Effect of the Olympic Games on urban societies: a case of study of Sydney 2000

A background paper by

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for a presentation by

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Symposium III: Cities and the Olympics at the
30th Japan Olympic Academy Session
Sophia University
Japan

November 17-18, 2007
Abstract

One of Australia’s greatest swimmers, Dawn Fraser, may be remembered by some older sport and Olympic Games enthusiasts in Japan for her efforts both in and out of the swimming pool at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Towards the end of her autobiography, Dawn: One Hell of a Life, which was published in 2001, she wrote about Sydney and the 2000 Olympics:

And now the carnival is over and Sydney is busy finding uses for the buildings and sporting facilities that remain. I think it’s a shame to change Olympic sites after the Games because people, including the athletes, can no longer wander around and truly remember what it was like if the places where they marched in the opening ceremony or where they won their medal are no longer there. Tourists who didn’t get to attend but saw it on television can’t later have a look at the actual venue. You lose the romance and atmosphere. I can go to Heidelberg in Melbourne now and not see a trace of the 1956 Games, or I can go to Rome and only say, ‘I think this is where the village was’. In Los Angeles in 1984, the day after the swimming events were concluded, they pulled the swimming pool down.

The Homebush {Sydney 2000} site, on the other hand, is largely being preserved and is now known as Olympic Park, and I was lucky enough to have one of its streets named after me about a year before the Games.

In this brief background paper to my presentation I will consider and examine the explicit and implicit ramifications and significance of Dawn Fraser’s comments within the framework of the effect an Olympic Games has had, and might, could and even should have on urban society. The paper and presentation will include some ‘facts and figures’ about costs and benefits of staging the Sydney Olympics, but much of this has been documented elsewhere. As a sport and Olympic historian as well as educator, my bias should be obvious, especially in the many visual images included in my actual presentation. Although the focus will be on Sydney 2000 as a case study, observations about, and images of other Olympic Games prior to those of the XXVIIth Olympiad will be included.

Preamble

At the conclusion of the Sydney Olympics, George Vecsey, the New York Times columnist wrote: ‘The Games were great, but the Australians were greater, and they bought a whole lot of time for the survival of the Olympic Games’. The significance of this statement is not so much the complimentary remark about Australians, but the ‘survival’ of the concept of a host city for an Olympic Games. This issue was addressed during the conference on Olympic legacy in Lausanne in November 2002, when IOC President, Jacques Rogge, stated there must be a relationship between developments made in the name of the Olympic Games and sustainability and long-term benefit to the host community. Also, Vassil Girginov and Jim Parry use the view of Sandy Hollway, former chief executive Officer of SOCOG to expound that the most post-Olympic studies are much wider than economic and environmental impact of the Games. The six areas of impact outlined by Hollway, and summarised by Girginov and Parry, are: infrastructure;
economic impact; showcasing; an international eye-opener; pride in the Australian
community; and confidence.iv

In 1999, the Sydney Olympic Games Review Committee (SOGRC) for the
Premier of New South Wales [Sydney is the capital of NSW] produced a document,
which read in part:

*An Olympic Games that is successfully staged and financially managed
leaves a positive legacy for the host city in terms of new and upgraded
sporting facilities and venues; new and improved infrastructure; enhanced
international recognition, enhanced international reputation; increased
tourism; new trade, investment and marketing opportunities; and increased
participation in sport.*v

In contrast to the lament of Dawn Fraser about what should remain after an Olympic
Games, there a certain ‘bureaucratic tone’ in the above quotation - perhaps more
‘realistic’ than ‘romantic’ and almost ‘demanding’. However, in keeping with the theme
of the symposium session on ‘urban effects’, I shall restrict much of the focus to Sydney
by also utilising some of the structure from the 1999 SOGRC quotation.

1. New and upgraded sporting facilities and venues

The sporting precinct at HB had been planned to occur gradually over 30 years;
indeed the Athletics Centre, which became the warm-up track for the Olympic Stadium
during the Games, and the Aquatic Centre were under construction at the time of the bid.
The Sydney International Athletic Centre, opened in 1994, is suitable for international
and national athletic events, and local and school carnivals, and has been extensively
used [See figures in PowerPoint presentation]

Also officially opened in 1994, and now known as the Sydney International
Aquatic Centre, this venue was, and is, extremely popular with over 10 million visitors
utilising the facility (lap & recreational swimmers, spectators, swimming squads, fitness
centre members) during the period 1993-2003. It is second only to the Melbourne Cricket
Ground (the venue for the 1956 Olympic Games) in ‘throughput’. Patronage has
increased in the period 2004-2006 [See figures in PowerPoint presentation].

A significant factor in the success of the above two venues is that they filled a gap
in the city of Sydney’s sporting infrastructure and did not create competition with other
facilities. This may not be the case of Olympic Stadium (later known as Stadium
Australia, then ‘sponsor-named’ in 2002 as Telstra Stadium). The capacity during the
Games was to be 110,000 spectators; the actual seating for Games 115,600, making it the
largest Olympic stadium ever. vi It has now been re-configured at a cost of approximately
$80 million to hold 83,500 spectators for post Games needs such as cricket and various
codes of football.

A facility, which has become more successful in recent years, is the Superdome
(the Games venue for basketball finals, artistic and rhythmic gymnastics with a capacity
of 21,000 spectators). Now known as Acer Arena, one source has stated it was the
world’s second highest grossing venue of its type in the world in 2005 – second only to
Madison Square Garden. vii However, the Sydney Showground (Games venue for seven
Olympic sports- badminton, basketball, baseball, handball rhythmic gymnastics, modern
pentathlon, and volleyball, and which also housed the Main Press Centre, has become an
important part of the infra-structure for Sydney’s world-famous Royal Agricultural Show – an event staged since 1817.

The International Tennis Centre - now managed by Tennis NSW – is utilised for major tennis tournaments, and the Sydney International Archery Park has become a much-needed venue for this sport.

The Olympic Athletes’ Village, comprising approximately 850 houses and 350 apartments is now part of the suburb of Newington. In keeping with the much touted ‘environmental games ideology, it is largest solar suburb in Australia.viii

One of the most successful items of infrastructure for the Games was transportation to and from the Olympic precinct. The 5.3 km railway loop links the suburbs and terminates only 400 metres from Olympic Stadium in a below ground subway station, which won an architectural award. The ‘throughput’ of 50,000 persons per hour has been a definite boon.

Of course, there are some facilities and venues that were purpose built for the Games; some remain, others have not. The controversial spectators stand for beach volleyball at the internationally renowned Bondi Beach were removed. A lack of financial viability has resulted in the removal of the 7 km cross-country course at Fairfield City Farm. Venues which have become sustainable, or almost self-supporting, include, for example: the Archery Centre; the privately-owned Ryde Aquatic Leisure Centre (Games venue for waterpolo); the Penrith Whitewater course for canoeing and kayaking (the only man-made course in the southern hemisphere); the Sydney International Regatta Centre (rowing, canoeing and kayaking) at Penrith; the Sydney Equestrian Centre at Horsley Park; and the Sydney International Shooting Centre.

2. Economic impact
The concluding comments of the international investment and contracts section of the Official Report of the XXVII Olympiad, Sydney, 2001 included the following statement:

For Sydney, for New South Wales and Australia, the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games provided massive exposure and publicity to the world and in many cases a fist or renewed awareness of Australia. The business opportunities identified and the networks established internationally, particularly with the many thousands of business people who visited Australia during and prior to the Games, will continue to provide opportunities into the future for Australian business and trade, particularly in the Asia Pacific region where Australia has a growing status as a stable and developed country with benefits to offer the region and the rest of the world wanting to do business there.ix

The Olympic Coordinating Authority (OCA) emphasised the economic effects of the Games in 2002, identifying three specific areas: promoting Sydney and NSW as attractive investment destinations, especially for regional headquarters of multinational corporations; promoting Sydney and NSW as tourism and convention destinations; and working with Commonwealth Government departments and corporate sector sponsors to raise the profile of Sydney, NSW and Australia.x The PriceWaterhouseCoopers report documented a wide range of business and economic benefits resulting from the Sydney Games, which included: projected business outcomes of $3 billion (with half-a-billion dollars in place by 2002); and an enhanced business profile for Sydney, NSW and
3. Showcasing and 4. An international eye-opener

These two areas of impact will be briefly discussed through a consideration of tourism. An early strategy was through Australia’s visiting journalist scheme in which print and broadcast journalists were recruited to visit Australia from 1996-2000 to write stories about the country. Sporting and Olympic stories were also readily available because pre-Olympic training of more than 127 teams from 39 countries in NSW alone added $US43.2 million to the state economy.

The actual number of tourists during the Games was 110,000 Olympic-specific visitors during September 2000, of which one third was ‘Olympic Family’. The post-Games tourist legacy was anticipated to be of greater significance. The Tourism Forecasting Council estimated in 1998 that as a result of international exposure from the Olympic Games there could be an additional 1.6 million tourists from 1997-2004, adding $2.9 million to the national economy. Unfortunately, this did not eventuate. There was a 15% increase in the last quarter of 2000 (+15%), and 4.7% increase in first quarter of 2001. But the September 11, 2001 attack by terrorists in the USA, followed by the terrorist bombing in Bali in 2002, and the outbreak of severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in Asia in 2003 grossly affected predicted tourism outcomes and revenue. During and subsequent to this period there was a steady rise in Australian dollar and a general slowing down of the world economy – especially USA and Japan from late 2000, the two countries most prominent in Australian inbound tourism. These factors resulted in negative growth in tourism over three years 2001-2003. [See PowerPoint presentation for figures]

The convention market for Sydney was more positive; indeed the specific site of the Sydney Olympic Park, along with their increasing number of events (currently there are nearly 1800 events held annually) being held or staged at that precinct resulted in the ‘on-site’ hotels having highest occupancy rates since Olympics (eg Novotel recorded 86.3%).

5. Pride in the Australian sense of community

Australia’s pride when its athletes succeed in sporting events, especially its ‘medal-tallies’ in summer Olympic Games, has been well documented. However, there was much pride in the communities throughout Australia when the then IOC President, Juan Antonio Samaranch, pronounced at the Closing Ceremony that Sydney organised ‘the best Games ever’. There was a notion that the Games were actually a ‘national effort’ so the pride was widespread. One example of this is the success of the Sydney 2000 ‘volunteer’ program.

The signing-on, training and mobilisation of more than 46,000 Olympic volunteers and 15,000 Paralympic volunteers were the biggest peacetime recruitment exercise in Australia’s history. These ‘willing workers’ and proud Australians undertook seventy different functional areas in five states and territories, and were stationed at 130 venues, and were on duty an average of 100 hours each. The potential legacy of this Olympic volunteerism is great: more than 60% were under 45 years of age (mistakenly, the impression is that ‘retirees’ volunteer. [See figures in PowerPoint presentation] The
potential is even greater when one considers relationships and partnerships which developed during and after Sydney 2000. Many universities provided around 6000 students with most taking on roles directly related to their courses, and some receiving course accreditation. In a preface to Laurie Smith’s book, Living is Giving: The Volunteer Experience, Sandy Hollway wrote “... to a significant extent they (the volunteers) were the face of the Games”.

The potential of this force has already been proven; the International Year of Volunteers followed the Sydney Olympics in 2001 and the profile of ‘volunteering’ received a boost in Australia. Other major events benefited and utilised the lessons learnt from Sydney. Some examples include the 2002 and 2004 Olympics in Salt Lake City and Athens, respectively, and the Manchester Commonwealth Games in 2002. Pride especially abounded when President Samaranch also noted at the Closing Ceremony that Sydney’s volunteers were ‘the best ever’. Their legacy lasts because the names of all volunteers are inscribed at the Olympic (Telstra) Stadium.

Along the Olympic boulevard, each one of the nineteen solar-powered light towers has an acknowledgment of previous host cities of Summer Olympic Games. As mentioned previously, Australia’s sporting performances contribute to pride in community and the achievements of the Australians Olympians at Sydney 2000, especially competing in their own country, added to that pride. Many of the athletes were feted at cities and towns throughout the nation. As Dawn Fraser remarked in the opening phrases of this paper, Australian Olympic and Paralympic athletes of the past have been acknowledged prior to Sydney 2000 by the naming of avenues in their honour at the Olympic precinct.xxxi Just as the legacy of their achievements has been acknowledged, the names of all Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic medal winners are recorded in paving made from Greek while marble and Australian black granite.

The Olympic cauldron, so prominent throughout the Games, has been relocated as an outcome of the downsizing of the Stadium. The re-lighting of this symbolic and significant icon of the Olympic Movement in September 2001, now situated between the Olympic stadium and railway station, was described by Sydney journalist Anthony Dennis:

\[ A \text{ curtain of water will cascade beneath the cauldron, shrouding the 24 stainless-steel support columns and emulating the moment last September 15, when it rose from the water after it was lit during the Opening ceremony.}\]

Although there is no Olympic Museum on location at Sydney Olympic Park (the Australian Gallery of Sport and Olympic Museum is a part of the Melbourne Cricket Ground - the Olympic Stadium in 1956). However, post-Games tours - the Telstra Stadium Explore Tour - include video-footage and a laser and sound show to create an Olympic atmosphere was introduced in 2005.

One might assume from the success of Australia’s Olympic athletes at Sydney 2000, and from the above reminders of those achievements such as those at Sydney Olympic Park and other locations throughout the nation, that active participation rates in sport would have been raised significantly. This is a mistaken assumption, as has been shown following previous Olympic Games.xxxiv Kristine Toohey has stated that the most substantial participation-related impact of the Sydney 2000 Games were increases in passive involvement, such as live and television spectating.xxxv
the flow on from elite to community sport – has been minimal apart from a short-term bounce after 2000. However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics study published in 2001, *The Impact of the Olympics on Participation in Australia: Trickle Down Effect, Discouragement Effect or No Effect*, concluded there was no overall evidence of discouragement because of the Sydney Games.\(^{xxvi}\)

However, there seems to be evidence of long-term effect of sports participation. Tony Veal and Kristine Toohey concluded from their study of the period prior to 2000 until 2002 there was no evidence of an identifiable Olympic effect’ on sports participating after the Games. There was both growth and decline in Olympic sports, and surprisingly, more growth was identifiable in 21 non-Olympic sports. However, Veal and Toohey identify deficiency and changes in the measurement tools, which might affect the statistical data.\(^{xxvii}\) Clearly, as Richard Cashman has remarked, ‘if the issue of sports participation and community involvement in Olympic sports are deemed an important legacy of an Olympic Games, more effort needs to be made to develop adequate measuring tools’.\(^{xxviii}\)

5. Confidence

Vassil Girginov and Jim Parry have reported that Sandy Hollway, who identified ‘confidence’ as the final of his areas of impact of the Sydney Olympic Games, stated that the games helped Australians say ‘goodbye to cultural cringe’.\(^{xxix}\) This is true of most Australians, perhaps with the exception of the indigenous aboriginals (and this issue, though vitally important, has not been addressed in this background paper, even though the ‘magic’ of Cathy Freeman lighting the flame and winning the 400 metres track event and its impact on Australian society is worthy of a paper and presentation in its own right)\(^{xxx}\)

I believe there is a confidence following the Sydney 2000 Olympics throughout Australia. Andrea Vollrath has examined the ways of creating collective identity before, during and after a major sporting event. Vollrath has discussed the ambiguity of trying to distinguish between different forms of legacies: ‘tangible legacies’, meaning monetary and measurable factors; and ‘intangible legacies’ – those less measurable such as ideas and cultural values, collective effort and popular memory.\(^{xxi}\) Vollrath also endorses Holger Preuss’ pleas that organising committees for Olympic Games and the IOC should strive for a ‘harmonious appearance’ and ‘permanent renewal’ of the Olympic Games for profitability and financing. Preuss seeks a unique development of an ‘Olympic atmosphere’ which should be supported and maintained in order to attract public interest in the long term.

Concluding Remarks

Not being a resident of Sydney, I do not ‘live’ in that community so I rely on hearsay and articles in the popular press as well as academic papers. But I also value and rely on the opinions and views of colleagues and friends, especially those who are aware of the significance of the Olympic Movement in society. One such person is Richard Cashman, whose scholarly book, *The Bitter-Sweet Awakening: The Legacy of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games*, has been a source for much of the research for this background paper and PowerPoint presentation. We both share the confidence that the Olympic Movement benefited greatly from Sydney 2000, and that its effect on urban society in
Sydney, specifically, and its legacy throughout Australia generally has great potential. Cashman concludes an article written on the legacy of Sydney Olympic Park specifically. I have utilised but modified his remarks to conclude this background paper on the effect of the Olympic Games on urban societies: a case study of Sydney 2000: 

_The 2000 Olympics have the potential to evolve into something worthwhile for the residents of Sydney [and Australia] who supported the Olympic Games wholeheartedly. It will require prudent planning and political will to realize this modified, and changing vision_.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


v Sydney Olympic Games Review Committee, _Report to the Premier of New South Wales_, 1999, p.3.

vi The evening track and field session on Day 11 attracted 112,524 spectators; the highest attendance recorded was 111,714 during the Closing Ceremony. See _Sydney Morning Herald_, November 29,2005. ^2005 Fast Facts about Sydney Olympic Park (http://www.sydneyolympicpark.com.au/corporate/media_room/fact_sheets/general;)


viii For further comment about the ‘Village’ housing, see Helen Lenskyj, _Inside the Olympic Industry: Power, Politics and Activism_, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2002. pp 141-142.


xiii States other than NSW also hosted teams for pre-Olympic training during this period.

xiv PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2002, p.55


xvii PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2002


75,000 people volunteered; 65,000 were interviewed. For further details, see Brendan Lynch, Sydney’s Olympic Volunteers: lessons and legacies, in Daryl Adair, Bruce Coe and Nick Guoth, Beyond the Torch, 2005, pp. 95-100.

The names of the most recent Olympians include Herb Elliott, Dawn Fraser, Shane Gould, Marjorie Jackson, Murray Rose and Shirley Strickland.


In 1975, Allan Coles wrote in a report of the Australian Sports Institute Study Group: A causal connection between excellence at the top and breadth of participation cannot simply be assumed. Excellent performance cannot serve only to encourage but also to discourage popular participation according to the factors involved. Allan Coles, Report of the Australian Sports Institute Study Group, Department of Tourism and Recreation, Canberra, 1975, p.14

Kristine Toohey, in Richard Cashman, Kristine Toohey, Simon Darcy, Caroline Symons and Bob Stewart, When the carnival is over: evaluating the outcomes of mega-sporting events in Australia, Sporting Traditions: Journal of Australian Society for Sports History, Vol 21, No.1, November 2004, p.8


Richard Cashman, The Bitter-Sweet Awakening, 2006, p.189


Ian Jobling and Sylvia Rombach, Media impressions of Cathy Freeman and the Sydney 2000 Olympics Games from an Australian, German and British Perspective, in ???. Carl Diem Institute, University of Cologne, 2003. Freeman has written, ‘... I was proud to light the flame in behalf of all Australians. They say it helped unite the country behind the Games. I am very happy if that was the case.’. Cathy Freeman, An Olympic reflection, in Harry Gordon, The Time of Our Lives, 2003, p.x. For a broader discussion of aboriginal issues, see Helen Lenskyj, Inside the Olympic Industry, 2002, pp. 77-78,142-143,149-152; Darren Godwell, The Olympic branding of aborigines: the 2000 Olympic Games and Australia’s indigenous peoples, in Kay Schaffer and Sidone Smith, The Olympics at the Millennium, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2000.
