

“To make an Olympic champion it takes eight Olympic finalists. To make Olympic finalists, it takes 80 Olympians. To make 80 Olympians it takes 202 national champions, to make national champions it takes thousands of athletes. To make athletes it takes millions of children around the world to be inspired to choose sport.”¹

So began Sebastian Coe, the Chief Executive of the London 2012 bid team, in his opening statement to the IOC Commission in Singapore on July 6th, 2005. The final presentation was to be remembered as one of the most inspirational and emotional moments of a historic and successful campaign that secured Great Britain the rights to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This case study presents key moments in the bid.



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It had been a long, hard road to that momentous and historic day that had made Great Britain so proud. The inauspicious beginning to the bid added to the romanticism of London's triumph. The story began with a

viability study performed by one man (David Luckes, ex-Olympian men's field hockey player) in the corridors of the British Olympic Association HQ. With no office or team to support him, he nevertheless created a solid plan. The early vision was to redevelop a vast area of the East End of London, in addition to development of a region of Hertfordshire, a county based close to Greater London.



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In addition to London, Havana, Leipzig, Rio de Janeiro, Istanbul, New York, Istanbul, Paris, Madrid had all expressed their intention to bid for the right to host the 2012 Games. London identified its key bid themes as: regeneration of the east end of London, the diversity of London, the legacy of the Games, the use of London's iconic landmark sites at which the Games would be hosted, and what the Olympic and Paralympic Games could offer British and world sport. Crucially, the bid process was the first to be operationalised after details of the Salt Lake City scandal had broken. The bid teams were thus subject to far more stringent ethics regulations that had ever been experienced before.

¹ Quotes and facts from this case study are based on those contained within 'The Race for the 2012 Olympics: The Inside Story of How the Bid Was Won'. Lee, M (2006) p. 176. Virgin Books Ltd.



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There were, however, problems from the start. Throughout the entire bid process, Paris remained the favourites, mostly because their facilities had already been constructed (most notable the Stade de France) and the public transport infrastructure in the city were excellent, unlike London's transport which was criticised heavily. To add to the problems, Great Britain were then forced to withdraw their hosting of the 2005 World Athletics Championships due to significant financial mismanagement, a huge embarrassment for a city attempting to become an Olympic host.

Furthermore, the recent £757million Wembley redevelopment project and Millennium Dome fiasco had compounded question marks over the ability of Great Britain to plan for sports mega events. However, thankfully, the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester held early in the bid process were to prove a resounding success and proved a worthy response to detractors who felt that London might be incapable of delivering a worthy bid. The Commonwealth Games held in Manchester were to become known as 'the friendly games', and were attended by highly influential IOC members; the IOC President

Jacques Rogge, and the International Association of Athletic Federations (IAAF) President Lamine Diack.

The official London bid book was delivered to the IOC in November 2004 by Amber Charles, a gifted 14yr old basketball player from East London. Amber represented the passion of London to use the Games to provide a legacy for future generations of children to choose sport, especially those based in the proposed regeneration area of East London. This theme was to run until the final crucial day of the bid when Amber and many other East End children took to the stage in Singapore in 2005 as part of the 100-strong London bid team.

The Bid Team

The London 2012 bid arguably stands as one of the most exciting examples of sport management, leadership and teamwork in the history of Olympic bidding. Initially, Barbara Cassani, the American executive responsible for the successful creation of the British Airways 'Go!' low budget airline was charged with the setting up of the bid. Cassani, a previous Businesswoman of the Year, took the bid successfully through the first round of voting before graciously stepping aside to allow Former Olympic champion Sebastian Coe to take the helm. Coe was to carry the bid forward to its successful conclusion. Coe was not only a former Olympic gold medallist, but a close friend of former IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, a successful British political figure and an individual that had been

suggested at one time as a potential future IOC President. Most crucially, Coe possessed the sporting passion, political experience and networking clout required to lead the bid.

Coe took over as Chairman immediately after the IOC candidate city announcement which saw Havana, Leipzig, Istanbul and Rio de Janeiro removed from the candidature. At this point, Paris, Moscow, London, Paris and New York remained. He was to state that:

“I thought I could make a difference...and I always thought that bringing the games into your own backyard is such an unbelievable bridgehead into all the things I had spent most of my adult life promoting. More young people in sport, getting sport higher up the political and social agenda, the opportunity to repair the damage of industrial decline in one of the hardest pressed areas of the country, the opportunity to use sport to allow young people to fashion their futures through sport, the inclusion issue. All the things people heard me talk about forever and a day.”²

Coe headed an equally strong and passionate team, which included celebrated Olympians Steve Redgrave, Kelly Holmes, Daley Thompson, Denise Lewis, Matthew Pinsent and Paralympian Tanni Grey-Thompson. Poignantly, Kelly Holmes was to win Gold in the 800m and 1500m event at the Athens 2004 Olympics whilst the bid was in motion, and cited Coe’s 1500m victory in the Moscow Olympic Games as one of the most powerful

and inspiring memories of her childhood. Now both were Olympic champions as well as teammates, united in the common goal to bring the Olympic Games to their country.



Politics and the Monarchy Join the Bid

The London bid team certainly included heavy hitters from the world of business and sport, but the addition of the most powerful monarchs and politicians in Britain to the bid were an exciting and powerful strategic move. For example, the stunning piece de la resistance of the 2004 IOC visit to London was a gala dinner hosted on the last night of the trip by none other than Her Royal Majesty the Queen, within the sumptuous and spectacular surrounding of Buckingham Palace. The Prime Minister Tony Blair was to also prove a central and powerful influence. It must be acknowledged that any successful Olympic and Paralympic bid must be backed decisively by the national government of the host nation if the bid is to be successful; London certainly achieved this in style. Dick Pound, former President of the Canadian Olympic Committee, was to comment to Britons after London’s historic victory that ‘*you should get*

² Ibid., p. 66

*down on your hands and keens and thank your prime minister’.*³



Tony Blair had always been in favour of a bid from day one and had played an important role in persuading the rest of the Cabinet to back a London bid. Rarely do British political parties unite together in a common goal, but it was during the final stages of the bid that the leaders of the three British political parties were to stand shoulder to shoulder in proud unity; a concept never seen again since the bid. The presence of opposition leaders Michael Howard (Conservative) and Charles Kennedy (Liberal Democrats) at an IOC meeting hosted by Tony Blair at 10 Downing Street proved to the Olympic Federation that the Olympic and Paralympic Games would be valued highly and that plans would be followed through decisively no matter which ruling party happened to be in power by 2012. It is also perhaps not commonly known that Sebastian Coe, the Chief Executive of the London 2012 bid, was previously a Conservative Member of Parliament (MP). At one point, Coe had been invited to a Cabinet meeting to brief key MPs and Blair had quipped: *‘I bet you never thought you would be sitting here.’* Coe had famously responded

³ Ibid., p. 195

*‘certainly not in this company’!*⁴ Sam Ramsamy, leader of the South African Olympic Committee, was also constructive in gaining a statement of support from Nelson Mandela for the London bid. The Sports Minister Richard Caborn had worked closely with anti apartheid movements and had previously directed two major concerts at Wembley in support of Mandela.

Managing Media Coverage

Managing the British and international media proved to be a particularly demanding issue for the London bid team, given the generally intrusive and often negative characterisation of the bid by the domestic press. The communications campaign took a strategic move of targeting the international press, as it anticipated negative domestic coverage. IOC correspondents for agencies such as CNN and Reuters were given access to the PM Tony Blair, via exclusive briefings at his home at 10 Downing Street, but such access was not made available to the domestic press. Similarly, in Singapore in 2004, in the run up to the announcement of the bid winner, the international press were invited to ask questions but the national British press were not. Mike Lee, the PR and Communications Director of the London bid had actually been a former political ‘spin doctor’ (PR manager) and this probably benefited the cause hugely as he was experienced in negotiating communications with an often hostile British press.

⁴ Ibid. p. 162

However the most major media crisis that the London bid was to face was the airing of a British television documentary about bribery in the IOC, which was broadcast as part of the highly-respected British 'Panorama' documentary series on BBC1. Whilst the bid team ultimately handled this set back successfully, it nevertheless detrimentally affected communications and trust between some IOC members and the London bid team for some time and undoubtedly provided ammunition for rival host city bid teams.

Managing the 2012 Brand

The 2012 brand was well crafted and unique. The bid was based around the concept of a legacy for future generations of children and adults to choose sport as a way of life. The award-winning London 2012 'Sport at Heart' promotional video featured famous British icons such as David Beckham and Roger Moore, and athletes running past famous landmarks, all set to the song 'Proud', a hit song by the popular British artist Heather Small. The video, made by an unknown director, faced stiff competition from top directors (Luc Besson and Steven Spielberg) who had been commissioned at significant cost to direct the videos of competing host cities. The 2nd London bid video, 'Inspiration', was shown at the final presentation in Singapore, and showed four children from Mexico, Africa, Russia and China being inspired to choose sport and become great athletes after watching coverage of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

London had achieved the highest international press coverage of any bid by the time the final vote was cast. The bid was characterised by its multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion across social classes; for example, one of the press conferences featured The Princess Royal and Ade Adepitan, a black wheelchair basketball player. The use of David Beckham was particularly inspired as, not only was he a famous international celebrity, but he was also an East End boy whose life had been changed by sport: exactly the legacy for East End children that London 2012 wished to achieve.

The day of the final presentation, the 100 strong London delegation was made up of politicians, athletes, the bid team itself, and around 30 East End children. These delegates represented both genders and many ethnicities. This proved to be a stark contrast to the almost all-male, all-white delegation of closest rivals Paris. The London bid team had in fact responded excellently to the cautious campaign run by perpetual frontrunners Paris. Had Paris responded more flexibly to the aggressive London bid, the final outcome might very well have been very different. The opening line of the 'Inspiration' video set the tone for London's final presentation:

'To make an Olympic champion it takes eight Olympic finalists. To make Olympic finalists, it takes 80 Olympians. To make Olympians it takes 202 national champions, to make national champions it takes thousands of athletes. To make athletes it takes millions of

children around the world to be inspired to choose sport.'

The bid team also played on the historic role of London in Olympism, when the city stepped up to host the 1948 Games after the destruction of WWII, and London subsequently introduced sports volunteering to the Games. A video speech by PM Tony Blair was also to bring a heart warming message of support from Nelson Mandela, who had said that he could not think of a better place than London to unite the world. The romanticism, energy and passion of the bid could not have been greater. PM Blair's final speech, broadcast to the IOC delegation via video, encapsulated the magic of the London bid perfectly:

*'As a leader in govt or sport, we have a duty to reach beyond our own time and borders, to have a vision which serves those who come after us. Our vision is for millions more young people in Britain and around the world to participate in sport and improve lives. London has the power to make that happen. It is a city with a voice that talks to young people.'*⁵

Sebastian Coe was to conclude the bid with a moving and inspired speech about how he had watched the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games on a small black and white television when he was a child and that this moment had completely changed his life. This perfectly encapsulated the passion for sport that the bid team held, and that their passion to

provide a legacy for many other children to choose sport was genuine. The innovation, professionalism and impact of the final pitch reflected the excellent management of the bid from inception to completion. The management of human resources, the brand image, the media strategy, financing, effective teamwork and great leadership had clearly formed the lynchpin of the campaign.

The Day the Bid Was Won

On 6th July 2005 at 7.46pm, Singapore time, Jacques Rogge, President of the IOC, opened the official envelope and announced to the world that London had won the bid. An ecstatic bid team rejoiced. PM Tony Blair was to recall receiving a telephone call with notice of Britain's victory, dancing a private little jig in the gardens of Gleneagles, where he was chairing a G8 summit. A huge crowd in Trafalgar Square, London rejoiced, as jets from the RAF and the Red Arrows streamed across the sky. London had won the final vote with 54 votes to 50 in the final round.

FIND OUT MORE

The Race for the 2012 Olympics: The Inside Story of How the Bid Was Won. Lee, M (2006). Virgin Books Ltd.

The Olympics Website www.olympic.org

The London 2012 Website
www.london2012.org

⁵ Ibid, p. 180

CREDITS

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