

# London 2012: A Games to Remember?

Published on Friday, 27 July 2012 10:52



**With the London 2012 Olympic Games set deliver a £16.5bn (\$25.9bn) boost to the UK economy by 2017 and help create the equivalent of 62,200 jobs according to research by Olympic Sponsor Lloyds, MEI asks industry experts what the Games will really be remembered for in years to come....Jon Coxeter-Smith, Director, Sagacity MCS Limited**

The Olympic Games is the 'greatest show on earth' and it is inconceivable that the event will pass unnoticed. My own appetite was wetted just over two years ago when I was lucky enough to be in Vancouver for the first week of the 2010 Winter Games. The city really was the only place to be. Moments like the little technical hiccups during the Opening Ceremony or the snags caused by the unseasonal, warm weather were dispatched without difficulty as the mood grew and grew, being raised to new levels by the first Canadian medals – announced on information boards all around the city – and the appearance of the Canada hockey team. Those few days provided memories that will live on and started my looking forward to London 2012. It will be unforgettable.

London 2012 has provided a vehicle to fast track the regeneration of East London. We've all seen the data showing incredible levels of economic and social deprivation in that area. I was particularly affected by the knowledge that life expectancy reduced by one year for each station travelled through on an Eastbound journey on the London Underground's Central Line. It will take many years before the full effects become apparent but we can say already that the chances of success have been significantly advanced. A new, socially and economically strong East London is great news for the local communities, for London and for the UK.

All those involved in getting to this point have performed with great aplomb. Execution of the preparation has been, by and large, faultless. The impact on confidence levels, among all those individuals and entities involved and out there in the wider world should not be overlooked. The whole endeavour has posted a very clear message to the rest of the world that London and the UK can be

trusted to deliver excellently.

And this will be never truer than in the construction industry. At the beginning of the journey the preparations were recognised as a mega project twice the scale of the newly opened T5 project at Heathrow to be completed in half the time. Simply put, if UK construction did things the way it always did things, then the project would fail. It did not simply because the industry rose to the challenge and the UK will for many years enjoy these newly found high levels of expertise in the planning and execution of major infrastructure projects.

Last, but not least, I think about sport. We will all be treated to feats of incredible athleticism by the finest athletes on the planet. New records will be set and we will all find new candidates for our own personal galleries of heroes and heroines. My daughters' attention will be fixed on the swimming as their favourites take to the water. We will all be privileged to see the likes of Bradley Wiggins, the first ever British winner of the Tour de France, racing on the streets of London so soon after his triumph in Paris. London 2012's promise was to inspire through sport. I have no doubt that is exactly what it will do.

It will be interesting to revisit these speculations in 10 years' time; London's five Olympic rings will produce these five halos. What is less certain is how brightly they will shine and how long they will last. That is the next challenge.

### **Andrew Brown, independent industry consultant and former chief operating officer of Racing UK:**

When we wonder how the London Olympics will be remembered, it is instructive to ponder the legacies of previous Olympiads.

Clearly, the most enduring memories of each Games for the past 20 years have been the achievements of the athletes in competition. So it is a reasonable bet that in years to come we will look back at these Games and remember primarily the performances of Usain Bolt, Missy Franklin, Laura Trott or other superstars that are sure to emerge.

Sadly however, Olympic Games are also remembered for off-field events - the doping of Ben Johnson in Seoul, the tragic attacks of Atlanta and Munich or the boycotts of Moscow and LA.

So aside from the on-field performances, what will mark London's Olympic legacy? The main contenders from the past 20 years are politics, security, doping and logistics.

Thankfully this year's Olympic build-up has not been marred by political matters: there are no issues circling to match the Cold War antics of Moscow and LA or the human rights controversies of Beijing.

While the G4S debacle does not bode well for security, the contingency of the army and police has wisely been called upon, so one trusts that no serious incidents will occur.

Without being able to predict the results of each athlete's personal tug-of-war between conscience and win-at-all-costs, given that the WADA protocols have been tightened and enforcement has been

increased enormously, it seems unlikely that we will see a doping scandal on the scale of Ben Johnson in Seoul or Kenteris/Thanou in Athens.

Which leaves logistics: will spectators enjoy their experience of the Games, including their journey to and from the venues? Whilst it would be wonderful to be optimistic, even on a normal day the London transport system is only one small SNAFU away from gridlock. Londoners are inured to the inevitable breakdowns on the tube, delays on the rail and chaos on the roads. But international travellers do not expect to endure of hours of discomfort to travel short distances. Sadly, we may therefore find that this issue is the off-field memory that lingers in years to come - but much has been done to avoid the potential problems so let's hope not.

On a positive note, if we can avoid any major hiccups of this nature, then we may surprise ourselves with an Olympics that is remembered the way it should be: for the celebration of outstanding athletic achievements by an overjoyed public.

**Chris Bignell, Director, XL Communications Ltd:**

Traffic chaos? Security blunders? British gold? You would need to be a soothsayer in advance of the Games to predict exactly what London 2012 will be remembered for. My guess would be that, once properly underway, people will quickly forget about any administrative cock ups and focus on the sport. I also reckon the event will get better and better as time goes on. I expect Team GB to pull a hatful of medals out of the bag towards the end of the Games after a disappointing start. And there will undoubtedly be heartbreak for at least one British participant.

Will London be the first truly digital Olympics? Four years ago use of data on mobile devices was almost unheard of. From my perspective the most interesting question outside of the track and field is "will the mobile networks cope with millions of people on smartphones and tablets demanding to see, hear and experience magic Olympic moments?". If you do not hear how terrible the mobile data coverage is in the next few weeks, the mobile networks have pulled off a spectacular success!

Will this be the social media Olympics? If a social media Olympics is defined by thousands of people on Twitter trying to be the first to tell you the result of the race you are watching or millions on Facebook changing their profile picture to that of Mark Cavendish or Bradley Wiggins for a few days, then the impact is really not that profound.

I suspect that the most meaningful outcome from London's party will be how and where people participate in it. Because anyone, anywhere should be able to see anything they like on any number of different devices. The combination of this, and in the UK in particular, the BBC's commitment and capability to show everything the Olympics has to offer will mean this is the most accessible event in history. You may not have got tickets for events, but wherever you are, you will certainly get the experience.