



## HOW TO KEEP THE GAMES AS A PREMIER EVENT?

### HEIN VERBRUGGEN

Moderator • International Olympic Committee



ORIGINAL TEXT IN ENGLISH

There is no doubt that the Games today have assumed an importance on a global scale that has taken sport from a recreational activity limited to the privileged few, to a universal audience across the world. The Games as they stand today represent a truly unique sporting phenomenon.

The Games as we look at them today appear to be in good health. This is evidenced by the appeal and reach of the Beijing Games last year, by the calibre of cities wanting to stage the 2016 Games and by the number and type of sports wanting to be part of the Olympic Programme. Fact: The Games are the premier multi-sport event in the world today.

Considering the many hurdles that have been overcome during the modern era of the Olympic Games, including two World Wars, boycotts, scandals, political and social upheaval to name but a few, it would appear that the Games have been remarkably resilient. The central reason behind this resiliency? It is the power and strength of the Olympic Games brand.

Despite growing competition, regular surveys show that the awareness and appeal of the Olympic Games continues to remain very high across the world when compared with other events. Although the Games are seen as the pinnacle of all sporting events, our research also tells us that they are perceived as far more than just a sport event. The world sees the Games as a celebration of unity and peace but also of diversity. This dichotomy is confirmed by several studies: while people often associate the Games with “competition”, “determination”, being “global”, “being the best” etc., they also spontaneously mention “friendship”, “peace”, “heritage”, “unity”, “fair-play” and “respect”. These values themselves represent an elevation of humanity through sport and through the Games in particular.

Such results are encouraging and point to the uniqueness of our brand: the Games are the only global event, which associates sporting excellence with fundamental human values. We must not underestimate the power of our brand, especially its ability to positively influence others

that are associated with it. Surveys conducted prior to and after the Beijing Games show that public opinion about the Games in general as well as about the host country was significantly more favourable after the successful hosting of the Games.

However, as we know from our experience during the international torch relay in 2008, the Games’ brand is fragile and can easily become a target of the media and other organisations. We cannot sit by as passive observers. It is our collective duty not only to safeguard, but proactively enhance the image and reputation of the Games and not let the brand become tainted. The image and reputation of the Olympic “brand” is therefore at the core of keeping the Games as the premier event in the future.

### OLYMPIC VALUES AS THE KEY DIFFERENTIATOR

To remain as the premier multi-sport event, the Games must differentiate itself from the multitude of world championships, world cups and other types of sport events that exist today, not to mention the increasing number of other leisure and entertainment distractions. The Games must also be appealing to a wide range of audiences, not limited to but including young people. So how do the Games distinguish itself from the competition and remain relevant in the future?

Remaining true to our Olympic values is the key to differentiation. Brought to life through the staging of the Olympic Games, it is what sets our event apart from other events. The humanistic component of the Games, in a world where sport is “big business”, is at the core of what makes the Olympic Games unique. The appeal of the Games lies in its ability to develop emotional and inspiring experiences among different groups including the athlete lining up at the start line, the family watching the Games on TV in their living room, or kids checking out their favourite sports websites. Whatever the pressure implied by the ever-present commercialisation of sport, we must remain true to our values and protect our core asset: the five rings and what they stand for.

### EXCELLENT, HIGH QUALITY GAMES OPERATIONS IS PARAMOUNT

The delivery of high quality and perfectly executed operations is paramount to maintaining the Games’ image and its excellence. This is particularly important for the athletes as the Games must remain the pinnacle of sporting competition for them.

It is fair to say that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has recently overseen largely successful Games editions on account of the delivery of high quality operations by all stakeholders. The IOC has now firmly established a comprehensive framework in managing Games organisers, establishing detailed contractual obligations and a comprehensive coordination and monitoring framework to ensure that host cities remain on track to deliver the Games according to our expectations.

There will always be room for improvement. Innovation and openness to doing things differently should be promoted and encouraged. The IOC must continue to assist Games organisers in their preparations, facilitating the transfer of knowledge from previous Games editions and learning from mistakes to deliver a continuous cycle of improvement.

The success of the Games depends on a wide and complex network of Games stakeholders and hinges on the ability to work together. The relationship between our partners and the IOC is becoming increasingly complex and more challenging for the IOC to manage. There is a need



to define the relationships between the IOC, the International Federations (IFs) and the Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG) and their partners, as well as to clarify the roles of each, and to understand what role the IOC plays as the intermediary once the Games have been awarded. In order to reduce the IOC's exposure to operational or delivery risks, the IOC has now taken an increased strategic responsibility for Games tasks which are considered critical, for example the broadcasting operations through the creation of the Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS). The right balance needs to be struck between maintaining sufficient control over the end product, which satisfies the collective and long-term goals of the Olympic Movement while allowing enough flexibility for Games organisers to deliver Games which meet its own objectives.

### SUBSTANTIATION OF THE IOC AS A NON-POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The criticism levelled at the IOC prior to the Games in China was unfounded. Neither the IOC nor the Olympic Movement are political bodies with political objectives. Unfortunately, the political discussions around the Beijing Games were allowed to ensue as a result of the confusion between the principles of human rights (as propagated by the human rights movement) with the Olympic principle of universal and ethical virtues. Whereas the human rights movement is based on the idea of achieving human dignity through individual freedoms and the entitlement to certain rights, Olympism instead is based on the ancient Greek virtues of "healthy spirit and healthy body", concentrating on the development of the human character.

Olympism, therefore, has its own right of existence as an alternative to the ideals of the human rights movement and must not allow the ideals of politically-motivated organisations with political objectives to impose on it. It is important for the Olympic Movement to understand this distinction and strongly reject the agendas of such organisations and stand proudly by our own commendable and universal principles. In removing this confusion, it becomes clear that political discussions of this nature should not be directed at the Olympic Games (a view now concurred by Amnesty International), in the future

### EARLIER IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION OF REPUTATIONAL RISKS

While I have argued that the Games are "extra" political, the IOC still needs to have a better comprehension of the types of risks and opportunities each Games presents in order to prevent them from being hijacked for purposes other than that of the celebration of sport. As I have already stressed, the image and reputation of the Games is delicate and easily influenced as a result of such confusion and misunderstandings.

The IOC still needs to analyse the risk profiles of activities like the international torch relay before the event and not in response to a crisis. We must fully understand the contextual risks and opportunities when a host city is being considered during this evaluation phase. We still need to be bold in our actions and decisions – we should never turn our eyes away from the challenges and difficulties our society faces.

### KEEPING THE GAMES MANAGEABLE

Clearly, one of the future challenges lies in the IOC's ability to effectively manage and control the increasing scale, cost and complexity to deliver the project. This is driven by growing demands from stakeholders and historical expectations: each Games wants to raise the bar in terms

of services and facilities and is very much driven by the ambitions of local organisers. As a result, the ability to manage this is partly beyond the IOC's control.

The IOC still needs to ensure that the philosophy behind the Games Study Commission recommendations is properly communicated and understood by all our stakeholders, and it needs to find innovative solutions to effectively manage the size, cost and complexity associated with the staging of the Games. The challenge often lies in our ability to meet the continuously rising expectations for the event from the different stakeholders and their need to be sufficiently engaged in order to manage these expectations more effectively.

The IOC may be the legal guardian of the Games, but the Games can only survive if the general public perceives them to be a "social good" and the benefits of hosting the Games outweighs the investment and resources required to both stage them and manage the post-Games legacy.

### LONG-TERM LEGACIES

The Games have the ability to deliver positive legacies (sporting, social, cultural, environmental, economic and urban legacies), which will have a lasting impact on the image and reputation of the Games. Games legacies need to be built into the concept and vision from day one and nurtured throughout. These benefits will provide long-term credibility and legitimacy to the Games. The Games act as the catalyst for change but need to be supported by governments from beginning to end to ensure that those post-Games legacies materialise. The IOC should also seek new opportunities after the Games have been hosted to keep the flame lit and to promote the fact that "Once an Olympic City – Always an Olympic City".

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

All these elements I have mentioned have a direct or indirect impact on the Games brand. There are many different interpretations of what we mean by Olympic values, resulting in lack of clarity and understanding across the Movement and beyond. The brand of the Games cuts across every level, from the choice of partners to the sports that should be included on the Olympic Programme. As I have stressed, the image of the Games is central to its success. Therefore, we need to develop a stronger plan as to what we need to do in the future to develop our brand. During this session I hope to identify what we need to do now to both safeguard and enhance the image and reputation of the Games.