

Nick's Olympic fantasy

7 Aug 2012 by Nick Lander

*It's difficult for us pessimistic, sceptical Brits to come to terms with how well our team and the Olympics organisation has performed. Below Nick presents a possible alternative, possibly even better, scenario. See [here](#) for how you, whatever your nationality and whereabouts, can win a bottle of **Pol Roger, Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill 1999 Champagne** by continuing the theme.*

At 11 pm on 5 July 2005 two large black cars stopped outside the British High Commission and the French Embassy in Singapore. Prime Minister Tony Blair and his assistant stepped into one, President Jacques Chirac and his assistant stepped into the other.

Ten minutes later both cars drew up simultaneously at the private entrance to the Aoki restaurant, where the four men were whisked into a private room. Their arrival and departure went completely unnoticed.

There was little in the room other than a sideboard with a large bottle of Tiger beer, a bottle of Chablis, both opened, and several glasses. Next to them, unopened, was a bottle of Pol Roger 1995 vintage champagne, which Chirac's assistant had recalled was Sir Winston Churchill's favourite champagne, just in case this rendezvous ended successfully.

There was only one topic to be discussed. The following day the IOC would announce the host city for the 2012 Olympics and there were now only two finalists: London and Paris. But the leaders' two assistants, who had been charged for several months with evaluating the short- and long-term consequences of taking on the role of host city in the 21st century, had come to a different and, they believed, significantly more beneficial conclusion.

In their opinion, for the good of their particular countries and for Europe as a whole - and perhaps even for world peace - both leaders should decline this honour. Instead, setting a precedent that they believed could lead only to a better appreciation of, and tolerance for, the International Olympic movement, the following morning the leaders of England and France would present a joint bid. The 2012 Olympics would be held in London and Paris.

There were numerous compelling reasons for this solution. No two major capital cities are physically closer to each other and none is served by better, or more modern, transport facilities. Both already possessed sufficient infrastructure that neither city would require the massive capital expenditure that the leaders' assistants already saw was underway in Beijing - the potential synergy provided was something no capital city, however wealthy, could provide on its own. And there was also the famous entente cordiale on which to build.

All four men in the room were only too aware of the millennium-long love-hate relationship that has existed between England and France that is so graphically described by historians Robert and Isabelle Tombs in their book *That Sweet Enemy*. The past century may have seen these two countries fight side by side more often than at any other time during this period but the love and hate still exist, exacerbated over such issues as the euro and the Iraq war. Here was the opportunity to establish a much closer working relationship as the 21st century evolved.

The arithmetic of the Olympics provides a recipe for such potential harmony. It comprises two major highlights - the opening and closing ceremonies - that would be decided by the toss of a coin. The even number of events that comprise the Olympics would be split equally, with the capital losing the opening ceremony having the right to choose which event to hold first.

And just at this point, as Chirac's glass of beer and Blair's white wine were refilled, their assistants stressed two further points on which they were prepared to lay their professional reputation.

The first was that in contrast to previous examples of a single host city, London and Paris would be much more able to stand up to any excessive demands from the IOC. Having consulted extensively with those in Athens and Sydney who had faced such demands, they now patiently explained how such a united front would minimise any potential disruption to the cities they cared for. The transport issues would be mitigated; the service industries would not have their livelihoods threatened as so many customers left town for the duration; and, most crucially, neither capital would be saddled with excessive debt for decades to come. Michelin, for example, could unite 2,012 restaurants on both sides of the Channel in

providing a 20.12 euro menu.

As he felt warmth for this proposal spreading into the room, Blair's assistant even went so far as to state that a two-centre Olympics would also generate competition between England and France on the arts and culture front. And, most importantly, with a combined market of 120 million people, no seat for any event would remain empty.

But it was Chirac's assistant who then weighed in with what he hoped was the decisive point. Why, he asked, does the Olympics carry the word international in its title and yet each host country then expects the world to be focused on it alone? Here was a unique opportunity to make the 2012 Olympics supra-national, to declare to the world that the ambitions of a single city and a single nation could and should be subjugated to something far grander, an Olympics that would signal a sense of peaceful co-operation between two countries, and two leaders, not generally accustomed to such gestures. Just after a century in which Europe had led the world into two catastrophic wars, wasn't this too good and obvious an opportunity to miss?

Both leaders remained silent before asking for 10 minutes to consult in private with their assistants. On their return, Blair and Chirac went off into the adjacent private room where they talked for a further 15 minutes. Nobody to this day knows what was discussed, only that the conversation was held in French. On their return to the room, they signaled to their assistants to open the bottle of Pol Roger.

The following day it was announced, to unanimous applause, that the 2012 Olympics were to be held jointly in London and Paris. Both Blair and Chirac, by then ex leaders, were guests of honour at the opening ceremony, held in Paris, and London's unforgettable closing ceremony.

The starting gun fired in Paris at the 2012 Olympics was to go a long way to remedying the damage to the world that the assassin's bullet had set in train in Sarajevo 98 years earlier.