

If you want to win the Olympics you can't just pitch up on the day

What is true for an athlete is also true for a city hoping to host the Games, as a key adviser to Rio de Janeiro's bid explains



MIKE LEE

The road to the historic decision to bring the Olympic and Paralympic Games to South America for the first time has been a long one. When we began working with Rio de Janeiro, when they were shortlisted in Athens in June 2008, the bid was struggling. There were some very major issues around the infrastructure, particularly transport and security. The position was not so different from the one London found itself in at the same stage of the 2012 race. And, just like London, Rio put a team together to develop a winning campaign.

One of the reasons they brought us on board was because of the lessons of London. People forget that when London was shortlisted we were fourth out of five and had big question marks around transport in particular. The key was to build the technical base and the emotional appeal. London taught us to be brave. One thing you learn if you look at the history is that the IOC can make bold decisions, despite their reputation as a conservative body. When it matters, the IOC often understand what they need to do to keep the Games fresh.

Once you are shortlisted by becoming a candidate city, you have 18 months to resolve technical challenges and really achieve lift-off with your bid. The serious campaigning can begin and that also involves building a powerful narrative and promoting internationally.

There was a view in Olympic circles that South America had never had the Games because it wasn't capable of hosting them. If we had built the campaign only around going to South America for the first time, we would have lost. As the London team did, Rio had to combine the rational and the emotional, building a story that understood the context of the Olympic movement.

We didn't want to overplay, too early on, the fact it was a historic moment. Unless we could say Rio was ready then the other side of the campaign, which was all about passion, celebration and emotion, couldn't work.

We brought both sides together in our Copenhagen presentation with Brazil's president, Lula, and the governor of the central bank, Henrique Meirelles, and then the emotion of bid leader Carlos Nuzman (a former Olympian and head of Brazil's Olympic Committee).

Lula was absolutely crucial because, just like Tony Blair in the London campaign, he worked at this for two

You can't stand there and point the finger at them and lecture them. The mistake some of the other bidders made was that they didn't seem to have thought enough about the people in that room, their motivations and their ambitions for the Games and the Olympic movement.

The defining idea was bringing together the journey of Brazil with the journey of the movement. Just as the Rio Negro, black river, and the Amazon, brown river, merge to form the world's largest river, we wanted to say: we've been on a journey to create this new, modern Brazil and you've been on a journey to keep the Games relevant, now let's bring them together.

We wanted to convey that the journey of Brazil wasn't just about Carnival and New Year's Eve and the beaches. It's a journey under Lula of lifting 30 million people out of poverty, one that has taken them to top tables and helped redefine the world economic order.

The IOC members, to their credit, realised that if you live in the modern world and you are going to achieve your aims, you can't stand still. That is one of the reasons why the Olympic Games is as big as it is. What we were really saying to the IOC was: if not now, then when?

If you look at the World Cup and the Olympic Games, three of the next four are going to Africa and South America. Rio has opened the way for the other emerging economies. You have to look to Russia and India. There are African countries, including South Africa, that are right to have ambitions about hosting the Olympics in future.

Then there's the Middle East. They might not yet have all the infrastructure we normally talk about when we think about hosting a major event, but they have the resources, the desire and a commitment to make sport a key part of their future. The lesson from Rio's success is that if you are serious and if you are committed, all things are possible.

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ROAD TO RIO

FIRST ROUND

Madrid 28, Rio de Janeiro 26, Tokyo 22, Chicago 18 (Chicago eliminated)

SECO DROUND

Rio de Janeiro 46, Madrid 29, Tokyo 20 (Tokyo eliminated)

FINAL ROUND

Rio de Janeiro 66, Madrid 32 (Madrid eliminated)
99 votes cast, 98 valid, 1 abstention

years. The reason we were never fazed about Obama coming was because we knew if he was coming, he was only flying in for the day. The message for heads of state is that you have to commit yourself. Lula was amazing. He delivered financial guarantees, established cross-party support, worked with the governor and the mayor, raised the issue with other heads of state, wrote personally to every IOC member, went to Beijing, visited the London Olympic Park. This is what you have to do. Not just pitch up on the day.

It all came together in our map visual. We showed the previous Games continent by continent and put numbers on it: 30 Games in Europe, five in Asia, 12 in North America including eight in the USA, and a big gap over South America. But the key thing was the tone we developed.

As Nuzman spoke about it, he wasn't trying to make the members feel guilty.