The Beijing 2008 Olympics

Why host the Olympics? The Beijing experience and thoughts for London 2012

We are a sporting lot at Locum. Jim Roberts, Director at Locum, (London Marathon time 2hrs 53mins) supported the British Team in Beijing. Jim introduces three articles.

The London Games in 2012 will undoubtedly transform East London. Beijing 2008 will not only transform a city but re-brand and re-present a nation.

First my Locum colleague Roger Hobkinson profiles why cities compete for large events such as the Olympics, then David Faulkner of Colliers International Hong Kong summarises the far reaching impact that this summer’s Olympic and Paralympic Games will have for China and its capital city.

Finally I outline my experiences of supporting the British team in Beijing this August and what lessons might be learnt for London 2012.

Bidding wars for major international events are now notoriously competitive affairs, often attract negative comment and cost large sums just for the bidding let alone the actual hosting – so, why bother? Motivations for hosting major events varies between cities. For example, of more recent Olympic host cities the mature cities (eg Barcelona, Atlanta, Sydney, Athens & London) are less concerned with geo-political considerations than those in emerging countries (Seoul or Beijing). The mature cities seek to fill in gaps in their city and bring forward regeneration projects, such as infrastructure, real estate development and social regeneration initiatives.

Olympic Motivations

Events such as the 2008 Olympics, World Cup, Winter Olympics, the Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games are often done to make a social or geo-political point. For example:

- Moscow 1980 clearly had a political angle although by the end of the decade communism was dying;
- Four years later Los Angeles showed how a free market approach could deliver a successful and profitable games;
- Seoul 1988 opened the world's eyes to the success story of South Korea;
- Barcelona 1992, established Catalonian pride and put the city on the road to being one of the world's favourite city destinations;
- Sydney 2000, helped to confirm Sydney's role in Asia-Pacific and as a great place to live, invest and visit;
- Athens in 2004, helped to modernise the city's infrastructure and make visiting the city a more enjoyable experience;
- Beijing 2008 has helped modernise the city and to show the world China is progressing as a modern open economy;
- London 2012 as a large, mature and open city why host? First to help modernise part of the city's eastern section and perhaps crucially to use the Olympics as a tool to promote "London plc" as it faces increased competition from mature and emerging cities across the world.

A key reason often cited for awarding the 2008 games to Beijing has been that the Games would provide major opportunities speed up the opening up and liberalisation of China. In the era of instant global communications and news, having the world's media investigating Chinese society in the years since Beijing was awarded the Games has certainly contributed to the change now underway. However, the real story remains to be told, for that we will have to wait until 2009, 2010, 2011...
**Destination development impacts?**

The main motivation for hosting Games in the 21st century is attracting global capital flows. In terms of destination development this will mean, becoming a more attractive place to live, work and invest. In particular growing the visitor economy and business destination facilities of the city, for example, in the case of Atlanta and Sydney.

Direct, short-term impacts, are largely focused on the visitor economy sector. Impacts in the real estate sector tend to be a consequence of decisions driven by other motivations, such as image and self-promotion, which provide indirect benefits to the sector and over a longer time frame. One of the key reasons for hosting the Olympics is that it focuses minds and brings forward development more rapidly than would have happened.

A fundamental long-term impact of hosting the Olympics is the ability to direct the pattern of urban development in a shorter period of time than otherwise might have been likely. Investment in infrastructure and environmental improvements was fundamental for Barcelona in 1992, important for Sydney in 2000 and vital for Athens in 2004. For Beijing in 2008, the major urban change underway will not only determine the success of the Games themselves, but also the ability to attract an increased share of global capital to the city. As Beijing is a relatively immature city, the Games can be expected to have a more significant direct impact on the city’s real estate market than those held in Atlanta or Sydney.

**A global advert**

Think back to the images of Sydney 2000 – attractive weren’t they? Fundamentally the Olympics and other major sports events act as a giant global advert to help build a city destination brand. The ability of the city to leverage off the images and perceptions created during the event itself and to continue delivering on the story of the place after the event is crucial. What are the destination brand propositions the city wants to show? Has the city got the destination management organisation to really leverage off the benefits of global attention for 3 to 4 weeks? Are the images long lasting? From men in rocket packs in LA in 1984, the Barcelona cityscape that framed the 1992 swimming and diving competitions, to beach volleyball on Bondi and Triathlons in Sydney Harbour in 2000. Beijing captured the world’s imagination with its “Birds Nest” stadium and “Ice Cube” swimming complex.

In 2012 London promises a mix of the old, new and temporary facilities set within London’s familiar landscape and landmarks.
Beijing 2008

This summer, thousands of athletes descended upon Beijing to participate in the world’s greatest sports spectacle. We were assured that the 2008 Summer Olympics (officially known as the Games of the XXIX Olympiad) will be the ‘People’s Olympics’, ‘High-tech Olympics’ and ‘Green Olympics’ under the guise ‘One World, One Dream’. Since the Games were officially awarded to Beijing on 13 July 2001, the international community has become increasingly polarised with regard to issues pertaining to the Games. But what did the Games mean for China; and how will Beijing be remembered in its aftermath?

New Venues in Beijing

1. National Stadium (Opening / Closing Ceremonies, Athletics, Football)
2. National Aquatics Centre (Swimming, Diving, Synchronized Swimming)
3. National Indoor Stadium (Artistic Gymnastics, Trampoline, Handball)
4. Beijing Shooting Range Hall (Shooting)
5. Beijing Olympic Basketball Gymnasium (Basketball)
6. Laoshan Velodrome (Cycling)
7. Shunyi Olympic Rowing-Canoeing Park
8. China Agricultural University Gymnasium (Wrestling)
9. Peking University Gymnasium (Table Tennis)
10. Beijing Science and Technology University Gymnasium
11. Beijing University of Technology Gymnasium
12. Beijing Olympic Green Tennis Court (Tennis)

Existing Venues in Beijing

13. Olympic Sports Centre Stadium (Modern Pentathlon)
14. Olympic Sports Centre Gymnasium (Handball)
15. Beijing Workers’ Stadium (Football)
16. Beijing Workers’ Gymnasium (Boxing)
17. Capital Indoor Stadium (Volleyball)
18. Fengtai Sports Centre Softball Field (Softball)
19. Yingdong Natatorium of National Olympic Sports Centre (Water Polo)
20. Laoshan Mountain Bike Course (Cycling - Mountain Bike)
21. Beijing Shooting Range CTF (Shooting)
22. Beijing Institute of Technology Gymnasium (Volleyball)
23. Beijing University of Aeronautics & Astronautics Gymnasium (Weightlifting)

Temporary Venue in Beijing

24. Fencing Hall of National Convention Centre (Fencing, Modern Pentathlon)
25. Beijing Olympic Green Hockey Stadium (Hockey)
26. Beijing Olympic Green Archery Field (Archery)
27. Beijing Wukesong Sports Centre Baseball Field (Baseball)
28. Chaoyang Park Beach Volleyball Ground (Beach Volleyball)
29. Laoshan Bicycle Moto Cross (BMX) Venue (Cycling - BMX)
30. Triathlon Venue (Triathlon)
31. Road Cycling Course (Cycling - Road Race)

Venues outside Beijing

Qingdao Olympic Sailing Centre (Sailing)
Hong Kong Olympic Equestrian Venue (Equestrian Events)
Tianjin Olympic Centre Stadium (Football)
Shanghai Stadium (Football)
Shenyang Olympic Stadium (Football)
Qinhuangdao Olympic Sports Centre Stadium (Football)
What was built?
The Chinese Government has arguably embarked upon the most audacious and costly masterplan scheme ever seen for an Olympic Games. At an official cost of some RMB276 billion (£20 billion) financial considerations are obviously not an issue. The fact that the Chinese Government has commissioned such bold architectural designs is deliberate. This event is China’s party piece, and a courageous statement to the world - China is a major player in the world arena.

In total, there were 31 venues built, or modified, in Beijing (plus 45 training venues), as well as sailing in Qingdao, equestrian events in Hong Kong, and football events in Tianjin, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Qinhuangdao. These world-class facilities hosted a total of 302 events across 28 sports between 8 August and 24 August 2008 with an estimated 10,500 athletes participating. As with recent Olympic Games, the venues were financed through public/private partnerships, with the Government providing roughly 50% of the capital required for the developments, on the basis that after the Games these facilities would become commercial ventures.

However, these sports venues are only a small fraction of what was built. The city is literally being redesigned; with a new subway system, new highway network, new sewerage system, new skyscrapers, street widening, various upgrading works, and most poignantly, a new dragon-shaped airport terminal (hailed as the largest building in the world) designed by acclaimed architects Foster and Partners, at an estimated cost of £1.8 billion. Moreover, Beijing’s urban environment is being dramatically enhanced through the construction of various new commercial buildings that have been erected on the back of the Olympics. Some of the most notable projects include the China Central Television (CCTV) Headquarters, the 6,500 seat National Centre for the Performing Arts in Tiananmen Square, and various upscale shopping centres and office buildings, not to mention the deluge of international hotel operators such as Hyatt Regency, Mandarin Oriental, Marriott, Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton who are eager to capitalise on the Games. In all, these developments are expected to require some 1.5 million residents to relocate to other areas of the city.

Impacts of the Games
Upon winning the Olympic bid, Beijing’s then Mayor and President of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Bid Committee, Liu Qi stated that “hosting the Games will help raise the living standards of the Chinese people and speed up China’s reform, which will also leave an important legacy to China”. This is a bold statement, and an ambitious target, but what effect will the Games have?

One key argument put forward to justify the financial burden that the Olympics places on local economies, is that the Games will create employment. This seems logical enough, as the Games do indeed require significant manpower for construction, management, operations, etc. However, it has been argued that the issue of increased employment in rapidly growing economies such as China is somewhat of a fallacy in that those workers employed for the Games would most likely be in employment elsewhere. Nevertheless, it is hard to dispute the positive economic impact that the Games seem to be having on Beijing.

In 2001, the National Bureau of Statistics suggested that the Olympics would push China’s gross domestic product (GDP) by 0.3 to 0.4 percentage points every year for the ensuing seven years. Given the rapid acceleration of the Chinese economy in recent years, the contribution from Olympic-related endeavours is hard to determine. However, the Beijing economy has grown at an impressive rate over the past 5 years, with GDP more than doubling, and tourist statistics illustrating healthy growth rates (low rates in 2003 were a direct result of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak across the region). This growth has, however, had an adverse impact upon the local population as a result of inflation. Unsurprisingly, the Olympics will generate positive returns across the board, with ADRs expected to rise to roughly USD500 a night, and with an expected 3.5 million visitors to the Games (including half a million foreign arrivals) who are forecast to spend USD 4.5 billion during the Games.

One of the most contentious issues associated with these Games is pollution levels. In October 2007, the United Nations reported that air pollution was three times more than the safe limit, which subsequently caused some athletes such as Haile Gebreslassie
to withdraw from certain events at the Games. This is perhaps the first time that environmental concerns have engendered so much public debate at any Games. While, the Chinese Government has taken drastic steps to improve the local environment, they have faced an uphill battle that is only now beginning to bear the fruits of hard labour. Encouragingly, Beijing seems to be using the Olympics as a catalyst for environmental change, with up to 60% of the Beijing Organizing Committee of the 2008 Olympic Games (BOCOG) Budget being earmarked for conservation works, sewerage system upgrading, landscaping, waste disposal and air quality improvements.

In a bid to improve air quality, Beijing has spent some US$15 billion over the last decade (over US$3 billion were spent in 2007 alone) which seems to be having a positive impact. The Government has implemented various policies aimed at improving air quality in the city, which has ranged from relocating coal-burning industries to planting a total of 12,000 hectares of trees in a bid to green up the environment, and reduce the impact of sand storms that frequently hit the city. China Daily, in an article dated 15 April 2008, suggested that "the city notched up 67 'blue sky days' from January to the end of March, 12 more than the same period last year and the highest in nine years". In the immediate lead up to the Games, the capital, along with neighbouring cities and provinces, will implement further measures including a partial ban on vehicular use and the shutting down of major pollution sources. Beijing will go one step further with measures including, taking 3.3 million cars off the road, banning outdoor spray painting, prohibiting quarrying activities, and suspending earthworks on windy days, to name a few. This all sounds great, but what will happen when the expected 500,000 foreign visitors to the Games depart?

Legacy of the Games
Despite the environmental concerns, the likelihood is that these Games will be one of the most memorable in history. China has a point to prove, and is making a concerted effort to proclaim its intentions on the world stage.

As for Beijing, the city is in the midst of a transformation from its relatively dirty, smog-ridden industrial base characterised by functional architecture, to a thriving metropolis with some of the most technologically advanced and innovative developments around. The 29th Olympiad undoubtedly had a multifaceted impact upon the city. Ambitious infrastructure projects are ultimately a blessing for the city, for use by business, locals and tourists alike, with developments bringing social benefits through improvements in communication, transport, environmental conservation, and social awareness. The various sporting venues will enhance sports development in Beijing, and China more generally; but perhaps most importantly, the Games created a sense of national pride.

In all, it seems that the 2008 Summer Olympics will be remembered as one of the most controversial and elaborate displays in history, and firmly place Beijing on the world map as an efficient and modern city which is fully capable of hosting an event of this magnitude. Lastly, and perhaps more importantly, it is worth noting that while the Government has upgraded the city’s hardware, it will be many more years before its software catches up.

David Faulkner
Director, Colliers International Hong Kong
The Beijing Olympic Games was undeniably one of the greatest shows on earth. But what lay behind the show? What made it so spectacular? What problems did Beijing face, or not face up to?

Jim Roberts, Locum Director, travelled to Beijing as a spectator and in this article throws his hat into the Olympic ring to contribute to the collective lessons learned for London 2012.

Ni hao London!

A spectacular opening ceremony and ‘technology enhanced experience’

It started with an unbelievable opening ceremony - a phenomenal spectacle and demonstration of unity and order. One thing is for certain, London should not attempt to compete on scale or spectacle. London needs to be different. London must exploit its freedom, its cultural diversity, its sense of humour and its love and passion for sport and celebration.

A formula for one city is not a blueprint for another.

For the opening ceremony I was yet to arrive in Beijing. Huddled around my computer with Locum colleagues we watched in amazement at the sight of 2008 drummers, the fireworks and colours that lit up the Bird’s Nest, and the eclectic sounds and costumes flashing across the screen (not to mention the creative outfits worn by some of the athletes!).

Hairs were firmly pricked with thoughts of what lay ahead in the next fortnight of competition and the experiences I was about to face.

We were watching the ceremony online through BBC iPlayer. How technology has changed the way in which we can engage with the Games. Interactive services, digital channels, instant playbacks and text updates, blogs, web-casts, pod-casts... the list of innovations since Athens is long and will certainly continue to develop over the next four years.

How will technology improve our experiences in four years time? What different means will allow us to engage and immerse ourselves in London 2012? Technology must continue to be exploited and developed across every aspect of London’s Olympic and Paralympic Games to give the greatest number of people original and world-class experiences.
A deflated arrival

Four days after the opening ceremony we arrived into Beijing airport’s vast new Terminal 3. The design, by Foster + Partners, is fabulous and like everything else we would soon see, on a scale not witnessed before.

Beijing’s Terminal 3 dwarfs Heathrow’s T5 (although it is equally effective at losing luggage).

Despite the long flight we were excited to have arrived. It was late, but surely the welcoming party would stimulate those tired eyes. Unfortunately not. Where was everyone? Where was the Olympic welcome? Our only greeting came from a few airport workers engrossed by the clean and jerk action being played out on a nearby big screen. It felt like we were the last to arrive at the party. In reality we probably were, but still it was not the best first impression.

Unfortunately the trip was riddled with these small but impressionable let downs. Like catering in the venues. The opportunity to showcase Chinese cuisine was replaced by a poorer relation of MacDonald’s.

Despite our deflated arrival and these small setbacks, we were in Beijing and the Olympics were beckoning.

A Royal Flush of Olympic venues

Day three of our trip took us into the Olympic Green for the first time. Despite the rather long and arduous routing of spectators into the park, I can honestly say that once in, those issues were quickly forgotten and we were speechless. Motionless too, apart from our heads craning to take in the awesome spectacle of the Bird’s Nest, the Water Cube, the Pagoda and the rest. But little did we know that the full beauty of these venues would only be revealed at night.

So, was the Bird’s Nest really as good as everyone said? In short, yes. I can honestly say that I have never been more moved by architecture than when I walked in and out of that stadium at night. Obviously the Olympics stirred this feeling but the architecture sung for itself. The huge piazza bridging the Bird’s Nest and the Water Cube was breathtaking. The lighting and ambience was so atmospheric that I found myself gawping in disbelief. I never thought I would describe a stadium as beautiful but the Bird’s Nest is.

Almost certainly we will never again witness such indulgence and extravagance. China had a mission to achieve and they succeeded in delivering a royal flush of venues.

So this begs the question, where does London focus its attention? There simply is not the investment available or public appetite to deliver venues to a similar degree.

For London, the objective which drives the Games is different. Sustainability environmental, socially & operationally must play a pivotal role and this must not just be lip-service or an afterthought. Sustainability must be at the core of delivering the facilities and infrastructure, but more importantly in their after-use as well. It is obvious that one should not commit to building a permanent facility unless you have a sustainable and committed business plan in place – but unfortunately this appears to be happening in London. For Beijing of course, sustainability is not a word presently in their vocabulary.

Don’t complicate Legacy

Unfortunately like ‘sustainability’ the word ‘legacy’ has become overused and exhausted. Most people talk about London’s legacy but have little understanding of what it actually means.

Legacy is a straightforward issue. Legacy is what is left after the Olympic circus has moved on. And not just the physical. Unfortunately I fear that the tiers of committees and organisations linked to 2012 are continuing to hamper the ability to take pragmatic and timely decisions and it is this that is complicating and confusing legacy.

There are some fantastic legacy concepts but I fear many will fail to surface for fear that they might not represent ‘optimum’ value. One only needs to look and understand the emerging transformation of the Olympic Park by the ODA and the stories of local skills training and employment, the decontamination of the site and the re-use of materials to witness sustainability in action.

One thing is for certain, the London 2012 stakeholders must stop prevaricating about legacy plans and commit themselves to a sustainable future path, even if that means delivering a significantly greater proportion of temporary infrastructure. On behalf of the British tax-paying public I urge officials to stop posturing and take some decisions.
Spreading atmosphere beyond the venues

Sadly the atmosphere in Beijing city was in stark contrast to the Olympic venues. Inside it was electric; better than I could have ever imagined. Outside, apart from the Olympic branded banners that hung from every street-lamp, there was virtually nothing to suggest that the Games were actually there.

It was almost as if all focus and effort had been concentrated on the venues and the rest of Beijing forgotten.

This contrast was evidently compounded by the huge clear-up, and clear-out, that had preceded the Games. The city was quiet. The near silence was eerie. It was not until we had been there a week that I saw a homeless person sleeping on the street. Even the remaining Hutongs had been tarted up with new tarmac and painted walls to mask what lay behind, thus presenting a clean existence to any tourists that may wander through. But still, there was no sense of the Olympics in these areas.

Away from the venues we found it easier to text friends back home than to find out Olympic results locally. This was madness but an indication of the limited spread of Olympics beyond the venues and perhaps an indication of the importance placed on visiting spectators.

Of course, one must remember that in the grand scheme of the Olympics, visiting spectators represent only a tiny fraction of the overall audience. Yes, they are important to help catalyse future tourism, but overall the numbers are small. In Beijing virtually every person we spoke to claimed a connection to any athlete. There appeared to be very few genuine sports tourists.

I would challenge the official numbers and suggest that little more than 50,000 overseas visitors actually made the journey. And remember that for London, we are likely to see a drop in normal visitor numbers during the Olympics as a result of the ‘stay-away’ factor. There is, of course, the opportunity for the rest of the UK to benefit in 2012 from the London drop-off by promoting themselves as alternative destinations, but capitalising on the 2012 factor.

London and Great Britain will be very different. There will be a party atmosphere throughout the land. There will be places for spectators to congregate and experience the Games together. The impact on GDP during the 2012 Games will surely suffer. It will be holiday time with employers receiving a windfall of leave requests. Olympic parties and viewing fests will break out in homes and gardens, bars and restaurants, public squares and parks and, for those at work, the online streaming will be rife.

The UK knows how to party and the Cultural Olympiad is an obvious means of building a crescendo. I am sure that, unlike China, UK residents and visitors will be able to sense the Olympics are in town and the atmosphere will stretch far beyond the venues.

For Destination UK this is extremely important as the experiences of every visitor will return home with them and cascade through family, friends and business networks. Positive experiences will convert into return trips. Sydney successfully cashed in on this tourism legacy, whereas Turin missed out and for Beijing, time will tell, but I fear an opportunity has been missed.

Invisible security

The single most volatile risk to positive experiences in London will be terrorism. We cannot avoid the inevitable but we can plan to avoid being overrun by protectionist behaviour and intrusive security measures.

Security in Beijing appeared tight and restrictive yet their polite and sincere approach created a calm spectator experience. Despite the lines of volunteers, security and police controlling your every movement, it certainly was not heavy-handed, far from it; in fact it was quite surreal at times when compared to western sporting events where crowds whip themselves up into frenzied excitement and physical crowd control is a necessity.

Though for some events like the marathon, which attempts to route around every major city landmark, the security was farcical. Spectators were severely restricted from getting anywhere near the course. That is, unless you were Chinese and had been bussed in and told to line the course, wave flags and wear smiley face stickers along with thousands of your compatriots. This attempt to manufacture a backdrop was disconcerting for us foreigners. Despite the huge security presence, however, bizarrely the event was still not secure. Fortunately no serious incident passed off. But for someone with intent, the fact that ordinary cyclists and motorists were able to meander along the marathon course right up until the athletes pounded past made a mockery of the entire security set up.

Of course, security is a necessity to protect the athletes and avoid tragedies and embarrassments for the host nation. But the athletes themselves want atmosphere. The last thing a marathon runner wants is 26.2 miles of silence. For London the challenge must be to create ‘invisible security’.

“Let’s make sure our Games delivers the best ever experiences for all the world to enjoy”
Knowledge volunteers

Despite the numbers of volunteers recruited for Beijing, their training was certainly lacking. It was frustrating at times. With large distances between venues and a serious lack of intelligible signage, the need for knowledgeable volunteers was great. Yet, a simply question would receive seven or eight desperate volunteers wanting to please with the majority failing. One could not fault the volunteer’s commitment, simply the execution that was lacking.

China’s visitor economy is embryonic compared to Europe’s and to a certain extent one can understand the volunteer pitfalls. But China was hosting the world’s largest international sporting event and inviting the world into its playground. I had an expectation that some volunteers would speak English and that there would be sufficient signage to navigate myself around.

London is capable of welcoming and hosting visitors well but this should not be taken for granted. Individuals need to be inspired to take up their ambassadorial duties on behalf of the nation – and certainly, one can learn from the Beijingers here. It is not just about the 70,000 official volunteers - London must focus on ‘quality not quantity’.

Furthermore, our government must treat the UK visitor economy more seriously by increasing investment and not just relying on cheaper immigrant labour to hold up the hospitality sector, but instead help create a highly skilled economy that delivers real and valued career paths.

Beat the drugs

As a spectator in Beijing I was proud to be British despite the lack of athletics medals. I was particularly proud that as a team, Britain is one of the cleanest. The extent of drug testing for our athletes is routine and exhausting. But for other countries this is not always the case.

Questions will always remain whether one athlete is clean or not. It is a complex issue which needs a complex and widespread solution to manage and deliver a level playing field.

Come 2012, Britain should lead by example and be proud of the fact that Team GB will be one of the most tested group of athletes in the world and therefore one of the cleanest.

Investment in Team GB

China demonstrated how concentrated support and investment can deliver medals. So too did Team GB (and four years ahead of schedule, if you believe the BOA).

One should not underestimate the benefits which radiate from a host-nation’s success on the field. The pride and inspiration that it stimulates is invaluable. Sport ignites passion and cohesion and helps break through barriers.

A country’s interest in a particular sport is certainly correlated to its team’s performance. The deafening cheers of support for China’s athletes were impossible to ignore. And back home the level of interest steadily grew as more medals were bagged and the BBC’s Olympic Breakfast became a daily ritual.

Britain must continue investing in its athletes and not just in those sports that delivered in Beijing.

And finally...

It is easy to find criticism in the Olympic plans and our nation’s backside is sore from sitting on the fence and believing the glass is half empty. There is so much positive coming out of London 2012 but unfortunately much of it fails to reach the news stands. Come on Team GB – the glass is certainly half full. Let’s make sure our Games delivers the best ever experiences for all the world to enjoy, be they athletes, spectators, tourists, sponsors and everyone else lucky enough to visit London in 2012!

Don’t forget its about the athletes

All of my experiences ignore those of the athletes themselves.

As a spectator my importance is well down the list. Of course, billions of TV addicts around the world are of far greater value to the Olympics and its host nation. And the media certainly stand in higher regard. And let’s not forget the VIPs, dignitaries, NOC and IOC members and their entourages - all vitally important. But one must not forget the athletes, for the Games are nothing without them.

Beijing did not forget them. The village, and the accommodation within, was the best equipped and designed of recent Games. Small improvements can always be added such as changing the canteen-style food hall from a ‘process’ focus to something more personal and relevant; and providing dedicated neutral zones where athletes can meet and mix with friends and family rather than relying on individual NOC’s like the BOA did with their ‘Team GB Lodge’. But overall Beijing’s village was a success and the athlete transportation and connection to venues was punctual and slick.

Jim Roberts
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