



With the Government putting its full weight behind London's Olympic bid for 2012, how will this benefit sport at a local and community level in the build-up to and aftermath of a possible Games?

London's legacy

BY WARREN CLARK

The British Olympic Association (BOA) began work on the London bid back in 1997, with a 400-page document handed to the Government, the Mayor of London and Opposition leaders in December 2000. Following three unsuccessful bids (Birmingham, 1992; Manchester, 1996 and 2000), the

International Olympic Committee (IOC) had made it clear to the BOA that only London would be seen as a serious contender for an Olympic bid from the UK. This, coupled with the fact that 2012 is seen as 'Europe's year', prompted the bid this time around. It is expected that a subsequent opportunity for a European city would not arise until 2024, by which time the identified brownfield sites may not be available. As far as a London Olympic bid was concerned, it was now or never.

As part of the bid preparation, a cost-benefit analysis was commissioned. This revealed that any shortfall in income versus expenditure would be compensated by a projected rise in tourism as a result of hosting the Games. There would also be around £1bn from the IOC, raised through the sale of TV rights. Any concerns over transport infrastructure and sufficient accommodation were also able to be addressed. The report concluded: 'If all levels of government are



committed to a common proposal, the potential advantages of a 2012 Games centred on the Lower Lee Valley can be developed into a world-beating bid.'

The strongest competition will come from Paris and New York, though with Vancouver hosting the 2010 Winter Games, it is thought that North America would not be favoured for the Summer Games as well. IOC President Jacques Rogge has been quoted as saying any bid from London would be 'formidable', leading to a strong belief that this is a battle the BOA can win. The final decision will be taken in Singapore in 2005.

The benefits

The BOA has outlined a number of potential benefits from London hosting an Olympic

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Games, both sporting and non-sporting. From a sporting perspective, recent history in both Australia and Spain has suggested that hosting the Games leads to a greater medal tally. It is also hoped that before, during and after the Games,

more young people will be inspired to take up a sport to emulate this success.

This increased participation would also lead to a healthier nation, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that there may also be a reduction in youth crime, and a stimulus for education. In a similar vein, an Olympic Games would be a driving force in breaking down barriers such as age, race, religion and so on. Also, there would be a Paralympic event alongside the main Games.

Regeneration is a cornerstone of the bid, with more than 4,000 new homes promised for East London. Much of the improvement would come through developing land which is currently contaminated or under-used. From an employment point of view, around 9,000 new jobs would be created, 3,000 of which would be

What's in it for you?

BY SIMON CLEGG,
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Sport and leisure centre managers in London should seize this opportunity to evaluate and, where necessary, improve their facilities in preparation for a possible staging of the Games. However, with thousands of athletes and supporting staff due to descend on the capital, every single sporting facility in London should be seen as a potential training venue.

Even out in the regions, there are cities which could market themselves as a base for a particular national team – if they have the correct balance of elite facilities. Many teams will choose to come over for several weeks in the run-up to the Games in order to acclimatise, and all will be looking for suitable facilities in which to train. The Great Britain team, for example, injected more than £1m into the Gold Coast area of Australia as we set up their base there during their build-up to the 2000 Sydney Games. With 28 Olympic sports, some towns would benefit from focusing on providing for a particular sport, as specialist facilities will always be popular with athletes from that given sport.

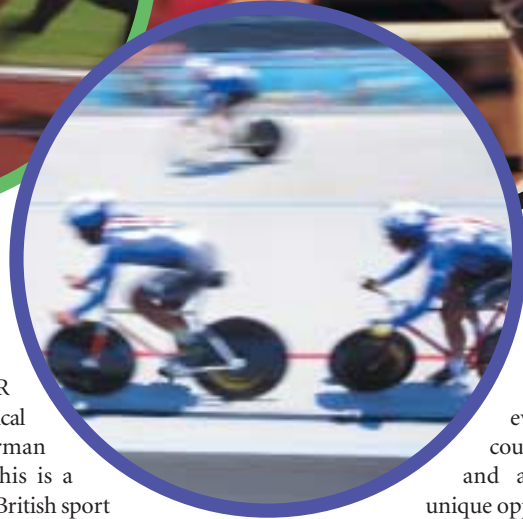
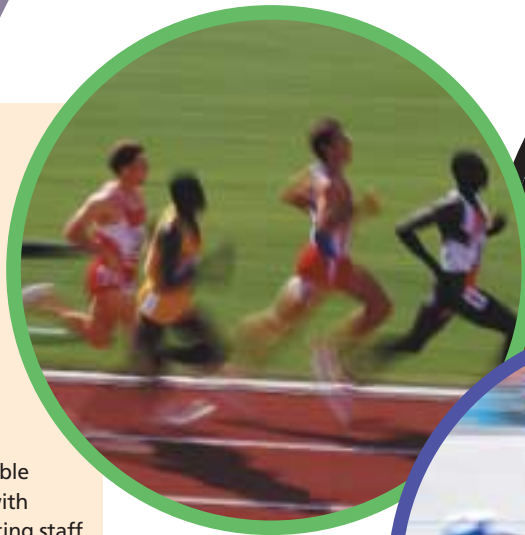
Before, during and after the Games, leisure centres should see increased levels of participation, due to the amount of interest and excitement generated by the Games. Minor sports often see huge leaps in participation levels, particularly if there has been British success – for example curling at the last Winter Games, or rowing and sailing at Sydney.

We hope that this increased level of interest will prompt the emergence of a new generation of sporting heroes – from all walks of society.

These are the sorts of legacies an Olympic Games can bring to the country, and this is why our sporting facilities – from grass roots through to elite – can all play a part in the preparation and execution of a successful bid.

within the East End. With an improved transport network, it is also hoped that a number of businesses would choose to relocate to the area.

From a sporting infrastructure perspective, the Games would ensure the development of sporting facilities at both elite and grass roots levels. School and community facilities would also benefit, as these would be refurbished in order to provide training facilities.



Supporters

The bid has attracted support from a broad range of bodies, including the CCPR (Central Council of Physical Recreation). Chairman Howard Wells says: 'This is a unique opportunity for British sport to show again that it can lead the world. CCPR will encourage its 265 member national sports organisations to contribute towards the biggest and best volunteer force ever seen in the history of the Olympics, and looks forward to

in generations. The aspiration to host the world's greatest sporting event gives our country, our capital city and all our athletes a unique opportunity to excel in every area. It is exciting and very encouraging, and rewards the British Olympic Association for their many years of effort.'

BOA chief executive, Simon Clegg, said: 'The announcement marks a critical milestone in this

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playing its part in helping to recruit and train these volunteers.'

The work ahead

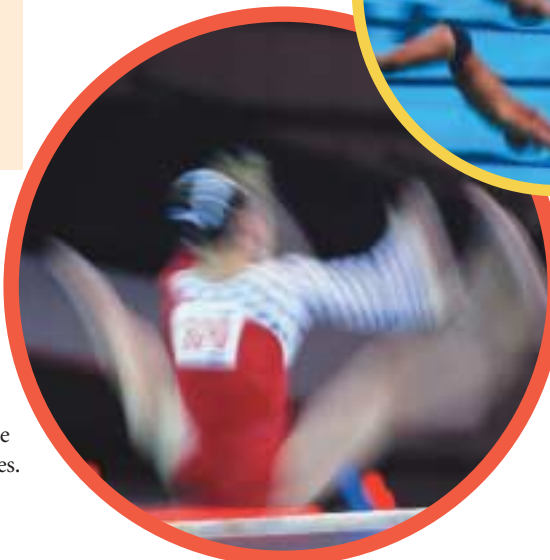
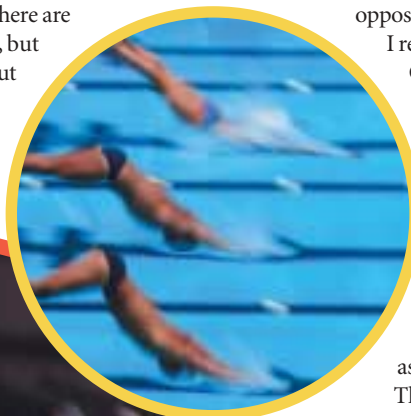
With the Government now committed to supporting the Olympic bid, there are two years of hard work ahead, but those involved are excited about the challenges. BOA chairman, Craig Reedie, said: 'The decision is the most significant for British sport

British Olympic Association project, which started back in 1997. There is no doubt that the dream of returning the Olympic Games to this country for the first time since 1948 has moved a step closer. There will be stiff

opposition on the road ahead, but

I remain convinced that, if the Government, London and the whole of British sport can act in a united way, there is a very serious prospect of success. The next 26 months will be tough, but the ground work undertaken over the past six years will provide solid foundations as we move forward.'

The BOA's London Olympic project co-ordinator, David Luckes, said: 'This marks the vindication of six years of preparatory groundwork assessing the viability of a London Olympic Games. The challenges now lie ahead – to produce a world-beating bid that can inspire everyone in this country and abroad. To do this we must be creative, inclusive, assiduous and unrelenting. This is a challenge London will approach with relish.' ●



A great idea, but not at any price

BY BARRIE HOULIHAN

There are powerful arguments for supporting the London bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games. At the national level it would provide a magnificent opportunity to celebrate the UK's contribution to global sporting culture and the achievements of our athletes over the years since we last hosted the Olympics in 1948. For Londoners, the Games offer the prospect of a massive injection of investment into one of the poorer areas of the capital. Perhaps more importantly, I do not think that the selection of Paris is a foregone conclusion. The decision is not being made now, but in 2005, and that is plenty of time to put together a powerful and compelling case for London. Moreover, those who doubt our capacity to host a successful Games should remember that we already host, on an annual basis, major sports events such as Wimbledon, the Formula One Grand Prix and the FA Cup Final, and in recent years have hosted the European Football Championships, the World Indoor Athletics Championships and the Commonwealth Games – and that we host these events with style, imagination and efficiency.

But, if these arguments are so persuasive, why do I still have some nagging doubts about hosting the Games lingering at the back of my mind? It is partly because the most frequently mentioned arguments in favour of hosting the Olympics are not about the benefits for sport, but about the impact on the regeneration of east London, the boost to tourism, plus some vague references to the 'feelgood factor'. If we are all to support the London bid with the enthusiasm that will be necessary to fight off the challenges from Paris, New York and Madrid, then there are three questions that I would like answered. The first is, which budget bears the risk of any overspend? The second concerns the opportunity cost for sport, and the third deals with the nature of the much promoted post-Games legacy for sport.

Who is taking the risk?

The generally agreed estimate of the cost of hosting the Games is £2.6bn. I am happy to accept that figure, even if the history of major projects meeting their budget targets is poor. Ken Livingstone has been extremely astute in announcing that the Greater London Authority (GLA) will contribute £625m. In a similar fashion the London Development Agency (LDA) has limited its contribution to a maximum of £250m. While London taxpayers might grumble at having to pay an 'Olympic tax', they at least know that, whatever the eventual cost, their liability is limited. Where is the rest of the finance coming from? Around £350m will come from the sport lottery fund

and £450m or so will come from the other National Lottery good causes. A further £750m will come from the introduction of a series of Olympic lottery games.

Apart from the funding coming from the GLA and the LDA, the rest is 'soft money'. This is especially true of the Olympic lotteries. While these new lottery games might reach their target of £750m, how confident can we be that this spending will be in addition to current spending on existing National Lottery games? At a time when spending on the National Lottery is in steady decline, it is a very brave

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assumption that, not only can that decline be halted but that newly-launched Olympic lottery games can generate £750m of additional income. This brings me back to the question of which budgets will bear the risk of overspending on the Olympic project, or the failure of the Olympic lottery games to reach their income generation targets? The assumption must be that the risk will be borne by the sports lottery fund, but even a small cost overrun would have profound implications for sports investment. Consequently, at the very least we should expect a clear statement from the Government that the financial risk associated with the Games will be met by the Treasury and the general taxpayer, and will not come from the comparatively tiny sports budget.

What is the opportunity cost?

If £300-350m of the total project cost is to come from the sports lottery fund, this would require between £40-50m to be put aside each year from 2005, which is a substantial proportion of the current £170m annual income to sport from the National Lottery. Sport England has acknowledged that it is seeking to cut projects because its sport lottery fund is over-committed. How many hundreds of improvements to local playing field lighting, new synthetic pitches, refurbished changing facilities and school/community sports halls will not be funded in order to put money aside for the two-week Olympic Games? The investment in the Games may well give value for money when measured in relation to the regeneration or tourism benefits, but I remain to be convinced that it will give value for money to sport.

But won't the legacy of top quality sports facilities and increased participation be worth the money?

I doubt it very much. Given the shortage of 50m pools in the UK, any new pool, almost wherever it is located, is going to be welcome. But the experience of managing Olympic size pools after the major event has finished is mixed. While Manchester appears confident that it can manage the Commonwealth Games pool profitably, Sheffield struggled to cover the running costs of the pool it built for the World Student Games.

There is also the question of the post-Games use of the Olympic stadium. Even if the Olympic pool requires significant continuing subsidy, we could take some comfort from the fact that it will be local people who will be making use of the facility, but the same cannot be said of the stadium. If a football club can be found to take over the 80,000 seat stadium (and West Ham might be back in the Premiership by 2012) will they pay the market price, or will the stadium be sold cheap, thus providing a subsidy to private business.

Leaving aside the doubts over the value of the physical legacy of the Games, there are those who argue that there will also be a legacy, in the form of the promotion of sport to a new generation, which will result in a boost to participation. There is no evidence at all that hosting a major event such as the football World Cup or the Olympic Games has any long-term impact on participation. What is much more likely to produce an increase in participation is sustained investment in sports development officers, good quality local facilities, well-managed school-club links and well-qualified coaches.

Put my mind at rest

I want to be able to support the London bid wholeheartedly, but some events, even the Olympic Games, are not worth the loss of the hundreds of small projects and programmes that are helping to transform the sport opportunities for schools and local communities, as well as for our high performance athletes. Over the past eight years we have had an unprecedented period of consensus on the importance of our club network, sport for young people, and high performance success. That consensus has been supported by sustained investment, largely through the National Lottery, in improving facilities and funding sports leaders. Unless the Government can provide a clear assurance that this progress will not be jeopardised by hosting the Olympic Games, then I will be quite happy to watch it on television and know that the taxpayers of France, Spain or the United States are paying for my enjoyment.

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