



*Advancing the Games:
the IOC, London 2012 and the future of de Coubertin's
Olympic Movement.*

**Lecture by Dr Jacques Rogge
President, International Olympic Committee
to
The Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce,
24 November 2008
London, Radisson Hotel, Portman Square W1**

Introduction

Thank you for that very warm welcome. I am very pleased to be here this evening.

I would like to thank the Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce for inviting me.

The Royal Society of Arts (RSA) is a great institution. It was founded in 1753, and has a long history of promoting and advocating new ideas in public education.

Pierre de Coubertin was an educator. He spoke to the RSA on 22 June 1904 about what was then a very young idea, just a few years old. It was also a very ambitious idea – to revive the Olympic Games.

It is a great pleasure, but also a great honour, to be giving the second annual “de Coubertin” lecture. He was a man I admire immensely. He was a sportsman, a philosopher and a man of action and determination. There is much to admire there, and I would encourage you to learn more about him, and his work.

Tonight I would like to talk a little about de Coubertin, and about the history of the Olympic Games. I want to share with you some thoughts on the future of the Olympic Movement and the challenges we face. And of course, I'd like to talk about the fantastic and exciting opportunity London has to build on the tremendous success of the Beijing Olympic Games.

Clearly, I cannot mention Beijing without acknowledging and praising the outstanding performance of the British Olympic Team.



Across Britain, people in their hundreds of thousands watched the Games at live sites; millions watched the victories of outstanding athletes such as Chris Hoy, Rebecca Adlington and, of course, your remarkable sailors and rowers such as Ben Ainslie.

Team GB secured their best Olympic medal performance for 100 years, winning 47 medals. I hope their example serves to inspire all those of you working hard over the next four years to make the London Games a success.

The British people showed tremendous passion and enthusiasm for the Beijing Games, perhaps treating it as a warm-up for 2012.

Some years ago I participated in a British Olympic Association conference on British sport which Dick Palmer, the wise then-Secretary General of the BOA, concluded by saying: "We have athletes, we have sport leaders, but we are a country of party-goers. We miss organising major events. We must become party-givers."

Well you made a good start with the handover party on the Mall which looked absolutely fantastic, so you seem to have put that right – I am looking forward to another even bigger party in 2012!

London is a fitting city in which to discuss the Olympic Movement. It will soon have the distinction of being the only city to have held the Olympic Games three times – in 1908, 1948 and soon in 2012.

Britain is the cradle and birthplace of modern sport.

It is the home of "fair play". Pierre de Coubertin was an educator and the founder of the modern Olympic Games. He was deeply influenced by British sport and the ideas of William Penny Brookes and Thomas Arnold.

He first travelled to England in 1883, at the age of 20, and would return six times before writing one of his most important books, "Education in England", in 1888.

He was so impressed by events such as the Henley Regatta and the British way of managing sports organisations that he organised the IOC on the basis of the same rules and regulations.

De Coubertin had inexhaustible energy and self-belief.



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

At the time he spoke to the Royal Society of Arts, he would have needed it too, as neither the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris, nor the 1904 Games which would be held later that year in St Louis, were great successes.

Some athletes at the 1904 Games took Strychnine to enhance their performance. And one marathon runner came fourth despite being chased a mile off the course by “aggressive dogs”.

Indeed, we can take enormous comfort from the fact that, taking the long view, the 2008 Beijing Games, were much, much better organised!

As London, Vancouver and Sochi will shortly learn, once an Olympic city, always an Olympic city. But legacy means more than buildings and the transformation of the environment. It means the lasting way the Games give people new opportunities.

For instance, the Beijing Games opened up more countries than ever before to sport. 204 National Olympic Committees took part, more than ever before. A record number of women participated. Eighty-seven countries won medals, more than ever before and some - Afghanistan, Mauritius, Tajikistan and Togo – won medals for the very first time.

132 Olympic records and 43 world records were set. And if the athletes displayed excellence, then so did the organisers.

The Games themselves were operationally superb. They showcased record-shattering athletic performances which thrilled and surprised the world, and created a surge in media coverage and global popularity. They drew bigger audiences than any Games in history.

We estimate that two out of three people in the world watched the Games, both online and on television.

We witnessed Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt become legends, but there were other moments to remember too. I was very touched by the reaction of Roger Federer – a man who has won money and almost every title in his sport, but was still moved to tears by the honour of an Olympic gold medal.



I will not forget the stoicism of shooter Matt Emmons, who lost the gold when he made a mistake in the final. He had made a similar mistake in Athens, but he resolved to come back again and win in London.

We saw that same stoicism in Alex Partridge, who won silver in the men's rowing eight at Beijing. Alex should have won gold as a member of Matthew Pinsent's fours crew in Athens, but had to withdraw at the last minute due to a lung illness.

He did not give up, but kept his Olympic dream alive for another four years and came back in Beijing to win silver in the eights.

That resilience and courage is what the Games are about, but the physical impact of the Games on China has also been immense.

Numerous infrastructure improvements have been made in Beijing, from its amazing new airport to new subway lines and transport links and, of course, new sports venues. There have been huge environmental improvements, programs to boost air quality and food and water safety. These measures will improve quality of life for millions of people.

But the legacy impact went far beyond economics. Measures to improve the freedom of the media introduced for the Games have now been extended.

Because I believe the Olympic Movement, and the Paralympic Movement, has often been the catalyst for social, urban and political change.

The Barcelona Games of 1992 gave the world its first, powerful example of a post-industrial city becoming a lasting example of regeneration and social change.

Benefits like these don't happen by accident.

Over the years, the IOC has learned a great deal about what it takes to create, manage and sustain a positive legacy.

Host cities have been selected because their people and government have shown they have a passion for creating a positive legacy beyond the Games.

They understand that a successful host city does its best to articulate and share its vision with the world, and engages with people from all backgrounds and cultures across the globe.



Every city that hosts the Olympic Games becomes a famous milestone in Olympic history and the temporary guardian of our values.

For this reason, we at the IOC continue to fine-tune our legacy practices.

We have learned that we must guide and develop the extensive knowledge-sharing that is an important hallmark as well as a legacy of the Olympic Movement itself. We share knowledge widely. We provide a number of tools that help cities manage positive legacy outcomes.

After Sydney we created the Olympic Games Knowledge Management programme.

We ask that every host city creates a body of knowledge and experience that can be passed on. Beijing is doing this, and so will Vancouver, London and Sochi.

It is a great responsibility. When the Olympic flag is handed from one host city to the next at the Closing Ceremony, that city begins creating its own chapter of Olympic history.

At the same time, the host city is expected to leave a legacy that the Olympic Movement can build upon. What kind of legacy, and how it should be delivered, is frequently the subject of debate.

Indeed, I am sometimes asked, and I am sure Lord Coe is rather tired of the question; “how can London possibly outshine Beijing?”

The answer, which I have repeated many times, is that it doesn’t need to – London just has to be London.

And asking me which Olympic Games is the best is like asking me which of my children I love the best.

There is no “best” or “greatest”, there is just “different”.

Each Games edition is unique. It is not the amount of money spent that determines how good a Games is, it is also the unique and inspiring atmosphere created within the city. I’m sure London will do very well there.

Forthcoming Games will be the first to implement the Olympic Games Study Commission report of 2003. This report made a series of recommendations to limit the size, cost and complexity of future Games.



London has learned from this, and it will build its Games around legacy and sustainability.

It will use existing and temporary venues, and the city's existing infrastructure. It will only build facilities that will be valued and used by the local community long after the Games are over. London has made regeneration a priority.

Vancouver and Sochi too have learned this lesson: the importance of legacy in the planning, preparation, delivery and staging of the Olympic Games.

London has already left its mark on Olympic history. Its first Games in 1908, 100 years ago, did much to put the Olympic Games back on track, after Rome pulled out due to the eruption of Vesuvius.

London also stepped in again to stage the 1948 Games following the Second World War. These were "austerity Games", staged amidst London's bombsites in a climate of "mend and make do".

But austerity or not, London 1948 provided notable moments too, such as possibly the greatest female athlete ever, the "flying housewife", Fanny Blankers-Kohn, winning four golds.

They were also the first Games where there was a large-scale volunteer effort.

As a result, they left a volunteering legacy that Britain has benefited from to this present day.

I would like to welcome some of those volunteers and competitors from 1948 here tonight.

1948 also saw the first sports competition involving war-injured patients, organised in the grounds of Stoke Mandeville hospital to coincide with the Opening Ceremony. It was this event which provided the inspiration for the Paralympic Games, which has since grown into the world's foremost sporting competition and celebration for elite athletes with a disability.

Based on this proud past, the London 2012 Games offer the opportunity to build on Beijing's success and consolidate de Coubertin's vision for a new century.



London's vision has many parallels with de Coubertin's own Olympic vision. London's vision, like de Coubertin's, places sport and athletes at the heart of the Games, along with young people and a strong focus on culture and education.

I have known Lord Coe for many years now, and the team at the London Organising Committee is one of the most committed and passionate we have had the good fortune to work with.

Its members have put a premium on connecting with young people, both in the UK and around the world.

They are doing this by focusing their efforts on the internet, and on ensuring that the venues of the Games are accessible to everyone.

The London Organising Committee also created a logo, which they designed to appeal to young people.

I like London's brand and logo very much. It is memorable, eye-catching and simple.

In focusing on young people, and on the impact of the digital revolution on the way the Olympic Games connects with the public, London is supporting the IOC's own priorities.

Over 5,000 UK schools have already joined the London 2012 Education programme – they signed up in time to help celebrate the handover.

London 2012 is challenging children in schools and in the rest of their lives to see how Olympism in general and the London Games specifically can inspire them to embrace active lifestyles.

I am encouraged by these efforts, because the IOC is very concerned to ensure that young people around the world have access to sport.

I believe – as did de Coubertin – that catching the sports bug simply helps you cope with life better. It encourages you to value yourself, and your body. It equips you for learning, and improves your ability to think and create.

Since the introduction of television in the 1950s the amount of time British children spend glued to a screen has risen to an average of 5 hours and 20 minutes a day. Young people are leading increasingly sedentary lives, and playing sport less.



And although young people are at the forefront of this shift, it affects everyone.

But new technologies also present us with new opportunities to engage and interact. On the internet today, people do not simply sit passively consuming content – they actively create, connect and share it. We can't resist the changes technology brings. We can't and we shouldn't.

What we should do is focus on the immense opportunity these new channels provide us with; to think more boldly and imaginatively.

The Olympic Games will continue to be one of the very few global events that can deliver a mass audience.

It will continue to unite people around amazing moments. The Olympic Games will continue to inspire, delight and engage people.

Our challenge is to use the new digital revolution to communicate the power and joy of sport between Olympic Games.

And to get young people and adults interested in the Games and sport by taking them seriously, and listening to them.

Why is this important? Because we know that investing in organised sport can help combat obesity and social isolation, and encourage a healthy society.

Twenty-two million children under the age of five and 1 in 10 school-age children are overweight.

By the time they reach adulthood, 1.6 billion people, or 1 in 6 of the world's population, are overweight; 400 million adults are clinically obese.

Across the world, physical activity and physical education in schools are in decline. Less than a third of young people are sufficiently active, and the result is increasing ill health and obesity.

Of course, at the other end of the scale, more than 28 per cent of children in developing countries are underweight and 850 million people go hungry every night.

These inequalities result in an unjust and unhealthy global society.

This is why I firmly believe that the Olympic Movement is more relevant and has more to offer, especially to young people, than ever before.



In short, Olympic values matter.

Our values and our principles have never resonated more with young people across the world. In the words of a recent Olympic public service advertising campaign, they bring out “the best of us”.

When de Coubertin set out to revive the Olympic Games in 1894, he wanted to do more than establish a modern sporting competition. He wanted to create an international movement that combined sport and education. That positioned sport as a model for peace and harmony. And that upheld a set of values which extend well beyond the playing field.

Excellence, for example, is not just about winning.

It stands for doing our very best, on the field of play or in the personal or professional arena. It is also about making progress towards personal goals.

Friendship encourages us to use sport to understand each other, and to forge friendships in spite of our differences.

Respect stands for fair play and for the fight against doping. Respect for oneself and one’s body, respect for others; for the rules, for sport and for the environment.

At the IOC, we continue to build innovative new programmes to reflect these values.

One example is the Youth Olympic Games. It will be staged first in 2010 for 3,200 athletes between the ages of 14 and 18. This will be the first major global sports event created by the IOC since the advent of the Winter Games in 1924.

I hope that young people attending the Youth Olympic Games will go on to become Olympians.

Even if they don’t, that they will always be ambassadors for sport in society.

Also, next year the Olympic Movement will gather at the Olympic Congress in Copenhagen. It is open to the public – so if you care about the Olympic values, and you have a concern, or an idea, then let us know – send it in through our website.



INTERNATIONAL
OLYMPIC
COMMITTEE

At the Congress, my colleagues and I in the Olympic Movement will discuss some of the challenges I have referred to this evening, and to argue, debate and reach consensus.

Thank you for listening to me this evening. I am very grateful for your time.

Sport and the Olympic Movement have been my life.

I am conscious that we come out of the enormous success of Beijing into difficult economic times.

Well, the Games have survived difficult times before. They have survived and thrived because of what they mean to people all over the world. The Games remind us that the transient difficulties of life can be overcome through hard work and determination.

The Games show that excellence, friendship and respect have no limits.

That wars, economic downturns, natural disasters and violent attacks do not dissuade or dishearten humanity.

Because while not all of us can be an Olympian, the simple joy of running faster, leaping higher or throwing further makes all of us equal,

brings us together,

and places each of us firmly in the world.

Not apart from it.

Thank you.

* * * * *