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## Watching the clock

**Monday 27 July 2009: three years to the day until the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games and the occasion is marked with an invitation to the press to ride the Javelin train and see how things are progressing around the Olympic park. Jonathan Ives packed his passport and followed the signs.**

The champagne bar at St Pancras station is as good a place to begin a journey as any in London and far better than most but a faint air of unease hung over proceedings as the 8am arrivals presented themselves for embarkation on the trip that was to mark one of the major time checks for the London 2012 project. It could have been the grey skies and persistent drizzle that seemed set in for the day; it could have been the all too obvious absence of any champagne on the notoriously capacious bar; it could have been the knowledge that we were all heading for east London in under seven minutes rather than central Paris in just over two hours; but whatever the reason, the early-morning conversation seemed as stiff as the rather lacklustre breakfast pastries laid out among the tables.

Perhaps those assembled were feeling the tension of a clock ticking down towards an immovable deadline three years hence but the events team were not on the same wavelength. Determinedly cheery and reassuring in the manner of all seasoned events organisers, they politely asked for the passports without which we had been repeatedly warned we would not be allowed on the train; press credentials alone were not deemed sufficient on a trip this short and this momentous. Such officiousness swathed in the banner of national security quickly becomes wearing but as The Leisure Review presented its documents a young gentleman who had arrived without anything beyond the careworn clothes he had on was assured that they would "be able to sort something out" to make sure his morning was not wasted.

With tea, coffee and the arrival of some Olympians past, present and future the mood seemed to lift and the volume of conversation rose along with it. James Cracknell displayed the whitest of new tennis shoes, while Daley Thompson showed off the greying temples that seem at long last to have leant him the distinguished air of the elder statesman. Tom Daley arrived with the whitest of teeth and was quickly grabbed by radio presenter Christian O'Connell for an interview. As we headed for the platform from which the Javelin would be leaving, Boris Johnson could be seen outside on his bike, arriving in the nick of time. Greeted by a couple of staff who ushered him off toward the German Gymnasium across the road to get himself sorted, he reappeared a few minutes later, identical to when we last saw him except that the cycle helmet had gone and the right trouser leg of his suit had been removed from his sock, to be joined by Seb Coe and Tessa Jowell. Television and radio interviewers got their time on the mics under cover before the photocell required the presence of all concerned at the sharp end of the train. With the drizzle relenting, the photographers did their job and everyone climbed on board for what promised to be the swiftest journey ever made across the capital.

After a brief welcome in which he reassured his audience that he was not going to be driving the train, Seb Coe set the Javelin train on its way and the first movement of the platform prompted a good proportion of those in the carriage reserved for the print media to interrupt their pursuit of studied indifference or competitive conversation and reach for their stopwatches. From St Pancras, the Javelin left the Kings Cross canal basin behind and sped through the brand new tunnel to arrive into the daylight at Stratford less than seven minutes later. With some disappointed but most suitably impressed, the train emptied onto a platform still some way from completion to press questions on Messrs Coe and Johnson, joined by Olympics minister, Tessa Jowell.

Closely surrounded by a group of journalists, the minister noted that the train was ahead of schedule and that 97% of people arriving at the Games will travel by public transport. She predicted that the Games would herald a

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Olympians past, present and future get ready to board the Javelin

**"It is not raining in London 94 percent of the time," Boris Johnson said. "Rumours of our wetness are overstated."**



Seb Coe faces the microphone again



Boris Johnson: bicycling and bullish

national revolution in physical activity.

Boris Johnson echoed the point in his own inimitable style. "This is a clear demonstration of the incredible efficiency of our transport system," he declared, "an example of legacy in advance of the Games." When someone pointed out the delays on the Tube that had hampered travel during the capital's rush hour earlier that morning, he remained bullish. "Don't blame me for delays on the Tube. Blame the people who cancelled Crossrail."

Positioning London as better prepared than any other Olympic host city in history, the mayor also refused to be put off his optimistic stride by questions about the weather. "It is not raining in London 94 percent of the time," Johnson said. "Rumours of our wetness are overstated. We have the same climactic conditions as Paris. I have a great deal of sympathy for the French, who must be consumed with jealousy with the real progress we've made."

A crocodile of VIPs, athletes and journalists, all carefully marshalled by a phalanx of high-visibility jackets, made its way to four buses. With the rain spattering the windows of bus number three, David Hughes, chief executive of the Olympic Delivery Authority, and Paul Deighton, the LOCOG chief executive, gave a running commentary as the tour of Europe's biggest building site got underway. The figures relating to the scale of the project – the number of workers on site, the tonnes of earth shifted, the tonnes of steel and miles of cabling being used – will be familiar to anyone with any interest in the 2012 project but they remain impressive. Hughes reminded his audience of a few of the more mundane, including the 17,000 athletes on site at Games time, the 30 bridges and tunnels constructed on the Olympic site, the two power stations on site and the tripling of the size of the A12 underpass. Having noted the huge scale of the project, he also suggested that the site would prove much more intimate than the main sites of either Sydney or Beijing.

As the bus edged slowly around the roof of the aquatic centre and the site of the velodrome, Deighton offered a LOCOG perspective with his distinctive Aussie twang. "For every venue we've thought about what it will be like at Games time and what it will be in the long term," he said. "That's the difference." While other Olympic hosts had talked about legacy, Deighton was confident that this was the first time any host had actually backed words with deeds, something that has already been noted: "Everyone is saying to us, 'You guys were serious about legacy.'"

Effort is being put into making sure that the Olympic park will be a venue in itself and Deighton spoke of how the compact nature of the site with its bridges and undulations would create a great atmosphere. However, access to the park during the Games will be by ticket only and a certain number of non-event tickets will be made available. This, Deighton explained, will enable the organisers to manage the number of people on site once the capacity of the park has been calculated and will also provide a resource of spectators able to take advantage of seats unfilled or vacated by those with tickets to specific venues and events. He acknowledged that ticketing will be one of the most important and most difficult elements of managing the Olympic experience, saying that LOCOG is currently working with all the Olympic and Paralympic sports to find out where the markets for tickets will be.

"A significant chunk of the tickets will be highly affordable," he said. "There will be some more expensive tickets but getting that balance right is important to us. It's about making sure that Londoners can afford to come to the Games, and also making it affordable for people in the rest of the UK."

As the bus pulled onto Stadium Island and into the centre of the Olympic stadium itself, Deighton explained that people from London 2012 had been at the recent FINA world swimming championships to discuss camera positions for the aquatic centre. In Beijing there had been problems when the television crews arrived a couple of weeks in advance of the Games to rig the venue and found that the camera positions were wholly inadequate. London 2012 did not want to have to deal with similar problems at the last minute so they were dealing with them now, three years in advance of day one.

With the site tour complete, The Leisure Review declined the opportunity of further interviews and made its way back into town, taking the opportunity afforded by the Docklands Light Railway and the Central Line to reflect upon the morning. While the rain had served to dampen spirits slightly, it had also done a good job of lowering expectations. For all the achievements to date, there is still much to do and this was after all a tour of a building site; a hugely impressive building site apparently well ahead of the timeline but a building site nonetheless. Continuing stories of the demands of the 'Olympic Family',

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Work in progress: the aquatic centre



Where the magic will happen: the Olympic stadium

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that ever-dysfunctional and unreasonable group of time-servers and graspers, will continue to sap the Olympic spirit and the ticketing policies, scheduled to be made public in 2010, will no doubt prove that the interests of the average Londoner will come a distant second place to the whims of the major sponsors, the corporations that have been allowed and encouraged to consider the Olympic Games and the ethical ideals they represent as properly bought and paid for, a marketing tool to do with as they wish in the interests of their shareholders and clients. The sight of kids from Newham and Hackney being kept well away from the Olympic park while the guests of banks, credit card companies and fizzy drink peddlers are ushered into the front row to enjoy the first half hour of every event before they head for lunch will be hard to take for anyone who believes in what sport, leisure and culture can and should do for individuals and communities.

But while all this may come to pass, there is also so much that will go right and do good. Sat on a bus peering through rain-streaked windows at the steel structure that will soon become the 2012 Olympic stadium, it was difficult not to let one's imagination leap forward three years and wonder at the spectacle, excitement and achievement that will be taking place right on that spot only a short ride from central London. During the journey from Stratford back to Soho it stopped raining and the sky cleared. As the sun came out I realised that there was not much I would not do to get hold of a ticket for the Olympic Games.

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