

Looking Back

All Olympic Games have a social and economic impact on the host cities and countries. The Games provide improved sports infrastructure, improved transport facilities, an affirmation of the city and countries heritage and identity, civic confidence, regional pride, promotion of tourism, improved volunteer ethos, environmental improvements and a celebration of sporting excellence by athletes from so many countries and cultures. Not all aspects are as positive over time as others. Melbourne was called the 'Friendly Games' and Sydney the 'Green Games' and these generalizations reflect some of what the host cities gave to the Olympic movement at that particular time.

Looking Back - Melbourne 1956

This was the first major international event for Melbourne and Australia. The Games may have only been from November 22 to the closing ceremony on December 8, but the years of anticipation and preparations and the experiences of the athletes and excitement of contact with the rest of the world had a legacy.



Focus

The nature of the legacy of the Melbourne Olympic Games for the host city and Australia.

Activity



Identify some aspects of the 1956 Olympic legacy for Melbourne and Australia.

Design an online exhibition of the highlights of the Melbourne Olympic Games. This will include your choice of design software, such as Microsoft Word or Adobe Fireworks or Adobe Dreamweaver to design a webpage. There is technical help at the following online sites.

Example: *Snap! - Press photos from the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games*, Exhibition catalogue from the 50th anniversary of the Melbourne Olympics. It focused on press photographs as evidence before television came to dominate and explored aspects of the Olympics' relationship to the Cold War, Australian sport and other relevant issues. You can download the catalogue from this site.

<http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/citygallery/Exhibitions/Pages/Snap.aspx>

Technical help:

Microsoft Word 2007

[http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/LRRView/10089/index.htm?Signature=\(964a6f4d-ad71-4e36-a199-c71b873fd894\)](http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/LRRView/10089/index.htm?Signature=(964a6f4d-ad71-4e36-a199-c71b873fd894))

This includes a demonstration of website creation.

Adobe Fireworks

[http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/LRRView/10377/index.htm?Signature=\(ef107a75-18fa-447f-a83c-d409fb45c01d\)](http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/LRRView/10377/index.htm?Signature=(ef107a75-18fa-447f-a83c-d409fb45c01d))

Adobe Dreamweaver

[http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/LRRView/10378/index.htm?Signature=\(d7192b80-d03d-4232-b2bb-cac7883192c7\)](http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au/lrrSecure/Sites/LRRView/10378/index.htm?Signature=(d7192b80-d03d-4232-b2bb-cac7883192c7))

WHEN THE OLYMPIC GAMES moved into Melbourne, from 22 November to 8 December 1956, it was as if the city had been brushed by a certain magic. Nothing before or since - no football final or Test cricket match or Melbourne Cup, neither the departure of Burke and Wills nor the arrival of the Beatles has ever evoked such sheer emotional involvement from the whole community. It

was not just the huge success of the Australian team, with thirteen gold medals, eight silver and thirteen bronze, that made the Games so sublimely memorable; nor was it the arrival of a whole new contingent of national heroes and heroines, with names like Cuthbert, Fraser, Crapp, Henricks and Rose. Those things contributed significantly, of course, but there was also a dimension that seemed almost transcendental. Certainly there was about those Games, at a time of fierce international tension, a reassuring innocence.

Indeed, many students of the Olympic movement would argue that these were the last of the innocent Games, that after them came invasions from the corrupting forces of television, drugs and professionalism. The innocence asserted itself away from the arenas, too, as people from the suburbs made outings to the Heidelberg Olympic Village to gawk at, and offer shy welcome to, people from the other sides of oceans, some of them in exotic robes and quaint headgear. For a city and a nation which considered themselves worldly, but were in truth prisoners of their own geography, the Games offered a step towards maturity, and a gentle exercise in multiculturalism (long before that word ever entered the dialogue of politicians and academics).

Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p203

A Green and Pleasant Memory – Prime Minister Robert Menzies

The Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, wrote his impressions of what the Melbourne Olympic Games had achieved. This was included in the official Olympic Report submitted by the host city after the Games.



Focus

The Prime Minister, R.G.Menzies impressions of the Melbourne Olympic Games.

Activity



- What were his three 'lasting impressions'?
- From your investigations, are all the Prime Minister's impressions historically accurate?
- Identify aspects which show the context of 1956, some ten years after World War II, and the Australian character.

A Green and Pleasant Memory

In the minds of the many thousands who saw the Melbourne Olympic Games of 1956 there still lives a green and pleasant memory. In the course of my own life I have seen many magnificent sights. I have seen nothing more stirring than the Opening and Closing Days at the Main Stadium.

There can be no doubt that from first to last the Games were a great success. In the early days, before the site for the track events had been settled, there were unhappy disputes and differences. But these were all resolved, and in the long run an organization of remarkable efficiency came into being. Looking back on it all, I believe that three things in particular made a lasting impression.

The first was the actual detailed organization of the events; the day to day timetables; the phenomenal punctuality and despatch. If a certain event were scheduled for three minutes past three and you looked at your watch and saw that it was three minutes past three, you could look up with complete confidence to see the runners on their marks and the starter with the pistol in his hand.

This kind of thing seemed easy to the uninitiated. It was, in fact, the result of tremendous preliminary work and rehearsal and administrative discipline. In the result it meant that the interest of the spectators was constantly keyed up, that there were no delays or irritations, and that the dramatic balance of the programme was undisturbed.

We in Australia are commonly (and sometimes rightly) regarded as rather casual people. I am sure that very few people expected that the events would, technically, be run at least as well as they have ever been run in the long Olympic history. When it was all over, we were proud, and every visitor who spoke to me was delighted.

The second memorable aspect was of the Games as a spectacle. Few had perhaps realised that the green sward, the blue sky, the orange-coloured tracks, the gay colours of the contestants, the swift movement of the runners, the high curved soaring of the javelins, would all combine into a picture which was artistically exciting. This aspect of these great athletic contests is one worth mentioning. It is sometimes forgotten that from the point of view of the onlooker the athlete practises not only a skill but an art. What is happening in the arena appeals as much to the eye as to the pulse and the spirit of partisanship. Those days at the Main Stadium are indeed among the high lights of memory !

The third aspect was one which I mention with particular pleasure because I had not dared to expect it. On more than one occasion in modern times, international athletic contests have provoked ill-will and jealousies and bitter national resentments. Such cases have, of course, been by no means the rule, but even as exceptions they have been sufficiently advertised to induce in many minds a feeling that we might at Melbourne see some awkward manifestations of national prejudice or of resentment in defeat. It is therefore splendid to be able to record that no ill-will appeared. Winners from many countries (some of them politically hostile to each other) were applauded with equal enthusiasm. Gallant losers were, in our racial tradition, applauded even more vigorously.

Australia and the Olympic Games

1956 Melbourne Olympics and 2000 Sydney Olympics



The Games

At the Opening Ceremony, when all the teams marched behind their national flags and wore their ceremonial and distinctive clothing, the vast crowd gave an unforgettable and warm reception to all. The fact that this team or that team represented a nation quite recently at war with us made no difference. There was indeed among over a hundred thousand people, without preliminary organization, without any suggestions or directions, a spontaneity of mind and of welcome that I have never seen equaled.

I had the vagrant thought that, if the whole ground and concourse of people could have been floated on a magic carpet and set down next to the United Nations headquarters in New York, it might have solved by one warm-hearted stroke of imagination some of the dreary disputes which drag their slow way along in the committee rooms and corridors of that vast building.

The Closing Ceremony was even more remarkable. Frankly, I expected it to be an anti-climax. The contests were over. The last stopwatch had been put away. True, there was a great choir which sang unforgettably. There was a sort of retrospective hubbub in the crowd. But there was no organized march of teams. On the contrary, they all got mingled together. They marched around the ground, very badly from the point of view of a drill sergeant, dressed in all sorts and conditions of garments, chatting to each other, waving to their friends, new or old. You would have thought that nothing much could come of such a march. But it was in fact superbly dramatic.

On the first day they had all marched as competitors in their national teams, preserving their national identity, headed by their national flags. On the last day they went around the arena as men and women who had learned to be friends, who had broken down some of the barriers of language, of strangeness, of private prejudices. And because of this, the last day became a remarkable international demonstration, carrying with it a significance which was not overlooked by anybody lucky enough to be present.

Calm judgment, of course, indicates that in some ways the effect of such great athletic events is relatively ephemeral. I for one would make no extravagant claims about them. But long after the names of the winners have faded from memory and the records then made have been broken, there will remain in the minds of many thousands of men and women, old or growing old, a warming memory of an event which had, as I believe, an enduring human significance.

ROBERT G. MENZIES,
President of the Games.

Source Official Report of the Melbourne Olympic Games pages 13-14

Other Sources

Parliament of Australia, Library: The Modern Olympics: an overview
<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rp/2007-08/08rp32.htm>

Extension

The Home Front: Hostess, Housewife and Home in Olympic Melbourne, 1956
Rachel Buchanan - http://www.api-network.com/main/pdf/scholars/jas72_buchanan.pdf

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