

For the British people, Wednesday 6th July, 2005, was a momentous and historic day. That was the day that Britain was awarded the right to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012. Such an announcement transformed the image of Britain as a nation capable of hosting large scale sporting mega-events. The venue of the announcement was Singapore: the voice delivering the decision was IOC President Jacques Rogge.

The 2012 Games will continue the great Olympic legacy of London and Britain. We will now take a brief look back at the history of the Games in London.



LONDON 1908

The 1908 Olympic Games held in London, England, were originally awarded to Rome; however, London stepped in at the last moment when Rome admitted that they were not ready!

The Games, held between 27th April and 21st October, 1908, proved to be a notable and historic success. Approximately 2,000 athletes participated, representing 22 countries. For the first time in Olympic history, a stadium was built specially for the Games. The Games were the first to feature the now-official Marathon distance of 42km and 195m in the

Marathon event. Interestingly, the last 195m was added so that the race could finish below the Royal Box in the London stadium.

Considering the example above, London 1908 can be remembered significantly for its impact on mega-event facility and operations planning. However, it can also be remembered for examples of heart warming sportsmanship – so characteristic of the prized amateur ethos that characterises the Olympic Spirit – and political controversy (the earliest example of politics encroaching on the Games).

Sportsmanship:

During the middleweight Greco-Roman wrestling final (Frithiof Martensson v Mauritz Andersson), the event was postponed for 24 hours to allow Martensson to recover from a minor injury. Martensson went on to win.

Political Controversy:

Politically motivated troubles between England and Ireland saw England reject Ireland's bid for independence, resulting in an Irish boycott of the Games.

LONDON 1948

The 1948 Games were an absolute triumph over adversity and a memorable example of the British wartime spirit. Following the Blitz and terrible loss of life throughout WWII, the London 1948 Games were the first to be held since 1938.

Despite rationing and difficult economic times, the Games were again (as in the case of

1908) a tremendous success. The Games involved NOCs 59, 4,104 athletes and 136 events and were held between 29th July and 14th August.



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Notable contributions to sporting and Olympic history were also made here: starting blocks for athletes in sprint races were introduced for the first time, and the Empire Pool was the first covered swimming pool to be used at an Olympic Games. Karoly Takacs won an Olympic Gold at the rapid-fire pistol event, characterising the 'triumph over adversity' image of these Games: Takacs, a Hungarian world champion pistol shooter in the 1938 Games, had lost his shooting hand via a grenade explosion in WWII, and had taught himself to shoot with his left hand in the intervening period as a result.

Perhaps the most memorable legacy was the birth of volunteering, and, whilst the Paralympics didn't yet exist, the indomitable post-war spirit of the British people saw Dr. Guttman at Stoke Mandeville make great gains in the use of sport as rehabilitation for wounded ex-servicemen. Undoubtedly the 1948 Games served as inspiration, with the first Paralympic Games finally taking place in Rome in 1960.

LONDON 2012

Sebastian Coe headed up one of the most memorable, innovative and auspicious bid teams in the history of event bidding in order to bring the Olympics to our shores. Initially an underdog, London came from behind to leap ahead of frontrunners Paris to secure the rights to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Whilst controversy surrounds certain aspects of the London Games (for example, the less than popular logo, the greatly increased price tag and fears that the credit crunch might damage legacy promises), the Games are nevertheless appearing to generate great excitement across the country. The development of the Olympic facilities are on track, and Team GB continues to light the fire of imagination in many a young fledgling athlete.

Continuing the traditions of 1948, London 2012 will depend on up to 70,000 volunteers to make sure the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games run smoothly and successfully.

START THE DISCUSSION

- ❖ Why do you think London has attracted the Games three times in Olympic history?
- ❖ In the 1908 and 2012 bids, London did not appear to always be a first choice, yet still eventually won the Games. What does this tell us about event planning and bid management?
- ❖ What specific impacts do you think WWII exerted on the Games, particularly with respect to volunteering, Paralympism and London/Britain's morale?
- ❖ What aspects of the London 2012 Games do you find particularly strong?
- ❖ What aspects of the London 2012 Games do you find a little controversial or precarious, and why?
- ❖ The Olympic spirit shown in the Greco-Roman wrestling event of London 1908 would not occur now. Consider the reasons for this.
- ❖ Do you think that the London 2012 Games will be a success? Consider macroeconomic, financial, logistical, event management, tourism and sustainability issues when considering your answer.

FIND OUT MORE:

The Olympics website History section: London 1908

<http://www.olympic.org/en/content/Olympic-Games/All-Past-Olympic-Games/Summer/London-1908/>

The Olympics website History section: London 1948

<http://www.olympic.org/en/content/Olympic-Games/All-Past-Olympic-Games/Summer/London-1948/>

London 2012 Official Olympics website

<http://.london2012.com>

CREDITS

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