Australia and the Olympic Games
1956 Melbourne Olympics and 2000 Sydney Olympics

The Games

Getting the Games

Melbourne and Sydney’s successful bids for the Olympic Games were not the only attempts in the era of the modern Olympic Games. Brisbane bid for the 1992 Olympics and Melbourne for the 1996 Olympics. Interest in getting the Games was shown by individuals, federal governments and IOC representatives from Australia (Richard Coombes) as far back as 1900 after the success of the lone Australian, Edwin Flack, at the Athens 1896 Olympics. A syndicate in Western Australia tried to use the Trans-Australian Exposition in Perth as a reason to gain the sixth Olympiad for Perth. It was suggested that Victoria could host the 1956 Winter Olympic Games at Mt. Buffalo as well as the Summer Games in Melbourne. Sydney made a proposal for the 1972 Olympic Games. Following the highly successful XII Commonwealth Games in Brisbane in 1982, that city bid for the 1992 Olympic Games. Melbourne bid for the 1996 Olympic Games.

Despite not being successful in the 1990’s this set up a platform with the IOC for Sydney’s successful bid for the 2000 Olympic Games. These proposals and official bids and Melbourne’s success in 1956 are clear evidence that Australia realized the national and international importance of hosting the Games.

Investigate the successful bids and remember that even after the host city has been announced, the right to host the Games can be removed and given to one of the other bidders if the city doesn’t meet IOC preparation deadlines.

Melbourne Olympics 1956 – The bid

Focus

In 1949 Melbourne only won the right to host Australia’s first Olympics of 1956 by one vote. What were the obstacles which Melbourne had to overcome and how did the bidding votes go during the process?

Activity

Explore the approach and issues of the Melbourne bid for the 1956 Olympic Games. This should include the role of Sir Frank Beaurepaire as an ex-Olympian and businessman, quarantine issues, how Melbourne won by just one vote and IOC criticisms.


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This includes the Olympic voting details.
Criticism of Melbourne’s preparations

The President of the IOC, Avery Brundage, had made his negative opinion clear about Melbourne hosting the 1956 Olympic Games. So when Melbourne won the right to host by one vote from Buenos Aires, it had to convince the IOC President that it would be ready in time. He made a surprise visit to Melbourne in 1955.

Activity
Outline Brundage’s criticisms of Melbourne’s preparations?
Were these criticisms justified? What was the outcome?

Here is an account:

Kent Hughes was mortified. On 28 April, he wrote to Burghley, who was by now one of two IOC vice-presidents. He called the visit the Brundage Typhoon, and went on:

*Quite frankly, either the Olympics get rid of Mr Brundage, or Mr Brundage gets rid of the Olympics. Even though he has been called many names* I think should have been able to cap the lot. He never considered the Chairman of the Melbourne Games [Kent Hughes himself] worth advising of his intended visit ... *We will straighten this out. What I am worrying about is the overseas publicity. I told Mr Brundage when he was here that he had cost us anything up to £200,000 in adverse publicity overseas and made the job of the organisers 10 times harder. At the moment, Melbourne’s preparations are far ahead of those at Helsinki, and I have every reason to believe that the Games will be a tremendous success, but if Mr Brundage remains, I venture to prophesy in advance that there will not be many more Olympic contests.*

In Paris in 1955, Brundage gave to IOC members his own account of the visit. He said he had told Australian officials: “Your projects have been changed several times. Your sites, even including the main stadium, have been changed several times. I discover that you are contemplating changing the rowing site to a place I’ve never heard of.” Even today you haven’t fixed the dimensions of the velodrome, or decided on the shooting site. You have changed the head of your organisation several times, and there seems to be much confusion.” Swerving easily among the metaphors, he summed up: “My observations caused a grenade of sensation in the world press, and had the effect of an atom bomb. The reaction to all this ... has been excellent. I just regret I didn’t say it earlier.” He felt that the project was now moving with order and efficiency: “I think our Australian friends have taken seriously their award of the Games, and realise that they will profit from their last chance to make a good impression on the world.”

The harsh words undoubtedly helped, because from that time the arguments and the delays ceased.

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Sydney Olympics 2000 – The bid

The level of Australian interest in hosting the Olympics in 1992 and 1996, the legacy of the successful Melbourne Games in 1956 and years of Olympic sporting success were the foundations for Sydney’s bid for the 2000 Olympics. Among other things, Sydney offered an Olympic Games which provided the climate, high national support and the opportunity to demonstrate that an Olympic host city could support urban sustainability and be left with a positive legacy. The growing costs for host cities and nations was a factor which threatened to rule out bids from smaller countries and economies.

Focus
The main features of Sydney’s bid for the 2000 Olympic Games.

Activity
Explore the approach and issues of the Sydney bid for the 1956 Olympic Games. This should include the role of the AOC in supporting Sydney, the main features of Sydney’s bid, the level of public support and how Sydney won the IOC votes.

The Bid Promotional video
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDaGolSxo4Y&feature=related

The Games TV Promotional Show looks at the other bid cities: Manchester

YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyMt6veKOVY&feature=related

Olympic Proposals and Bids by Australian Cities, Ian Jobling, Department of Human Movement Studies University of Queensland

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