

## ENDURING BENEFITS OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES FOR AUSTRALIA

Working together, Australians organized an Olympic Games which was monumentally successful. I say this advisedly, because I recognize this is an audience not easily persuaded by superlatives. But, we have it on no lesser authority than President Samaranch, that these were the best Games ever. More importantly, everyone involved - from the athletes, to the spectators in the stands, to the sleep-deprived hordes at Martin Place, Darling Harbour and Circular Quay night after night - clearly had the time of their lives. The question for us now though is: was it just one brief shining moment, as the song goes? I think not. There will be major enduring benefits, subject to two provisos.

First, that as a nation we take steps proactively to maximize the benefits. We must now use the window of opportunity and businesses and

by Sandy Hollway\*



Government must follow through and capitalize.

Second, that a revisionist cynicism does not develop which, with the passage of time, seeks to put down the achievement and the experience. I think the accomplishment has many layers of enduring significance for our nation.

### Infrastructure

The most tangible legacy is the infrastructure and can be placed into three categories.

Firstly, sporting facilities. These are now the best or among the best in the world. Sydney needed them. It had certainly lagged behind other key sporting capitals, including Melbourne. The facilities are available for elite sports and international competition, but also for large scale community use as already seen with the Aquatics Centre.

Second, there have been improvements to both the efficiency and quality of urban life in Sydney. These extend from a cleaner and better City look to the rehabilitation of the Homebush Bay area.

And third, there is the economic infrastructure, for instance the airport upgrade, rail links and Eastern Distributor.

All these are very important for a City which makes its economic way through being international, a gateway, a place for visitors and events.

### Economic impact

Just about as tangible as the bricks and mortar are the dollars and cents. The Games will add between six and seven billion dollars to GDP in Australia, 1.6 million extra tourists and over 100,000 new jobs. There is longer term potential for higher business confidence, increased international product recognition, and the acquisition of new management skills transferable to non-Olympic activities. Indeed the management and staff themselves are a legacy for the nation. The excellence of their work is now apparent for all to see. They kept their eye on the prize and



*The Sydney Olympic Stadium in the foreground.*

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*Aerial view of the Olympic city of Sydney.*

worked quietly away for years, never distracted by the tough times and controversies. They have been fully vindicated. The pressure cooker atmosphere saw young people and middle managers squeeze ten years of professional development into two or three. Venue Managers, most of them promoted from inside, all stepped up to the mark and delivered. This body of skill, experience and talent is an asset for Australia as a site of future major events, but also an asset for our economy in general. Of course, factors unrelated to the Olympics, particularly the strength of the global economy, the business cycle and domestic policy settings, will be more important to our economy than the Olympics. But two things are incontestable: that the Olympics have paid their way and they have enhanced our long term prospects.

The Olympic Business Programme of the New South Wales Government welcomed 2,000 senior business leaders to Australia for the Games. Some 1,500 business decision-makers from 20 countries were presented with an investment proposition by Investment 2000 and 16,000 visitors went through the Business Club Australia facility at Darling Harbour, 30% of them international business visitors. The Business Club is on its way to meeting its target of A\$1 billion in new exports and investment as a result of the Games. The New South Wales Government has recently released a post-Games strategy for business building on the success of the Games.

There are also micro-economic benefits; that is, at the level of the individual organization. It is striking how many of our sponsors saw the Olympics as an

opportunity to change the way they do business, not to mention increasing their exposure, networking and alliance building. Government agencies too, such as transport and the Police, grasped the chance to change the way they go about their task and improve their cooperation.

## **Financial responsibility**

These benefits have been achieved on a sound economic footing. While the final detailed accounting is yet to be done, the essential picture is fairly clear. On the State Government side, the net cost of the Games was approximately A\$2.2 billion, taking into account the outgoings on such matters as venue construction, transport, security and so on and incoming payments to the Government, including from SOCOG. Importantly, all costs have been fully funded in successive State Budgets

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*Aerial view of Bondi Beach.*

without any borrowing. Thus the Treasurer has said: “the permanent legacy for Australians will be all benefit and no burden”.

On the SOCOG account, we raised approximately A\$2.3 billion from private sources, including what the IOC has been proud to proclaim as a record for sponsorship. This more than covers the programme expenditures of A\$1.9 billion involved in actually delivering the Games. We are also financing such things as payments to the State Government towards venue construction of over A\$200 million and A\$100 million which will go direct to the Australian Olympic Committee as an important legacy to ensure the future strength of Australian Olympic teams.

### **Showcasing - Not just a pretty face**

Then there is the showcasing of Australia to the world - the physical

beauty, cultural richness and social attractiveness of Australia as a place to be and to visit. The cumulative audience of television viewers was 40 billion. There were, almost unbelievably, over 11 billion hits on the Internet site; 900 million on one day alone, 1.25 million a minute at one stage. I commend the tourism industry and the tourism authorities, especially the ATC, for recognizing the potential very early on to pick up market share. To quote the IOC in relation to Olympic related tourist promotion, “Barcelona set a new standard and Sydney has surpassed that”. But it is not only the showcasing of Australia as a beauty spot. The Olympics also showcased our organizational capabilities, our technological sophistication, our capacity for creativity and innovation - in other words in the broadest sense, our business strengths. This boost to our national

reputation is best understood with a sporting analogy. It is not only that Australia performed almost faultlessly, but that we had chosen an extremely high degree of difficulty. The fact is that, with the Olympic Games, we took on - and our trading and business partners in the world saw us take on - the biggest, most complex and most risky peace time project on earth. We did it to a standard of excellence. And that is the word we should be using here in Australia, ‘excellence’.

### **An international eye-opener**

It is interesting to scan the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade summaries of international media coverage of Australia through the period of the Olympic Games. Not only was Australia big news, but the portrayal of us was, on the whole, extremely positive. It was nice to see the *Daily Telegraph* in the

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Great Britain so utterly wrong in its prediction that the Opening Ceremony would be “spectacularly ghastly”. We will have to learn to live with some comment in the Greek press that the Opening Ceremony was not Greek enough. The picture to emerge in the foreign press is of an Australia with “superb organization” (*The Montreal Gazette*), “splendidly organized” (*La Stampa*), “efficient” (*The Independent*) “brilliantly organized” (strangely enough the *Daily Telegraph* again), as well as fun-loving and welcoming. There were frequent references to our multiculturalism and our embracing of indigenous people and culture. When the *Star* newspaper in Malaysia heads a report “a really good show, mate” and when *The South China Morning Post* commends our Opening Ceremony for being “rich in symbols of unity and reconciliation”, we know we are making headway in breaking the caricature of Australia as a narrow European outpost in the Asia Pacific region. Perhaps most relevant to those of us interested in Australia’s international economic future is the perceptive comment by *Der Tages Spiegel* of Germany, “Never has the continent on the other side of the globe been nearer to us”. It should open our eyes to our own capabilities when the *Berliner Morgen Post* quotes the Sports Director of the German Sports Association saying “I can hardly see that we could have achieved something similar in Berlin”. Or again, listen to some of the feedback from Australian Diplomatic Missions overseas. The Ambassador in Cairo: “Just to thank you endlessly for turning Australia and all Australian representatives into super stars. Everywhere we go here people - Ministers, senior business people, people in the street, diplomats - make a point of coming up and congratulating us on Sydney. It really is superb to be able to be so unashamedly proud”. From the Ambassador in Vietnam: “All in all, our stocks in this region have never been

higher. Sport is a wonderful diplomatic tool for us”. The Ambassador in Caracas: “The response in this part of the world (Latin America) has been terrific vis-a-vis Australia”. The High Commissioner in Canada: “It’s a source of pride to be an Australian abroad. The Games have projected nothing but Australian excellence, creativity and competence”. Perhaps most succinctly from the Ambassador in Athens, a veteran of 30 years in the foreign service: “I can’t think of any time when I have been prouder to be representing Australia overseas”. If this were just all emotional gushing, froth and bubble, then I would

the end, be the most important and enduring of all the benefits from the Games: the psychological impact.

## Goodbye Cultural Cringe

In the first place, if the cultural cringe did not actually die in September of this year, it certainly took a very heavy blow. We saw four Arts Festivals of high excellence. The variety extended from Aboriginal Dance to Circus to Mahler Again, the word is ‘excellence’. Let us not, as Australians, be afraid to use it in culture and the arts, as we do in sport. To walk, as I did one evening, from a performance by the Australian Ballet at



A scene from the show ‘Fusion’ interpreted by young acrobats from the Shanghai Circus School.

agree it is by no means apparent that it translates into real Australian interests, including our business interests. But I have quoted overseas reaction at some length to argue that we are not just dealing with warm and fuzzy feelings towards Australia; we are dealing with an enhanced perception of Australia as a seriously capable country.

## Pride and our sense of community

I would like to suggest that the Olympics carry a layer of meaning for our country which is less tangible but which may, in

the Opera House to Roy and H.G. on the big screen at Circular Quay was, in thirty minutes and three hundred metres, to see a microcosm of Australian cultural vitality - from high art to sheer fun. Consider other evidence of the relegation of the cultural cringe thanks to the Olympic Games - our enjoyment of Roy and H.G. (surely something that would only be done in Australia); an Opening Ceremony which was spectacular, and innovative but also full of content about what Australia is and should be; and a Closing

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Ceremony unashamed to have fun with prawns on bicycles.

## **A Decent Society**

Next, I suggest the Olympics held a mirror up to ourselves as a profoundly decent and cohesive society. We witnessed in the stands the Australian sense of fair play - the cheering for the opposition, so remarked on by President Samaranch and other overseas visitors. We relished our diversity, in the context of a united Australia, with the strong indigenous and multicultural themes through the Games. Witness, for example, what ATSIIC Chairman, Geoff Clarke, has said: *"The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games have been a powerful healing statement for Aboriginal Australia, a milestone on the road to true reconciliation from which there should be no turning back"*. And speaking of the decency of our society, what about the attitude in the streets and on the buses and trains - the helpfulness, good humour, courtesy of each person to the other in the crowds and queues. It is not rhetoric, but simply accurate, to say that our community joined hands across Australia in the Torch Relay. Our behaviour during the Games period surely told us something about ourselves and pointed to the best that is in our character. And speaking of national character, what about the volunteers? That 46,000 turned out, and represented our country so brilliantly, says something very good about the makeup of Australians. That over 2,000 people offered to open up their homes to the families of overseas athletes again speaks volumes, and leads to the next point.

## **Australia's Internationalism**

I suggest that the Games were also an affirmation of our fundamental internationalism. The Olympics is the most successful popular embodiment of internationalism yet invented by human beings - crossing, wonderfully, all barriers

of country, race, religion, language and politics. The community warmed to this, not just to the sport. As in Melbourne in 1956, we were proud and pleased to welcome athletes and visitors from everywhere. We felt our friendliness and hospitality was on show, as it was. We rose magnificently to the occasion. Consider these words from Rusty Priest, President of the RSL in New South Wales, at the service in Hyde Park for Olympians killed in war, *"Never before have we seen the flags of so many nations in this place. Only a few short years ago it would have been unthinkable that some of the flags here today could be allowed to fly in front of a memorial dedicated to Australia's war dead. But in the spirit of peace, consistent with the Olympic Movement, we welcome all the nations of the World here today"*. Australians did not need to be told why to cheer, as they did, when the two Koreas entered the Stadium under a single flag for the first time, or when the athletes from East Timor appeared. The Games show we are a country comfortable with the world. We now know we are not an insular people.

## **Inspiration**

As the final strand in the national psychological impact of the Games I mention the inspiration, particularly to the young. If the Olympics are a manifestation of collective values of internationalism and inclusiveness, they are also a theatre for playing out the drama of life and for exhibiting the values of life - individual values of courage, determination, fair play, friendly competition and team work. A child watching Cathy Freeman or Ian Thorpe in 2000 will have said "I can do that" and turn up in Athens or wherever else the Games are held in the future, just as Herb Elliott was inspired by the 1956 games to go on to the performance he achieved in 1960 in Rome. But the inspiration is not just to pursue sport. It is to imitate values. We admired the battler collapsing at the end of the Marathon, and Eric the Eel. We admired the athlete who rose to the challenge despite pressures and put-downs, for instance Grant Hackett. We admired the team which tried its utmost and was then magnanimous to the victor, as with Argentina in the Women's Hockey final. We admired the athlete who was not going to leave



*Sydney Opera House, recognized the world over.*

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*Show by the royal Maori Tainui tribe in front of the Sydney Opera House.*

anything in the tank in striving to win, as with the great Gebreselassie in the 10,000 metre race.

## **A potent mix**

So in my view the Games were a very potent and unique mix:

- of national delight, and perhaps surprise, that Australia could organize such a huge event so well;
- of recognition that the City and the country will be permanently better off with our facilities and infrastructure;
- of basking in the Australianness of our culture and willingness unapologetically to show it to the world;
- of sixteen days not just of fun but of real community and mateship, one Australian to another;
- of an opportunity to demonstrate our comfort with our cultural diversity, and our friendship towards peoples from all over the World;
- of inspiration and affirmation of values important to us all, especially the young;

and of the revelation to both an Australian and an overseas audience, that we can be the centre of world attention, step up to the mark and knock'em dead.

Unlike the economic impacts, no model exists to predict the multiplier effects of this potent injection of pride into the national psyche. But I have to believe that it is big.

## **Confidence**

I said three years ago that the ultimate importance of the Games for our nation may be to blow away the dust of self doubt. That will, I think, prove to be true. The dust of self doubt will take a long time to settle again in Australia, if it ever does. So do I argue that the Olympic Games have transformed Australia's economy? Of course not. Or that the glow will last for ever? Of course it cannot. But do I contend that this was not just a momentary thrill, that it will long send ripples out through the economy and the national mood? Yes,

certainly. And do I contend that at any future moment of national doubt about our capacity for excellence, we will always be able to call on the Olympics as a reminder that we are up there with the best of them? Yes indeed.

So when we reflect on the Games just completed, I don't think anyone could want a better and more vivid demonstration to the world and to ourselves that we are ready - not just as a matter of rhetoric, but really ready - for all the opportunities and challenges that the coming century will serve up. Those of us involved in organizing the Games feel very privileged to have shaped this outcome. But we wish above all to thank you, because in the end it was the entire national effort, and the entire Australian community, that made this terrific chapter of the Australian story possible.

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