Olympic 2008 Essay, Research Paper

Winning the right to stage the Olympic and Paralympic Games forever

changed the face of Sydney, Australia. The now-familiar images of

Darling Harbour, Homebush Bay and Bondi are only part of the most

recent stunning Olympic legacy.

Urban renewal, environmental conservation, recreational and sporting

venues, and a renewed national amateur sports program were all set

in high gear when Sydney was awarded the Games.

When TO-2008 announced its master plan for hosting the Olympic and

Paralympic Games one year ago, there were five objectives: improve

our environment, upgrade our city infrastructure, provide better accessibility

for the disabled, more housing downtown (including “affordable”

housing) and create a prosperous economy.

At this stage, seven months before the vote, there is still a chance

that Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of the International Olympic

Committee, will pronounce Toronto the winner this July, when the IOC

announces the official host city of the 2008 Olympic and Paralympic

Games. Winning the Games will forever change the face of Toronto.

Our Olympic plan is an ambitious and innovative one, which will generate

long-awaited waterfront redevelopment, the construction of permanent

facilities, new roads, rapid transit upgrades, new downtown housing,

and much more.

The best news today is that we don’t have to wait for 2008 to see

the benefits of our Olympic dreams. The Toronto 2008 Olympic Bid (TO-

2008) has already set in motion a process of urban revitalization,

amateur sports renewal and civic rejuvenation that is underway whether

it wins the right to host the Games or not.

Toronto is a waterfront city. And yet for most of this century, much

of our waterfront has remained a barren stretch of industrial portland.

Earlier this year, the Fung Task Force Report described the site as

“. . . nearly 2,000 acres of undeveloped, misused or derelict lands

. . . a significant portion of the land is environmentally degraded,

lacks infrastructure and has totally outmoded plans and regulations.’

‘ Since 1911, governments have tried to address these issues, but

repeated attempts have failed .

Enter the TO-2008 Olympic Bid. Driven by the requirements of the

bidding process and as a clear sign of their support, Prime Minister

Jean Chretien, Premier Mike Harris and Mayor Mel Lastman committed

$1.5 billion last October – $500 million from each government – for

the first phase of a massive waterfront reclamation project, which

will see major infrastructure development, environmental clean-up

of the area, including the Don River, and the creation of green spaces

along the waterfront. In essence, we should finally have a waterfront

of which we can all be proud.

Whether or not the Games come to Toronto in 2008, the redevelopment

of Toronto’s waterfront and infrastructure has begun. These projects

and others have been all or partly driven by the 2008 Olympic Bid.

This overarching process of rebuilding our community comes as a result

of the bid for the 2008 Olympic Games, but will proceed with or without

those Games.

The Sydney Games sparked an intense debate about Canada’s commitment

to amateur sport, bringing the government’s financial commitment to

athletes under scrutiny. Canada’s amateur sport policy was contrasted

to the Australian national program, initiated several years ago, which

injects hundreds of millions of dollars annually to create, train

and develop our youth physically and athletically.

As an athlete-driven bid – conceived and sustained with the ongoing

participation of more than 150 Canadian athletes – TO-2008 has worked

from the beginning to create a sport legacy in Canada. Last fall,

it announced the creation of a new, independent, non-profit foundation

dedicated to the advancement of junior athletes. The Foundation for

Athletes and Sport Training (FAST), funded by public and private money,

will give grants to eligible charitable sport agencies, which will

in turn distribute the money to individual athletes, programs and

organizations. Harris has already committed $10 million to this program.

The arts and culture component of the Games is integral but often

overlooked. Every city hosting the Games must present an accompanying,

spectacular Olympic Arts Festival. This festival lasts four years,

consisting, in fact, of four annual festivals. TO-2008 unveiled its

expansive Olympic Arts and Culture program in December, including

a number of initiatives intended to showcase arts and culture as a

visible, viable and integral component of our community.Together,

these initiatives will showcase the scope, diversity and excellence

of Toronto’s arts community.

The rewards of the Olympic bid are not all tangible. Co-operation

has been an important hallmark of Toronto’s 2008 bid. Inclusion has

constituted one of its pillars from the outset, under our Chair David

Crombie. The bid has worked hard to reflect the characteristics of

diversity that define Toronto. In addition to the co-operation it

has brought about between governments, TO-2008 has brought together

individuals and communities from across the city, signing up 60,000

volunteers so far.

All cities that bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games make

elaborate and visionary plans. And every Olympiad leaves behind a

legacy. But few bids truly do. Looking around, we can already see

the beginnings of TO-2008’s legacy to our community and to sport.

Already, we are winning.