

Olympic riposte - the judgement of Paris (and London)

21 Aug 2012 by Sam Brannigan

Our second Olympic fantasy piece comes from Sam Brannigan. Details of this writing competition, to win a bottle of Pol Roger, Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill 1999 champagne can be found [here](#). The closing date is 31 Aug.

The International Olympic Committee's Extraordinary meeting in September 2012 was about to begin, but before entering the room, the head of the IOC Jacques Rogge called David Cameron and François Hollande aside for a brief word, away from the forlorn figures of Boris Johnson and Bertrand Delanoë, the respective mayors of London and Paris.

They must understand, of course, that the IOC had to respond in an appropriate way to worldwide outrage at the most embarrassing debacle in its long history, that although Britain and France were about to be shredded it was nothing personal, and that he hoped that after a suitable period of time both countries would regain their status among the most illustrious members of the international movement.

They went in to the room and took their seats, the British and French like prisoners in a dock, Rogge resplendent in his judge's seat as chairman of the inquiry.

Mr Rogge began his address: 'The IOC is dismayed that after assurances by both governments that these games would enhance the *entente cordiale* and bring closer bonds between these age old enemies, and modern friends, we have witnessed weeks of astonishing ineptitude, undignified jingoism, national one-upmanship and a level of squabbling and petty nonsense that runs counter to all of the aims of the Olympic family.

'London's opening ceremony was a lesson in nose-rubbing effrontery and silliness. The excuse that it was just anarchic British humour was not accepted around the world. The choice of the Monty Python cast to theme this ceremony was the first of many dreadful decisions – men in striped tops wearing berets, outrageous moustaches, and onions cycling round the Olympic track while being pelted with brie by 80,000 laughing spectators was most certainly not funny, and neither was the dream sequence involving Mr John Cleese as Charles de Gaulle being chased by giant snails with German Crosses painted on their shells. This was supposed to be a celebration of all things British, not a music hall attack on France.

'France, of course, lost the chance to maintain dignity and the moral high ground, by closing the ceremony by using pantomime cows with bottles of horseradish waving Union Jacks as an "audience" watching a Parisian café scene, and the pastiche of the Rumble in The Jungle with a man dressed as a bottle of Château Margaux beating the life out of another dressed as a cup of Earl Grey tea while being cheered on by a screeching crowd was a scene of such infamy that I still find it difficult to recount the details.

'And there were the competitions – did the entire world really have to suffer because you couldn't choose whether to hold the marathons and long-distance walking in Paris or London? Did the huffing compromise really have to be the staging of the events in the Channel Tunnel? Notwithstanding the fact that it is just perfect in length for the 50k walk, did nobody stop to think that running past the Eiffel Tower or Big Ben might be more interesting than running through a train tunnel?

'Did the English really have to insist on holding the archery tournaments at the town of Agincourt with a Union flag flying above the French flag "merely to reflect the reality of things"? And why did the French accept no other venue for wrestling and boxing than the town of Hastings? These requests were mischievous in the extreme, and reflect extremely badly on the English and French sense of fair play and accommodation.

'Of course, alarm bells should have rang when the logo was unveiled some years before the games – instead of creating an inspirational symbol reflecting the forward-thinking ideals and national harmony within the Olympic movement, it was clear that the co-hosts could broker no agreement – in the end they could only agree on another nation they felt the same way about creating this joint logo: Germany. The German designed logo was an eagle cleverly created from a stylized map of Britain and France coloured red, black red and yellow – a credit to the Germans and a lesson in dynamic forward thinking the British and French would do well to learn from.

'And then we have the endless stream of baiting comments by the mayors of each city – Mr Johnson displayed an

appalling lack of respect for both his office, the Olympic family and his co-hosts by claiming London had “far more va va voom than stinky old froggy Paris”, while M Delanoë’s French translation of the old English adage “You’re going home in a ***** ambulance” while pointing forcefully from the VIP box of the Paris Olympic stadium went well beyond the bounds of decency.

'I recall that in 2005 Mr Blair and M Chirac, in a moment of far-sighted cooperation and friendship, toasted the future with a great champagne by the renowned producer Pol Roger. This champagne was loved by Sir Winston Churchill, a great Englishman who adored France. It was a fine gesture, because the maturity, warmth, class and generosity displayed by this champagne was similar to the grace and warmth shown by its owners to the greatest of Britons, and those same virtues were reciprocated.

'I suggest that the French and British delegations here today hang their heads in shame – go back to your countries with the scorn of the Olympic movement upon your shoulders. One day we will once again allow cities to share the jewel that is the Olympic Games – you have given us many lessons to learn, it is to be hoped you will learn them as well.'

The shell-shocked French and British delegations left with the damning words ringing in their ears, and they headed for an ante-room to let it all sink in.

Hollande and Cameron looked sheepishly at each other from across the room, Delanoë looked distraught. The gloom was suddenly broken by a loud pop, a yelp and then peals of laughter – Boris Johnson was surrounded by waiters and civil servants, having managed to cover himself in Pol Roger’s fabulous non-vintage after a fight with its cork. He dusted himself down, grabbed the bottle, put an arm round Cameron’s shoulders and walked towards the French – as he poured four glasses of fizz he cheerfully spouted classic Boris bonhomie and whims, managing to coax rueful, knowing smiles from his supposed enemies while laughing at the fun of it all as the Champagne settled in to elegant gold.

'A toast!' said Boris. “To Churchill, de Gaulle, Pol Roger and Earl Grey! And may we not spend 25 billion to say as much the next time! Cheers!'