



**BRITISH PHILOSOPHY OF SPORT ASSOCIATION SYMPOSIUM
(in association with UK Sport)**

What would a “good” Games look like in 2012?

**University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
May 18th 2006**

Principal participants

Chair: Dr. Mike McNamee (Chair, BPSA, Reader in Philosophy, School of Health Science, Swansea University)

Jerry Bingham, Head of Strategy, Ethics & Research, UK Sport

Darren Campbell MBE, Olympic athlete

Prof. Ian Henry, Professor of Leisure Policy and Management, and Director of the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy, Loughborough University

Liz Johnson, Paralympic swimmer

Dick Palmer CBE, OBE, former General Secretary, British Olympic Association

Prof. Jim Parry, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy and Head of the School of Humanities, Leeds University

Nikki Phillips, Senior Lecturer, Department of Physiotherapy Education, Cardiff University and Chairman of the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Sports Medicine

Jerry Bingham explained that the idea for the symposium had its origins in the rhetoric that invariably accompanies an Olympic bid – when a host city pledges to put on “the best-ever Games”. In the wake of highly successful Games such as Barcelona in 1992 and Sydney in 2000, the question was: what kind of “best-ever” Olympics could London realistically hope to stage?

Jerry said that he felt “ethics” was one area in which London could uniquely try to frame this ambition. From an athlete-centred perspective, this might focus on ways in which to provide the very best experience for competitors, encompassing issues of fair play, sporting conduct and drug-free sport; developing an international consensus about what is acceptable and not acceptable in preparing young athletes for major competition; creating opportunities for athletes across the world to share their experiences through regular dialogue in the years leading up to 2012. Welcoming this first collaboration between UK Sport and the BPSA, Jerry suggested that the symposium marked the beginning of a journey – one which could take another 6 years to complete – and provided a tremendous and much-needed opportunity for the sports philosophical community to engage with mainstream sports organisations.

Darren Campbell, spoke about the inspirational qualities of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, about the way in which they can instil dreams, even in people from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. He said that, even though there is already widespread excitement about the London Games, people do not yet appreciate quite how big the Games will be and urged everyone to grab the opportunity to be part of a unique experience. Having competed in three Games, Darren said that he appreciated how he had been part of something very special. It’s not the medals that get you out of bed in the morning, he said, but the memories – knowing that “you’ve walked the walk” and been part of a community of athletes from across the globe sharing a common dream.

Focusing on the Paralympics, **Liz Johnson** argued that the debate about disability sport had now moved on from one that was concerned primarily with issues of physical access. She said that we need to take that acceptance and turn it into an emphasis on the elite athlete rather than the disabled person. In order for Paralympic athletes to feel they are being treated in the same way as Olympians, the key will be to eliminate the sympathy element: the public should respect Paralympians first and foremost for the athletes they are and the achievements they attain. For a disabled athlete to achieve the qualifying standard and represent his or her country at the Paralympic Games is neither any more nor any less an achievement than it is for an able-bodied athlete in relation to the Olympics.

Liz also called for the media to extend both the amount and the content of its Paralympic coverage – the BBC should make full use of its interactive TV channels, for example – so that young people with disabilities can see the full range of opportunities and possibilities open to them. A successful Paralympics in 2012 would be one which created a whole team of role models, not just the one or two high-performing individuals such as have come to the fore in the past.

Dick Palmer, who had been part of the London 2012 bid team, looked back at the bid process and pointed to some of the key reasons for London's success. He said he believed that one of the big values London had embraced was the idea that its bid came from sport: Britain had an athletes' commission, athletes were involved, the London Games would be for athletes – indeed, they would be for the youth of the world. It was on the back of these images and messages that London had sold the idea to the IOC that the Olympic “franchise” would be handed on enhanced, with value added. Looking forward - to ensure that this is indeed the case - Dick said he wanted to see a safe and well-organised Games that were characterised by great atmosphere and enthusiastic spectators. He wanted London and the UK to project the image of a confident society, one which would show the rest of the world that we are a nation that can deliver. He said it was imperative that Government promises were delivered “right down to the last penny” – indeed, that all parts of the vision were reinforced during the build up to the Games.

Nikki Phillips considered some of the practical issues – flexible accreditation, space, transport, internet access etc – that would improve the working conditions of Games headquarters physiotherapists. It is a shared objective among central support personnel that London should be seen as an expert service provider. It is also crucial that HQ medical staff should be trusted in relation to the decisions they have to make about athletes – and this relied on establishing good relationships with athlete support teams. From both a professional and personal point of view, she said that she hoped London would be a drug-free Games, not only for the obvious reasons but because she has seen the effect that a positive finding can have on team morale.

Ian Henry examined a number of the wider social issues on which the London bid had been sold – multiculturalism, the engagement of young people, health and sustainability. As far as multiculturalism is concerned, he suggested that that the promotion of interculturalism might be the better strategy, one in which people are encouraged to bring aspects of their own culture to a shared context. If the London Olympics can help achieve multi-cultural, inter-cultural dialogue in the UK, then, as a reflection of what may be possible elsewhere, it will help address a major global difficulty. Sport is not a panacea in terms of addressing multicultural issues but if, in relation to the Olympics, it can help stimulate dialogue and discourse, then it will have made a significant contribution.

Jim Parry prefaced his contribution by saying that he would like to see the London Games being truly “Olympic” Games – that is, not just the world's finest multi-sport festival, but an event that gives expression to de Coubertin's philosophy of Olympism. De Coubertin, he said, considered the Olympic Games to be primarily about education rather than sport: they exist as a public manifestation, a public celebration of what sport could be as a contribution to the all-round harmonious development of the human being. In truly “Olympic” sport, Jim argued, the focus should be not just on the elite athlete but on everybody; not just on winning but on the values of cooperation and participation; not just on sport as an activity but on sport as an agent of personal development and social progress.

Olympism promotes the idea that there are common values that we share – and that these ideas can be exemplified in ways that we interact when we play sport. These values include:

- Excellence and achievement – not necessarily elite excellence but excellence which emphasises improved standards across the board, as well as personal excellence.
- Achievement through personal effort
- Mutual respect, and equal consideration for all, the necessary conditions for which relate directly to multi-culturalism and other forms of social interaction.
- Internationalism: sport enables one to make approaches to people from different cultures and nationalities in ways that few other areas of human activity do.

As far as the London Olympics are concerned, Jim said that, through the actions of athletes, he simply wanted to see these things happening. He also wanted these ideas said - reinforced not only by athletes, but by sports leaders, commentators, and in the commercials. The Games are an opportunity to emphasise what can be realised through rule structures and people's common ethos: people would be creating an event together which they could not do unless they were sharing certain values and following the rules.

While all Olympism is to do with sport, Jim suggested, not all sport is “Olympic” sport. If one takes the view that global associations such as the United Nations and the human rights movement are the only hope for the salvation of the world, then it might also be reasonable to believe that Olympism, which springs from the same liberal tradition, is the only hope for the salvation of sport.

The panel dealt with a range of questions from the audience. These covered:

- Issues of sustainability and legacy
- Practical ways of keeping the Paralympics and Paralympians in the public eye between Games
- Preserving the ethical integrity of sport in the face of commercial pressures
- Ensuring that all part of the UK engage with the Games and share the benefits
- The opportunity costs of the Games