

The complexities of managing future Olympic Games

As the world unites in joyful celebration of the new millennium, it becomes very easy to forget our collective responsibility to protect and develop the most valued aspects of our present society. One of the essential jewels of the previous millennium has to be the Olympic Games. Known to us all as a unique sports experience, it is one of the few truly global products that has the potential to demonstrate human achievement in all of its forms, whilst making a very important contribution to world peace.

However at the end of the 20th century, the Olympic Movement received unprecedented criticism, with nearly every media source wanting to get in on the act. In reviewing these media criticisms in an objective manner, we must initially ask ourselves, what are the key issues and how insurmountable are they? Clearly some unethical decisions have been made, but surely these need to be placed in their rightful context. It is a 'minority' of managers and participants that have not played by the rules, but it would be naive to believe that such incidents are new, or that they do not exist in any other aspect of modern day life. The very fact that sport is held up in such high esteem, as an ideal where achievement and responsibility are fundamental principles of acceptance - not just in sport but in life in general, makes the

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The participants at the Olympic Stadium in Athens.

Games even more worthwhile to protect for future generations to come. We, as students studying for the European Masters degree in Sport Management are the next generation of sport managers, and truly believe that the benefits of sport to a civilised global society have barely received rightful comment from the media. Sport has and always will possess the potential to serve the harmonious development of every individual regardless of origin or background. Transcending national borders and generations, the Olympic Games must continue as it can unite the world in a way that nothing else can.

With this belief, we, 80 postgraduate students from 12 different countries, enrolled to attend the 7th European Sport Management Committee study programme entitled 'Olympism - Past, Present and Future'. Supported by a Socrates grant and co-hosted by the University of Northumbria in Newcastle (England) and the College of Sport Sciences (Greece), this international educa-

tional programme took place in Athens, the very site of past and future Olympic glory.

The programme started with the 'History and Philosophy of Olympism' and eventually culminated in us bidding to host a future Olympic Games - ambitious progress in just 10 days! Clearly we could all relate to the concept of the Olympic Games but what was Olympism, and how could history and philosophy be considered remotely interesting? Olympism as a philosophy of life, was introduced to us via a most informative series of historical slides, highlighting the origin of so many Olympic aims and rituals taken for granted. Above all, we probably learnt for the very first time the real significance and purpose of the modern Olympic Games. Just as importantly, we found that we could completely relate to it - blending sport, culture and education was exactly the reason why we were here.

However, just when we started to feel a little complacent about the subject matter, we were introduced to different perceptions of Olympism. Was it Coubertin's, Lenk's, Grupe's or even the Olympic Charter's definition that we could specifically relate to?

The complexity and diversity of opinions soon dawned on us and as the programme progressed, we found that we were continuously challenged by interactive learning experiences that questioned our most basic assumptions. By the end of day two we had experienced an Olympic quiz, visited the Panathenian Stadium, site of the 1896 Olympic Games, but most importantly we began to recognize considerable cultural differences amongst us all. For example, from the formal aspects of the programme, we initially carried out a most enlightening cultural evaluation of our own preferred national deci-

Olympic Games

sion-making styles. Was the German approach to sport management and work ethic so different from the Portuguese; the English sense of humour so different from the French; Greek time management so different from the Finnish? Just from our own judgements, the answers were most definitely, yes, yes, and yes. At last we were starting to fully comprehend the significance of our home tutor's comments on cultural diversity - effective international management was only possible if you could *'think global, and act local'*.

Despite our relatively similar university sport student backgrounds, we were beginning to encounter, formally and informally, so many differences that we began to critically appraise not just our cultural beliefs but also our own personal beliefs. This came about as we were further exploring the principles of Olympism via the session 'Values - Sport Without Discrimination and Sport Management Ethics'. We quickly realized that it was easy to declare a personal commitment to rules and a necessary acceptance of ethics in general. But when presented with a variety of sport and non-sport specific scenarios, it soon became apparent that our actions on occasions did not endorse this intent. We concluded that we had all *'bent the rules a little'* at some time in our sporting careers, had been guilty of telling *'white lies'*, and would still *'attempt to cheat if it meant the difference between passing or failing an academic examination without being caught'*! When asked to produce an ethics charter for a particular sport, we found group consensus impossible to achieve. Within multicultural groups, we could not agree whether certain sporting actions were considered ethical or not. Was diving in a competitive football -match an acceptable practice or not? Was psychological goading of an athlete or official, either by spectators or

participants an (un)acceptable element of sport? Unfortunately, the key lesson that we were quickly learning was that trying to manage individual differences in a world of constant change was and is always likely to be a very difficult task.

At Masters level, we expected some intellectual activity, but even the most simple of questions were proving troublesome. We knew that we could cope with the applied sport management theoretical and technical aspects of the programme, as we had been studying these for the last few years. Fortunately, our confidence quickly returned as we found that we could directly relate to the topical and useful sessions provided by internationally renowned academics on Managing Finance (Measuring Economic Impact), Managing People (Selecting and Training the Volunteer), and Managing Time (Improving Personal Effectiveness and Efficiency).

As promised, the educational experience endorsed the broad spectrum of learning opportunities available to us in Athens. We visited renowned archaeological excursions, such as a guided tour of the Acropolis, as well as the state-of-the-art sport venues of the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad in Athens in 2004. Informed practitioners enlightened us as to the complexities of major event planning such as the impressive multimedia presentation of the 6th IAAF World Championships, and let us not forget the practical elements of sport, being introduced to the ancient and potentially lethal Olympic sport of Pancratium.

The final challenges of the programme were to consider specific Olympic issues and 'The Future'. Selecting topical issues on drugs and ambush marketing, we were randomly assigned to prepare arguments for or against specific motions.

With technology and quality service provision being key issues of this

decade, we tried to make predictions about the future role of the sports manager, and then tried to forecast how this might impact on future management practices of the Olympic Games. With the advances made with global networks and digital technology, numerous questions prevailed. Would there be any need for managers to travel? Could venue managers just consult and interpret information extrapolated from computers and television cameras, making decisions from afar? Would different Olympic sports take place synchronously, but at different venues around the world? Each question raised further personal thoughts - how will this affect the competencies that we shall need, and what are the implications for personal career development plans? The most challenging and worthwhile element of the whole programme was a 2 day competitive management game, with the most appropriate title 'The Olympic Games ... Are You Fit To Compete?'. Real life practical tasks were introduced resulting in an array of strategic, ethical, and operational decision-making. Adhering to strict deadlines, each task involved different mediums of communication as well as different levels of management. The first task, for example, assumed that you were the International Olympic Committee Evaluation Commission, with the brief being to 'prepare a four-page report advising and justifying a new or amended candidate city bidding process'. In comparison, the second task asked us to take the role of an Organizing Committee, Athens in this case, in procuring national sponsorship. Using information that had been kindly provided to us by the IOC, the TOP marketing programme objectives established the framework from which we could operate. Focusing on conflict of interests, and demonstrating an in-depth understanding of the 'golden triangle of

Olympic Games

sponsorship' (sponsor, sponsored and media relationship), the task entailed the production of a sponsorship plan, as well as a customized draft of a sponsorship portfolio.

As a candidate city bidding for the next Olympic Games we were expected to prepare and present a detailed bid to host the Olympic Games Youth Camp.

What would be the programme of the Youth Camp - where, when? How would we promote it and select the delegates? What would be our budget? What logistics would be involved? How should we divide up our resources to plan and present the information required for the presentation? What format should we use? Could we access Internet to use some special effects? How could we demonstrate our professionalism as well as competitive advantage? What were other groups doing? Who was on the panel and what knowledge did we possess relating to their interests and needs?



Learning to organize the Olympic Games.

We learnt so much through participating, not just in this management game, but in the whole intensive programme. Indeed, some of our evaluative comments revealed the essence of our true learning experiences

Presented in an atmosphere that epitomizes the very essence of the Olympic Movement - namely the union of sport, culture and education, we were fortunate enough to be provided with a unique learning opportunity created by the Sport

Management Committee of the European Network of Sport Sciences in Higher Education. Having experienced and discussed in some depth the true meaning of Olympism, we now believe even more in its present and future values as a philosophy of life. We understand the difficulties of trying to manage sport, with its intense media scrutiny as well as often conflicting stakeholder demands. As we enter a new era of complexity and globalization, we realize that managing

sport will not be easy. However, having encountered new cultures, new friends and new ideas, we leave Athens as very different people from when we arrived. Representing the students of Europe, we now feel ready to accept the challenges of the new millennium.

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News Flash

Lithuania

In Vilnius, the presidents of the Bulgarian and Lithuanian NOCs, Ivan Slavkov, who is also an IOC member, and Arturas Poviliunas, signed a joint cooperation agreement in the following areas: Olympic Movement, Olympic marketing and exchanges between national sports federations. In Kaunas, a course organized with the aid of Olympic Solidarity and devoted to the process of acclimatization and adaptation of athletes, brought together the

coaches responsible for preparing athletes for the forthcoming Games of the XXVII Olympiad in Sydney. Moreover, at a ceremony held at the Lithuanian Embassy in Paris, the President of the Lithuanian NOC awarded the NOC Olympic medal to Janusz Piewcewicz, administrator at the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC), in recognition of his contribution to the Olympic Movement.



Arturas Poviliunas (right) awarding the NOC Olympic medal to Janusz Piewcewicz.