

Olympic riposte - no compromise

28 Aug 2012 by Hannah Watt

And here's the third entry in our writing competition to win a bottle of Pol Roger's luxurious Cuvée Sir Winston Churchill 1999. For the full background see [here](#). Entries close at midnight this Friday. The result of this particular Olympic competition will be announced next week. Many congratulations on the high standard of entries.

When the head of the IOC was informed over breakfast on the 6 July 2005 (the morning after what would become known within inner circles at the IOC as the infamous Pol Roger incident) that the respective leaderships of France and Great Britain had arrived seeking to convene an emergency meeting with him, he raised his eyebrows slightly and expelled a soft sigh. Pushing his plate aside and standing up, he inclined his head indicating that they may be invited in. As he waited, Jacques Rogge walked over to the window, and stood, hands behind his back, looking out over the skyscrapers of Singapore, listening to the purposeful footsteps drawing closer along the corridor.

Still riding high on their wave of ingenuity, Blair and Chirac lost no time as they set about explaining their collective intention to withdraw their Olympic bids and combine in submission of a new joint bid. Jacques Rogge simply smiled somewhat indulgently and listened quietly, allowing the two men to expand on their fantasy. For fantasy it was, and once the elaborate vision had been enthusiastically related, a calm silence ensued while Rogge considered what had been said, and composed himself for a response. Blair rubbed the centre of his forehead with his forefinger, slightly regretting the second bottle of champagne that had followed the first, and Chirac glanced nervously to his side. Both shuffled uneasily, wondering whether this brave new concept had perhaps made more sense the night before, when they had been cosseted within the privacy of the Aoki restaurant, and the bubbles.

Jacques Rogge contemplated them both as a fond uncle might, about to remind two over-excited nephews that however persuasive their arguments to the contrary, it was still time for bed. He had heard many things in his time presiding over the IOC, and there had been previous highly idealised suggestions for making changes to the well established and successful Olympic formula. It was all too familiar a tale that, as the time for the announcement approached, after years of toil in preparation for the fateful day, the final bidders would scabble around looking for a way to sidestep the potential crushing devastation of defeat. This, admittedly, was one of the better and more fair-minded solutions that had been suggested. However, he knew what had to be done.

So, while he acknowledged that it was commendable that they sought to compromise and share the great honour that would be bestowed, he kindly but firmly explained that the withdrawal of their bids at this late stage would not be accepted. To do so would only result in a hefty penalty and forfeiture of their participation in any bid. Should they take that route then no doubt any one of the runners up, Madrid, New York or Moscow, would be more than willing to step in to take their place as the host city for 2012.

Therefore, assuming their current bids stood, one of Paris or London would win the right to hold the games of the 30th Olympiad, and one of them would lose. That was the way it was and they would have to accept it. He reminded them of the belief held by French Baron Pierre De Coubertin, who had revived the Olympic Games in 1894 and founded the International Olympic Committee, that the important thing in life was not to triumph, but to compete. The Olympic spirit may be about bringing people together in peace and friendship to play sport, but there was no escaping the human instinct to compete and to strive to be the best. This is what drives athletes on, enabling them to get back up and try again after every disappointment - Citius, Altius, Fortius.

Competition could still be conducted in the spirit of peace and friendship, but there was no place for compromise and collaboration. Each of them would have to come to terms with whichever result befell them that day, keep their heads either way, and deal with it. Hadn't Rudyard Kipling said much the same? In any event, did they really think that either of their Olympic committees, or nations, would thank them for a collaborative Olympics? The world loves a great rivalry. Even where there wasn't one, the media would create it - so why deprive them?

Would any of their own athletes condone such an approach? Were Andy Murray and Jo-Wilfried Tsonga to find themselves up against each other, matching the other point for point, game for game, would they ever in a million years lay down their racquets, shake hands, call it a draw and share the prize? Of course not! While both men may have the

utmost respect for each other's ability, they would want to win, and accept the possibility that in trying, they may lose. It was the very nature of sport. Compromise was not an option.

The two men nodded slowly, brought down to earth by this sage dose of realism. As a subdued silence descended on the trio, Rogge swiftly broke it with a prompt clap of his hands. 'Now' he said to Blair and Chirac, putting a hand on each of their shoulders, 'Good luck to you both. For one of you, today is your day. Cherish it. Celebrate it. To the other, commiserations, but look to the future, your day will come. And if it does not, I'm afraid, that is life, we cannot all be winners all of the time. Be grateful for the opportunities you have, and if you can say hand on heart that you gave the best of yourself, then you need have no regrets.'

Side by side they retraced their steps down the hallway, heading back to their respective entourages to break the news and await the announcement. As they came to part ways they stopped and faced each other. 'Ah well' said Chirac, shrugging. 'We tried. It was a dream, but perhaps it was not meant to be. Sometimes, it is better to look back wistfully on the promise of what might have been. The reality could never be so perfect.'

'I will always remember the evening we spent together at Aoki, and the vision we shared', replied Blair. 'I have never felt so certain about anything than when we popped the cork on that bottle of Pol Roger. But hey ho, *que será será*. Perhaps we are ahead of our time! So, may the best man win and all that.' They shook hands. 'Yes' said Chirac, 'And may the other have the courage to lose graciously. *Bon courage!*'

As the final selection was announced in Singapore that 6 July, at the 117th session of the IOC, with the sound of 'London' still ringing in the air, Chirac was the first to congratulate Blair. 'So my friend, it seems today it was your day after all. Well, it may be in London, but at least you will be speaking our language!' he chuckled. 'France will see you on your home ground then - let the real competition begin!'

And so it was. London held what was generally acknowledged to be one of the greatest Games the world had seen. The French made various digs about empty seats and widely aired their suspicions regarding the British cyclists' use of 'magic wheels', while Great Britain gloated as Team GB overtook France in the medals table. For some there were triumphs and for others disasters, but for a short period at least, everything seemed well with the world.