Olympic riposte - a 2016 twin centre

20 Aug 2012 by Charlie Foley

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One half of the stadium roared, the other half brooded over their mate. One half of the stadium ripped off their shirts and festooned themselves in the green and yellow flag, the other glanced fugitively from under their wide-brimmed Norteno hats.

It was the final of the football at the 2016 Olympic Games and the two host nations faced each other across the Boca stadium. The Brazilian team were smashing the ball past the burly Argentine keeper and it was looking to be another victory for Team Brazil. 'Gaucho pride' was in tatters; the Argentinians were left licking their wounds and limping back into the Pampas.

Brazil had dominated the Games, cleaning up gold medals in football at Maradona's home stadium, volleyball on Copacabana beach and sailing in Guanabara Bay. And, most embarrassingly for their southern neighbours, the Brazilians had managed to scoop gold medals in many equestrian events.

The much vaunted 'home advantage' had come through for the Brazilians, as it had for Britain back in 2012. Team GB had rocketed up the medals table with spectacular wins from fantastic athletes. France, meanwhile, had languished at the bottom of the medals table, their athletes accused of replacing passion with pride. London had outshone the Parisians on the field and also in the streets. It was the feel of the Games in London which had left a lasting memory for visitors; something had been happening on each street corner, there had been a buzz in the air, a spirit of celebration. Across the water, the Parisians remained aloof, hosting events without enthusiasm and grumbling about the disruption to their city. London came away from the Games with a legacy of festivity, fun and good sportsmanship. Paris had cowered in its shadow.

In 2016 south of the equator it was Brazil who had capitalised on the home advantage, its athletes charging around the track with newfound vigour. Yet it was Buenos Aires, with its tree-lined avenues, its sprawling cemeteries, its tortoise-like pace of life, which had captured the hearts of visitors. The Argentinians had welcomed everyone with open arms, its squares were thronged and its stadiums were packed. Tourists lounged beneath jacaranda trees chomping on *medialunas* and cheering on the athletes. Officials sipped inky Malbecs and congratulated themselves on another successful Games. The Argentinians had opened their city and invited everyone to an *asado* where the fire was always stoked and where the *mate* never ran dry.

The mood in Rio was fierce, its athletes were at the top of their game, they were gathering up golds but all in front of an absent audience. There was something so very European about Argentina that kept tourists enthralled. The French felt at home, the Spanish were practically family, the South Africans had bonded over barbequed beef, and the Americans couldn't get enough of the numerous shrinks! They all filled the squares of Buenos Aires, watching the events in Rio on big screens while sipping on ice-cold Brahma.

The athletes were shuttled up and down the coast in seaplanes. They struggled to sprint under a baking sun, their progress around the track watched by the grey eyes of the Christ Redeemer. But in the end they, like the thousands of tourists, would end up in Buenos Aires for the closing ceremony, which was bound to sound out the 2016 Olympics as an Argentine legacy.