black and white television in the school hall to watch John Sherwood, a local athlete, win a bronze medal at the 1968 Mexico Olympics. As he sat and watched, his life changed. "A window to a new world opened; at that moment I knew what I wanted to be, I knew what I wanted to do," Coe told IOC members.

Twelve years later, Coe, himself, was an Olympic Champion, when he stormed to victory at the Moscow games.

### A promise to ignite dreams

The London bid prevailed in Singapore because it promised more than most previous host cities. Yes, London would deliver a memorable games – it had already proved that in hosting games in 1908 and 1948, but it also promised to ignite the dreams of young people, not just in the UK, but throughout the world. London promised to inspire young people to discover sport and to fall in love with it. London would harness the power of the Olympics to re-connect with young people whose lives were filled with 'distractions', but perhaps lacking purpose.

Using the Olympics to engage with young people was evident in the inspired decision to take 30 East London children to Singapore as part of London's bid team, while other candidate cities stuffed their seats with politicians and business people.

An Olympics Games that aims to transform the lives of a whole generation, not just a few elite athletes has never before been attempted. This makes London's ambition for 2012 far bigger than any previous host city and is the absolute core of the London 2012 legacy.

**London's ambition – for the Games to transform the lives of an entire generation – is far bigger than that of any previous host city, and this is the absolute core of the 2012 legacy**

### How the Olympics has changed

The concept of a lasting legacy seems to be a relatively contemporary theme. When London, at short notice, last hosted the Olympic Games in 1948, 4,104 athletes from 59 countries gathered to compete and celebrate the end of war. Its purpose was to reunite and celebrate. It was the opportunity to experience a 17-day sports festival, culminating in Great Britain winning three gold medals and finishing 12th in the final medal table. The games had finally taken place after a war-time pause of 12 years and operated smoothly. Job done. Yes, a fleeting feel-good factor, but no talk of a lasting legacy. See you in Helsinki in four years time. Now mega-event consultants describe the opportunity to create a myriad of legacies:

- Social legacy that engenders national pride, unity and revitalises communities.
- Environmental legacy that promotes sustainable living.
- Sports legacy that catalyses the nation to lay down their remote controls and get moving, more often.
- Economic legacy that invigorates business, inward tourism and generally promotes the host city 'brand'.

### What legacy?

201 countries and over 10,000 athletes took part in the 2004 Athens games. However, the over-riding memory for many people was the run-up to the games and the frantic race to complete the Olympic venues before the opening ceremony. Athens was one large construction site and Olympic stakeholders were concerned. The IOC at once point considered stripping Athens of the games. Consequently, this led to a fixation on facility completion rather than any enduring sports legacy. As a result, key Olympic structures, such as parts of the Olympic Athletic Centre, post Athens, are now under-utilised and falling into disrepair. Several other Olympic sites were closed after the games while long-term legacy plans were developed. A report to the IOC in 2007 by Hellenic Olympic Properties which is responsible for the 22 Olympic venues confirmed that only six had secured long-term management agreements. Given the

inadequate legacy planning, there has been no 'host city bounce' that translates into success at subsequent Olympic Games. For example, Greece finished 15th in the final medal table during the Athens 2004 games. Fast-forward to Beijing where they slumped to 59th, winning just four medals. Australia, by contrast, still high after the Sydney 2000 extravaganza, increased its gold medal total and consolidated its 4th place in the final medal table in Athens.

### Going for gold

Legacy planners talk in terms of the 'soft' and 'hard' Olympic legacy. Host cities have nearly always delivered in terms of the hard legacy; new transportation and telecommunication links, community regeneration through the upgrading of parks, spaces and new sports and commercial buildings. For some host cities, the hard legacy has had a transformational effect on the city which was the case with Barcelona after hosting the 1992 Olympics. In contrast, the soft legacy is intangible and engenders a strong sense of national pride; it helps to connect communities and inspire a future generation to adopt an active and healthier lifestyle. This aspect of legacy is difficult to put your arms around and quantify. London probably has the most ambitious soft legacy of any previous host city. One of its soft legacy objectives is to demonstrate that the UK is a creative, inclusive and welcoming place to live in, to visit and for business. That is one giant step away from simply staging a memorable beach volleyball tournament.

So can London create a genuinely enduring participation legacy? Will it introduce two million additional people into a new world of physical activity which is a core part of its legacy commitment or will it simply create more of a fleeting 'Wimbledon effect'? The success of Team GB at Beijing has already fed through to an increase in the purchase of sports clothing and equipment. Also, the receptionists at Manchester Velodrome are working overtime to keep up with demand from the general public eager to book track time and emulate triple gold winner, Chris Hoy. However, a genuine legacy requires legs the size of Hoy's to ensure it has the endurance to ripple beyond East London to profoundly touch and enrich the lives of people wherever they live for years after the cameras, lights and action of the games themselves.

The second article will explore the London 2012 legacy aspiration in more detail and how it seeks to change the lives of millions.

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