

Manifesto for a better Olympics

Mark Perryman bursts the London 2012 bubble by suggesting that the Games fall well short in terms of inclusiveness and economic benefits for the British public. Amongst ways to improve the Olympics, he argues for aiming for maximum participation, spreading out events across a host nation rather than city, improving accessibility, and lowering costs of attendance.



There is scarcely a scrap of evidence from any previous Olympic Games of economic regeneration or a sustainable boost in employment. Not one recent Olympic host nation can point to an increase in sport participation levels as a result of the Olympics. As for tourism, the Olympics leads to a decrease in visitors not an increase as the travel industry, which has no reason at all not to be one of the Games' biggest supporters, has repeatedly pointed out.

Despite all this no politician, nor a single sports administrator and none of the well-resourced think-tanks has come up with a plan for a better Olympics for all. This is what my new book, *Why The Olympics Aren't Good For Us, And How They Can Be*, uniquely sets out to do.

I love sport, my book is not in any sense anti-Olympics, and I joyfully admit I will be amongst the first to be consumed by the excitement of the Games once they begin. But I also firmly believe that they could have been so much better, something far too important to ignore as the Gold Medals are hung around Team GB athletes' necks.

My 'New Five Rings' are really quite simple ideas, together they are founded on the core principle that to make a 'home' games worthwhile they must be organised with the objective that the maximum number of people should be able to take part. If not, then its the remote control and the sofa for most of us, and thus the Games might as well be anywhere else but in Britain.

Ring One: A decentralised Games taking place all over GB. A local Games for large parts of the population. Drop Host City and replace it with Host Nation. This one change would at least make major parts of the Olympic programme geographically accessible instead of everything being located in London.

Ring Two: A games with the objective of maximum participation. Across Britain we have numerous huge stadiums, mainly football grounds, yet capable of being used for a vast range of other Olympic sports. But virtually none are being utilised. Centralising all events in London venues with much smaller capacities than would otherwise be available slashes the size of audience who can attend and increases the ticket price for the few, instead of lowering those prices for the many.

Ring Three: Shift the bulk of the programme outside of stadiums entirely for large scale free-to-watch events. A multi-stage cycling Tour of Britain, a Round Britain yachting race, a canoe marathon, open water swimming events in the country's Lakes and Lochs. The true measure of London's chronic lack of ambition is the scrapping of the Marathon route, one of the few current free-to-watch Olympic events. The 26.2 mile London Marathon route which is lined each year with hundreds of thousands of spectators has been replaced by 4 six mile laps, reducing the potential audience by 75 per cent. A disgraceful decision which has scarcely been commented upon by media commentators too busy with their LOCOG cheerleading.

Ring Four: Olympics sports that are universally accessible. The same countries always win the Equestrian, Yachting and Rowing events while entire continents have never won a single medal in these sports. These are sports that require vast investment, specialist facilities and have next to no mass appeal. Compare the breadth of countries which have won boxing, football, middle and long distance running medals. These are sports requiring no expensive kit or facilities, use simple rules, and have massive appeal. Sports should be chosen because of their accessibility and then given targets to prove

it. If they fail to do so, drop them and replace them with others. My favourite candidate for reintroduction is the tug-of-war, which last featured at the 1920 Games. It is one of the most basic sports imaginable, all that is required is a length of sturdy rope, the teams could be mixed which is another plus, and in a packed stadium a tug of war competition is a potential crowd pleaser too, at least as much if not more than some of the privileged sports currently enjoying Olympic status.

Ring Five: A symbol of sport not a logo for the sponsors. Reverse the priorities. The only use permitted for the precious Olympics Five Rings should be by voluntary and community groups on a not-for-profit basis to promote sport. The sponsors should be banned from any use of the Five Rings. They need sport just as much as sport needs their millions yet the IOC and LOCOG sell the Olympics short by meekly complying with the sponsors ever-escalating demands. And lets not forget who is the biggest sponsor of London 2012, the British taxpayer.

I want to build a new Olympics, to take the best of the Games I first fell in love with (and have the sticker album to prove it) and reimagine what they could still become. Why has no such alternative, to date, been offered? *Why The Olympics Aren't Good For Us* looks to redress that balance. Let the debate begin.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the British Politics and Policy blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

About the author

Mark Perryman is a research fellow in sport and leisure culture at the Chelsea School, University of Brighton. His book, [Why The Olympics Aren't Good For Us, And How They Can Be](#) is exclusively available from www.orbooks.com.

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