

Olympic Glory: An Analysis of Australia's Success at the Summer Olympics

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Olympic Games	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1896-1952 (Various)	23	18	22	63
1956 Melbourne	13	8	14	35
1960 Rome	8	8	6	22
1964 Tokyo	6	2	10	18
1968 Mexico	5	7	5	17
1972 Munich	8	7	2	17
1976 Montreal	0	1	4	5
1980 Moscow	2	2	5	9
1984 Los Angeles	4	8	12	24
1988 Seoul	3	6	5	14
1992 Barcelona	7	9	11	27
1996 Atlanta	9	9	23	41
2000 Sydney	16	25	17	58
2004 Athens	17	16	16	49
2008 Beijing	14	15	17	46

Table 1: Australia's summer Olympics medal tally: 1896–2008

Funding	Decentralisation/Regionalisation
Institute/Academy Network	Leading Edge Support Services
Leadership/Accountability	Partnerships
Prioritisation of Resources	Talent Search
Coaching Expertise	Interventionism

Table 2: Ingredients for success in high performance sport

Time Period	Total Expenditure	Olympic Teams	AOF Distributions to the AOC
2001 to 2004	\$76,874,855	\$17,354,080	\$26.7 million
2005 to 2008	\$71,036,580	\$17,066,511	\$28.4 million
2009	\$16,331,425	–	\$6,293,580
2009 to 2012 (estimates)	\$75,000,000 +	\$13.4 million for 2012 Team	\$25,150,000

Table 3: AOC budget and funding 2001–2012¹⁵

Australia has had quite a remarkable history with respect to the Olympics. Along with Greece, it is one of only two nations to have participated in every Summer Olympics. As a relatively new country (1901) with a small population, it experienced moderate success in its early involvement in the Games. But it was the post-World War II period – marked by a period of economic and political stability and with a conservative national Liberal government in power for 23 years – that some outstanding achievements occurred. In fact during the 1950s and 1960s, Australia experienced a golden era in sports.¹ In the early 1960's, the renowned US publication *Sports Illustrated* even published a series of articles on the sport-loving Australian nation, pointing to evidence of its success in the Olympic Games as well as in other top level international sports.

The nation's athletic prowess was further acknowledged by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) when Melbourne (1956), and then Sydney (2000), won bids to host the Olympic Games. Although Australia's Olympic participation has been one of consistent involvement, there have been a series of troughs and peaks with respect to Olympic success (see Table 1). The nation's Olympic history can best be broken down into three distinct time periods.

Participation in the Summer Olympic Games, 1896-1952: Moderate Early Success

Overall, Australia's Olympic history has been quite well documented by a large number of authors. Harry Gordon, in particular, is one of the most prolific, earning the title of AOC Sport Historian for his work. Gordon's assessment was that Australia's early Olympic history of success as measured by medals won was reasonably good for a small nation located so far away from the mainstream of sport.²

Australia had a moderate total of 63 medals (23 gold medals) spanning the period of the first 12 Summer Olympics. Notable gold medal winners included Edwin Flack who won two athletic events for Australia in Athens

in 1896, Sarah “Fanny” Durack at the 1912 Stockholm Games where she won a swimming event, Andrew “Boy” Charlton who was a swimming champion at the 1924 Paris Games and Shirley Strickland and Marjorie Jackson who won in athletics at the 1952 Helsinki Games. The majority of these early medals were in swimming and athletics and the rest were scattered across a few other sports. For the most part during these formative years of the Games, Australia set a tone of embracing the Summer Olympics and it became a keen and active participant in this quadrennial sports event.

Participation in the Olympic Games, 1952–1972: The Golden Age of Australian Sport

In the six Summer Olympics from 1952 to 1972, Australia celebrated a “Golden Age of Sport”. The major highlight in this period was the 1956 Melbourne Olympics – the first time that the Games were held in the southern hemisphere and only the third time that they were staged outside of Europe. Performing on their home soil, Australian athletes won a total of 35 medals, with 13 being gold. The country finished in third position overall on the medal tally behind only the USA and the USSR.

During this era, Australia won a total of 40 gold medals and the country was always on the victory podium with at least one gold medal in every Olympics. This consistent period saw total medals never dip below 11 in a single Games and the total medal tally was an impressive 119. Successful Australian Olympic champions included the likes of Dawn Fraser, Murray Rose, Michael Wenden, Shane Gould, Marjorie Jackson, Ron Clarke, Herb Elliott and Betty Cuthbert, many of whom became household names in Australia.³

Participation in the Olympic Games, 1976–2010: The Great Slump Followed by the Revival

In the period from 1976 to 1980, Australia experienced a slump in its Olympic success compared to the previous “golden era”. Medal totals during this period were quite unremarkable (14 medals in total – with the 1976 Montreal Games the low point with only five medals won and no gold). However, by the 1984 Los Angeles Games through to the 2008 Beijing Games, Australia experienced a resurgence, with the 2000 Sydney Olympics providing a medal haul of 58 and a fourth place ranking among nations. In many circles, Australia’s hosting of the 2000 Sydney Games earned it the accolade as the “The Best Games Ever”.⁴ A new generation of athletes such as Ian Thorpe, Kieren Perkins, Susie O’Neill and Cathy Freeman helped to bring Australia back to the medal podium on a regular basis. In recent times Australia also sent some of the largest teams of any nations to the summer Games, with a total of 632 for Sydney in 2000, 482 for Athens in 2004 and 435 for Beijing in 2008.

An Analysis of the Reasons for Australian Success at the Summer Olympics: “Outstanding Achievements by an Isolated Country with a Small Population”

Much of the Australian Olympic research to date has been descriptive and gives positive accounts of Australian participation and success. Texts written by Harry Gordon⁵ and Max and Reet Howell⁶ tend to fall in this category along with a large number of books by successful Australian Olympic athletes and officials. More critical types of scholarly work have been undertaken by Helen Lenskyj⁷ and Richard Cashman⁸, with much of their focus being on the Sydney Olympics. There has also been scholarly work by Alex Baumann⁹ (See Table 2), as well as by Frank Pyke and Ken Norris¹⁰ and by Richard Baka¹¹ all of whom attempt to focus on the reasons for Australian success in the Olympics. The following discourse attempts to analyse and explain the reasons for Australia’s success at the Summer Olympics Games.

1. A Proactive Australian Olympic Committee and Australian Commonwealth Government: Money Can Buy Medals!

(a) The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC): A World Leader and Innovator

A major reason for Australian success at the Summer Olympics has clearly been an extremely proactive AOC. Outlined below are several of its unique features which make it an innovative leader within the Olympic family of nations.

(i) An Ever Increasing Budget and Healthy Financial Situation: Money Talks!

One of the major reasons for a high medal tally at the Olympics has been an AOC which has raised significant amounts of money to fund its Olympic teams and also to get into the mainstream of public interest. An ever increasing budget by the AOC has seen it invest money in large quantities into its Olympic program. During the first 70 years of the Olympic Games up until about the 1960’s, the AOC was not under extreme pressure to grow its financial base. For example, when the Australian Olympic Team went to Helsinki in 1952, it did so with a budget of £130,000 of which £30,000 Pounds came from a federal government grant and the rest from Olympic appeals. There was no marketing and licensing income and no television revenue.¹² When it finished third at the 1956 Melbourne Games, it was the primarily the result of the natural talent of its athletes as well as a national sporting passion. But as the Olympics became increasingly more professional, the AOC had to raise more funds to keep up with the major Olympic powers such as USA, the USSR (and then Russia), Germany and China.

One of the key budgetary changes was the AOC’s

ability to deal with the Sydney Olympic Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) and gain a legacy total of \$88.48 million dollars from the 2000 Sydney Games.¹³ This money was put into the Australian Olympic Foundation (AOF) Ltd. – a body linked to but separate from the AOC – and resulted in significant annual distributions from this fund. There was also money coming from its traditional fund-raising sources at the state levels (via public appeals), sponsorship income and marketing and licensing support. Supplementing this was financial assistance it received directly from the IOC under the banner of Olympic Solidarity, a funding support scheme available to all nations in the Olympic Family. The “bonus” funding it received via the AOF (in excess of \$60 million to date) greatly increased its ability to develop and maintain its programs. Table 3 illustrates the impressive AOC spending and budgeting for the three quadrenniums¹⁴ from 2001 to 2012.

A key area of its increased budget has been its ability to better fund its Olympic athletes and coaches, not only at the Games, but via training and preparation support in the lead-up to each summer Olympics. Athletes who won medals at the 2008 Olympic games or who won medals in the 2009, 2010 and 2011 world championships or other major international events of a comparable standard became eligible for Adidas Medal Incentive Funding (\$15,000 for gold, \$10,000 for silver, \$7,500 for bronze during 2009 and 2010 and increasing in 2011 and 2012 to \$20,000 for gold, \$13,400 for silver and \$10,000 for bronze). Specifically this support is to assist athletes to represent Australia at the 2012 London Olympics and win medals. In addition, there are International Competition Grants to National Sports Federations of \$2500 per athlete and official who have qualified or who are likely to make the 2012 Olympic team. For the 2009 – 2012 period, \$6.145 million has been budgeted for Olympic team preparation. An International Federation Travel Assistance Program also assists Australian representation on International Federation Boards and Committees.¹⁶

(ii) The Professional Corporate and Decentralised Structure of the AOC: A Well-Oiled Machine

In comparison to most other NOC's, the AOC has a unique structure with its main national body and offices based in Sydney as well as a series of State Olympic Councils (SOC's). One of the main objectives of the SOC's is specifically fund-raising by a variety of means (e.g. annual dinners, golf days, corporate and government donations, Olympic fun runs, etc.). At the state level, there are also other events often linked to educational objectives, the best examples being the Pierre de Coubertin Awards given out to secondary school athletes nominated by their schools, Olympic academies and celebration of Olympic Day on June 23. For the better part of a hundred years this decentralised approach has seen the Australian Olympic movement spread its tentacles within the grass-roots level and become well-recognised and supported across the nation.

Another key feature has been the adoption of an increasingly professional corporate structure headed up

by its full-time, paid President, John Coates, and a support staff of 35 with 27 located in Sydney plus a smaller contingency of eight in the states.¹⁷ The AOC has also been a major player in the IOC. With three current members, Kevan Gosper (1977), Phillip Coles (1981) and John Coates (2001), Australia has significant input on the IOC with some NOC's not even having a single voting IOC member. For 17 years, Kevan Gosper was on the IOC Executive Board and he served as Vice President for eight years. In 2009 John Coates became part of the IOC's powerful Executive Board. Interestingly Australia has also had 32 individuals awarded the IOC Olympic Order – four of these received the prestigious gold level – the highest honorary award given by the IOC. As a result of this significant role within the IOC, Australia is considered one of the strongest, most influential and respected Olympic nations.¹⁸

Further testimony to its power and influence in the Olympic movement is the AOC's support of the IOC-backed World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). In fact, the current President of WADA is John Fahey – a former New South Wales Premier in the mid 1990's during the planning years leading up to the Sydney Games. In 2007 he took over from the prominent former IOC Vice President Dick Pound of Canada.

(iii) Creative and Innovative Programs: Spreading and Keeping Olympism in the Public Eye

Besides its major role of preparing, selecting and sending its Olympic team to each Games, the AOC has developed a number of programs, some of which are unique to this southern hemisphere nation. One of its major initiatives which started in 2001 is the Australian Youth Olympic Festival (AYOF). Modelled after similar youth games in Europe, these biennial games were based at Sydney Olympic Park at Homebush, their goal being to develop the next generation of Olympic athletes. No doubt their success in Australia helped to influence the IOC to develop the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) with the first Summer YOG held in 2010 in Singapore. There was an extremely strong and enthusiastic participation by the AOC which sent a team of 100 aspiring Olympians to this inaugural event, which will see alternating summer and winter YOG's.

In addition to this are a number of other AOC programs such as its Live Clean Play Clean drug awareness program, a national Olympic Day and a number of other youth-based initiatives. The AOC's emphasis on using the internet for its A.S.P.I.R.E school-based program with a very interactive website illustrates its attempt to keep up with modern trends appealing to the young generation.¹⁹ Table 4 outlines many of the varied programs and services operated by the AOC.

It would be difficult to find another NOC that delivers such a variety of programs and services and that is so well known and supported by the public, the corporate and government sectors. The AOC has definitely proven itself to be a key “mover and shaker” within the Australian sports system.

Australian Olympic Team (Summer and Winter Olympics and new Youth Olympic Games)	Raises money to send each team to the Games and then organises and manages the entire Australian contingent.
Addidas Medal Incentive Funding International Competition Grants International Federation Travel Assistance	Significant financial support from the AOC to assist athletes, coaches and officials.
Australian Youth Olympic Festival	Hosts a mini youth Olympics held in Sydney every second year
A.S.P.I.R.E.	School based program of the AOC using significant AOC website content; Boxing Kangaroo BK Zone
Live Clean Play Clean	Drug awareness program for young athletes
Olympic Winter Institute of Australia	AOC is In partnership with the Australian Sports Commission/AIS , winter sport bodies, etc. to run the high performance winter sports program
Olympians Club of Australia and Olympic Ambassadors	Automatic membership to all Olympians who help to promote Olympism in Australia
Australian Olympic Role Model	Initiative of the Victorian Olympic Council to promote Olympic sport to youth
Pierre de Coubertin Awards	Award given to senior secondary school students nominated by their schools; 750 recipients in 2009
Olympic Academies	Held at state and national level in Australia with a few delegates sent to IOC international academies
Olympic Day	Celebrated in June each year with mostly school-based events
Special Olympic Commemorative Events	50 th anniversary of Melbourne Games, 10 th anniversary of Sydney Games, fund-raising golf days, dinners, etc.
Australian Team Support	Student messages of support to athletes at the Games via Village Art, emails, etc.
Chat With a Champ	Promotional web talks by Olympic athletes serving as role models to Australian youth
Olympic Speakers Bureau	Olympians given financial support for corporate and other speaking engagements.
Special Olympic Promotions at Olympic Affiliated Venues	Olympic displays within the National Sports Museum at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Sydney Olympic Park and the Powerhouse Museum ; celebrations of Olympic milestone e.g. 1956 and 2000 anniversary celebrations
Australian Centre for Olympic Studies	Grants to these autonomous university research centres with the main one at the University of Technology in Sydney and another at the University of Queensland in Brisbane
Athlete Commission and Medical Commission	Olympians and medical practitioners provide expertise to the AOC on a range of athlete-centered services
AOC Media Centre: The Home of Australian Olympic Stories	Uses the AOC website and other means to promote the Olympic movement
Australian Olympic Foundation	Distributions of interest from large Sydney legacy fund of \$88.48 million used to fund AOC programs

Table 4: Major Programs and Services of the Australian Olympic Committee²⁰

(b) The Commonwealth Government of Australia: A Dominant Player in the Support of Olympic Sport

From its origins as a nation in 1901 up until the 1970's, the Australian Commonwealth Government did very little to support high performance sport. The exception was donations to the Olympic Team fund every four years by both federal and state governments. However, this all changed in the 1970's when a new Australian sport system emerged and became heavily reliant on federal government leadership and financial input. One author has described the evolution of the new sport system as a delayed, eclectic approach, heavily influenced by diminishing Olympic results, such as the dismal performance in Montreal in 1976 where Australia slipped to 32nd, down from the lofty third place at the Melbourne Games some 20 years before.²¹ An overview of this very significant Australian Commonwealth Government's contribution to sport lends itself to examining four distinct periods.

(i) Pre-1972: The Beginnings of "National Fitness"

During this early era, the Australian sport system was primarily a preserve of the private sector and founded on a club-based model. Government intervention did occur in a minor way with the Commonwealth Government passing a National Fitness Act in 1939, which was a response to so many Australians being classified as unfit for military service. Although close to \$6 million dollars was spent on the recreation, fitness and sport area from the late 1930s to the early 1970s, this was over a forty-year period and the program was a collaboration between the Commonwealth Government and the states with virtually no money spent on high performance sport. Instead, a private, non-government entity, the Australian Olympic Federation (AOF), controlled all facets of the nation's Olympic involvement. In this period, Olympic gold medal athletes were a product of what many international press agencies called a "sport loving" nation. With a tradition of sporting prowess, an abundance of natural sporting talent, a generally favourable climate, and a sporting era during the 1950s and 1960s often dubbed the "Golden Age of Australian Sport", there was virtually no pressure for any change to the high performance sport model.

(ii) 1972-1992: The Establishment of the Australian Institute of Sport and the Australian Sports Commission: The Emergence of a New Sports Model

Times were changing quickly both on the international sport scene – where Australia's Olympic success was starting to wane – and in the Australian political arena. Darwin Semotiuk has noted that "The election of Gough Whitlam and his Labor Party in 1972 represented the beginning of a new era in Australian sport."²² A series of special Labor-commissioned reports, including *Recreation In Australia: Its Role Scope and Development* (1973), and *The Report of the Australian Sports Institute Study Group* (1975), were the beginnings of a more comprehensive national sport policy. This led to new sports programs including a capital facility assistance scheme, grants to national sport

organisations, the initial plans for a national sports institute, and the creation of a Department of Tourism and Recreation

Unfortunately, this situation was short-lived and in dramatic political circumstances, the Labor Party was ousted in 1975 by the Malcolm Fraser-led Liberal-Country Party coalition. Commonwealth Government sport policy and programs were initially placed on very unstable grounds with the abolition of the Department of Tourism and Recreation in 1975. The move towards significant changes in the high performance sport model was stalled for several years, even though the new government did maintain some assistance to previous Labor-instigated sport programs. But a series of events convinced the Fraser government that a revamp of the sport system was inevitable. Of major importance was Australia's embarrassing 32nd placing in the 1976 Montreal Olympics. There was also extreme lobbying from the media, the general public and the sports fraternity, including the AOC, the Confederation of Australian Sport, state governments, numerous national sports organizations, and even from bureaucrats and politicians within the Fraser Government. As a result, the Liberals were forced to act, and Bob Ellicott, a keen, sport-friendly Minister in the Fraser government, paved the way towards a new direction in sport policy. Under his direction, funding for sport programs increased with the highlight being the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) commencing operations in January 1981.²³

Government changes occurred again in 1983 when a Labor Government led by Bob Hawke (and later Paul Keating) assumed control for a 13-year period. The Labor Party instigated a number of further structural and funding increases designed to help in the evolution and consolidation of the overall sport system. In 1985 the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) was established to oversee Commonwealth Government expenditure on sport. By 1989, the ASC and AIS were more closely linked structurally and increased funding to high performance sport was announced by way of two key initiatives labelled the Next Step Program and the Maintain the Momentum Program. State institutes of sport also began to appear in an attempt to partially decentralise services to elite athletes.²⁴ Another government agency set up as an integral part of the sports system was the Australian Sports Anti Doping Agency (ASADA) in 1992. By the early 1990s, some 20 years after the first serious foray into elite sport programs, the Commonwealth Government had spent increasingly impressive budgets on the delivery of high performance sport.

(iii) 1993-2000: The Lead Up to Sydney: Policies and Programs Aimed at Winning Medals

When Sydney was awarded the Olympic Games by the IOC in 1993, following a very close vote with Beijing, a new era of high performance sport assistance commenced. A host nation always wants to be a successful and Australia was no exception. Existing programs and services were maintained, but in 1994 the Olympic Athlete

Program (OAP) was launched. As a follow on from the previous Next Step Program (1989-92) and the Maintain the Momentum Program (1992-94), the OAP specifically brought increased expenditures for elite sports associated with the Olympic Games. Under the OAP, an extra \$140 million was added over a six year period and – along with grants from states through their institutes and academies, as well as AOC funding grants – Australian athletes had access to unprecedented funding in their preparation for the 2000 Games. Even though a Howard Liberal government was elected in 1996, their commitment to funding arrangements set up by the outgoing Keating government was continued. The ASC coordinated the OAP, which covered funding for talent identification, international competition, coaching, training camps, intensive training centres, athlete scholarships, research and the provision of sports science and sports medicine services to athletes, and grants to paralympic athletes.²⁵ When the new OAP funds were added to existing funds, the impressive total for the six year period was in the range of \$327 million.²⁶

(iv) 2001 – 2010: The Emergence of New Sport Policies Post Sydney 2000: Showing Faith in the System

Spurred on by the 58 medals won by its athletes, in May 2001 the Howard government launched a new sport policy *Backing Australia's Sporting Ability (BASA)* in which it increased its financial commitment to sport for the 2001-2005 period to the tune of \$547 million, an injection of an additional \$161 million over previous budgets. Approximately 75% (\$408 million) of this total was aimed at the Sports Excellence – Backing Australian Athletes Program. A further \$65.4 million was then allocated towards an upgrade and expansion of facilities at the AIS in the 2002 budget. Besides the increase in funding to elite sport, \$82 million went to Sport Development, \$24 million to Tough on Drugs in Sport and \$1 million to Excellence in Sports Management. While the new sports policy did attempt to address more “participation” issues and “grass roots” programs than did previous programs and budgets, the bulk of money was still heavily skewed toward high performance sport.²⁷

In May 2008 the Commonwealth Government released a direction paper entitled “*Australian Sport: Emerging Challenges, New Directions*” in which it sought to introduce reform in the way the Government supports elite sport and the manner in which it uses sport to boost participation and physical activity to help build a healthier nation. In August, it decided to appoint an independent sport panel to come up with recommendations for a new sport policy. Shortly after in February 2009, the AOC and the Australian Paralympic Committee issued a paper entitled *National High Performance for Olympic and Paralympic Sports in Australia* where it reported that an additional \$109 million per year on average was required to sustain Australia's top five medal count at the Olympic Games.²⁸ *The Future of Sport in Australia (The Crawford Report)* was released in November 2009 and wanted to change the direction of federal government funding to high performance sport. There was almost immediate criticism by the AOC which set up a special Study Panel and then

1972	Australian Labor Party Caucus Paper on the Future Development of Sport and Recreation in Australia (Cohen Report)
1972	Department of Tourism and Recreation Act (abolished in 1975)
1973	Recreation in Australia: Its Role, Scope and Development (The Bloomfield Report)
1974	National Seminar on Leisure, The National Coaches Seminar
1975	The Report of the Australian Sports Institute Study Group (The Coles Report)
1978	The Bloomfield Report (Western Australia Government)
1979	Towards a National Sports Program (Sports Advisory Council)
1980	Green Paper on Sport and Recreation (Opposition Labor Party) Master Plan for Sport (Confederation of Australian Sport Report)
1985	The Australian Sports Commission Bill
1986	Australian Sports Commission Strategic Plan
1988	Outcomes 1986-1987 (ASC Evaluation)
1989	A Case for Additional Funding to Further Develop Sport in Australia (ASC/AIS submission); Going for Gold; The Next Step
1989	Drugs in Sport (Interim Report); Drugs in Sport (Second Report)
1992	Maintain the Momentum
1994	Evaluation of the ASC's Impact on Sport Performance and Participation
1994	The Olympic Athlete Program (OAP)
1999	Tough on Drugs in Sport
1999	Active Australia: A National Plan, 2000-2003 (The Oakley Report) Shaping Up: A Review of Commonwealth Involvement of Sport and Recreation in Australia (The Oakley Report)
2001	Game Plan 2006 – Sport and Leisure Industry Strategic National Plan,
2001	Backing Australia's Sporting Ability: A More Active Australia
2009	Australian Sport: Emerging Challenges, New Directions
2009	The Future of Sport in Australia Report (The Crawford Report)
2010	Australian Sport: The Pathway to Success

Table 5: Major Australian government sport policy initiatives since 1972³¹

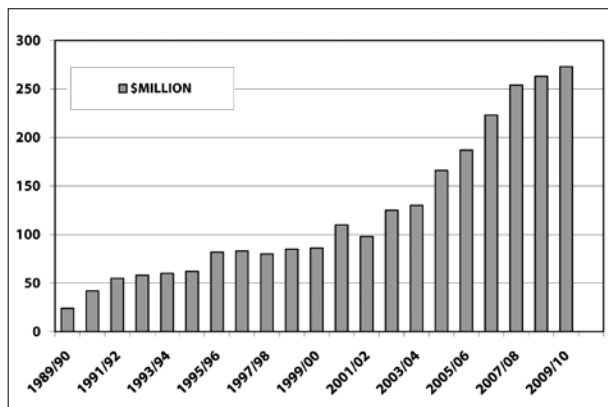


Table 6: Australian Sports Commission expenditure on sport, 1989–2010

lobbied the Sport Minister, Kate Ellis.²⁹ Eventually after much discussion and public debate in the media, many recommendations of the *Crawford Report* related to elite sport were scrapped. Instead, in May 2010, the government released its new sport policy, *Australian Sport: The New Pathway to Success* in which it maintained the status quo of keeping elite sport funding at a significant level. The Minister of Sport, Kate Ellis announced “A record \$1.2 billion [...] over the next four years, including \$325 million in additional funding for the ASC and incorporating \$195 million in new funding for sport.”³⁰ This move was applauded by John Coates and the AOC as the two traditional major partners in funding high performance sport continued to work together to achieve international sporting success.

Table 6 illustrates total expenditure on sport, recreation and fitness by the Australian Sports Commission between 1989 and 2006, a notable increase on the \$600,000 that was spent by the Commonwealth Government in 1972–73.³² By 2009/10 the annual expenditures of the ASC had grown to \$273 million.³³

An analysis of this increased funding and ongoing financial commitment to high performance sport shows that over a 30-year period the investment has paid dividends. Australia won its first ever Winter Olympics medal in 1994, then came two gold medals in 2002 in Salt Lake City followed by two medals in Turin in 2006 and three in Vancouver in 2010. Likewise in Athens and Beijing, the results reflected medal hauls of 49 and 46 respectively and consecutive top ten finishes. These last two summer Olympic totals were only a small decrease from the 58 Sydney Games medals, and in remarkable contrast to the almost 30% decrease usually experienced by nations in the Olympics following their hosting.

2. Improved Coaching, Competition and Infrastructure: Getting the Right Mix

Clearly the increased funding to Olympic sport by both the AOC and the Australian Government allowed for new programs which enhanced its Olympic success. Of paramount importance was money to hire full-time professional coaches be they from overseas or from domestic ranks. As a result coaching expertise came to Australian shores from the UK, the USA, China, Canada and other

nations. A “Best Person for the Job” approach was taken. And with the AOC instituting coach incentive grants based on performance, the coaching profession worked with athletes in Australia to help deliver positive Olympic results.

The Sydney Olympics was a major stimulus in helping to improve the infrastructure for sport in Australia. In addition to this, starting in the 1980’s, Australia began a concerted effort to host other major international competitions and world championships. Examples included the Commonwealth Games in 1982 in Brisbane and 2006 in Melbourne. The FINA World Aquatic Championships were held in Perth in 1991 and 1998 and then in Melbourne in 2007. This regular hosting of international events allowed Australian athletes to gain experience, compete on friendly home soil and not have to travel long distances. Importantly, this development brought sport to the public eye and gave the nation important event experience and a reputation as a world leader in hosting major international competitions. It also meant that an important infrastructure of high performance sport was developed with highly competent coaches, sports officials and sport administrators.

In addition, Australia has become a world leader in the provision of sport science as well as medical and counselling services to its elite athletes. The network of national and state institutes of sport were critical in this development with significant funding devoted to assisting Australian athletes to perform at their best. Furthermore, in the lead-up to, and at each Olympic Games, Australian athletes had the benefit of top professional assistance from the likes of medical doctors, sport scientists, physiotherapists, massage therapists, nutritionists, etc. The ASC also implemented two new initiatives, A National Coach and Athlete Career and Education Program and a National Talent Identification and Development Program which highlights the importance it placed on finding future Olympians.³⁴

3. Historical, Geographical and Cultural Factors: The Importance of Sport Down Under”

As Richard Cashman makes clear, Australia owes much of its sporting heritage to Britain. As far as sporting traditions are concerned, during the 18th and 19th centuries, the British military introduced and popularized a number of non-indigenous games such as cricket, hockey, soccer, badminton and squash throughout the Empire.³⁵ With this support from the “mother” country, Australia developed into a sport-loving nation.

When trying to explain the magnitude of Australian Olympic success, several notable characteristics are prominent. The vast majority of Olympic medals came in the sport of swimming, in which Australia was traditionally very strong. Figures show that of the 449 Summer Olympic medals won by Australians there have been 58 gold medals in swimming. Olympic swimming legends include Fanny Durack, Dawn Fraser, Murray Rose, Susie O’Neill, Kieran Perkins, Grant Hackett and Ian Thorpe. Such is Australia’s interest in swimming

that historically it has tried to claim ownership of this sport, often vying with the USA for supremacy. A second important fact is that women won a larger percentage of medals than did the men. Caroline Wilson points out that “Between 1948 and 2000, women have made up 28 per cent of our Olympic teams – yet they have won 39% of all gold medals.”³⁶ Dennis Phillips made a similar comment:

With fewer opportunities Australian women have outperformed the men. In so far as Australia has a reputation for excellence as an Olympic nation, that reputation has been built largely on the achievements of women.³⁷

In a strange sort of way, the fact that Australia is so far away from the major hubs of international sport in Europe and North America has proved somewhat of a bonus rather than a negative feature. This is because a “unique” high performance sports model had to be developed that would work for a nation literally half-way around the world from most of the international sport action. Faced with this geographical isolation, Australian athletes had to come up with creative means to get international experience, often by residing for long periods of time at overseas locations. By having to endure such hardships, Australian athletes literally became more hardened competitors in this type of challenging environment. Many successful Australian Olympians seemed to get “mentally tough” and were not affected by the intimidation factor, instead developing a mind-set that they can compete with the best.

Finally, a sporting culture has definitely developed in Australia which encourages participation and at the same time expects excellence. The success of Australia at the Sydney Games, followed on by the Athens and Beijing Olympics as well as recent positive Winter Olympics results, has caused a “spin off effect”. There appears to be a mood of “Success Breeds Success.” The public, the media, the governmental sector, the AOC and even the athletes, coaches and sports administrators have come to demand and expect Australian success in the Olympic Games. Having an interest in winning Olympics medals and doing well on the international sporting stage seems to be a nationalistic trait of Australians. In its recent development of a new sports policy in 2010, the Commonwealth Government is on record of saying it wished to “maintain our status as one of the world’s greatest sporting nations.”³⁸

The Olympic spirit within Australia is typified by the National Sports Museum at the MCG in Melbourne where there is significant attention to the Olympics, and the public tours within the Olympic Park precinct are also very popular. The same is true of Sydney Olympic Park (SOP) at Homebush and the Powerhouse Museum in Darling Harbour where visitors can learn about Australian Olympic heritage. There were several different celebrations in 2006 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Melbourne Games. In September of 2010 during the 10th anniversary celebrations of the Sydney Games there were an extensive variety of events. These included a 2012 Australian Olympic Team Appeal Breakfast, a Schools Celebration of 1200 primary school children at the ANZ Stadium at

SOP, a Sydney 2000 Volunteers Reunion, an Anniversary Celebration Dinner, an Olympic Educational Forum, an Outdoor Concert and other promotional efforts. All forms of the media, in particular television, were generous in coverage especially highlighting successful Sydney Olympians such as Cathy Freeman, Ian Thorpe and Grant Hackett.³⁹

4. Improved Cooperative Relationships and Partnerships: “The Team Approach”

When analysing Australia’s Olympic achievements, acknowledgement must be paid to a very proactive AOC. The AOC has been a major lobby force in soliciting Commonwealth Government expenditure on Olympic sport and topping this up with additional funds. It has been hugely successful in attracting significant sponsorship and marketing of its brand in Australia – evidenced by a close working relationship with several of the key Olympic worldwide sponsors such as Coca Cola and McDonalds as well as with major Australian companies such as Qantas, Australia Post and Telstra. The AOC’s ability to work cooperatively in a “team approach” within the overall sports system with many different players has been a major reason for Australia’s Olympic success.

During the pre-Olympic period before the 2000 Sydney Games, there seemed to be an atmosphere of unprecedented cooperation. The network of national and state institutes of sport, the ASC and state government sport agencies, the AOC, the Australian Paralympic Association and NSO’s representing the Olympic sports, all operated in an extremely unified manner. Shortly after the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, four Executive Directors of state sport institutes, namely Frank Pyke (VIS), Ken Norris (ACTAS), Michael Scott (NSW) and Alex Baumann (QAS), all attributed this cooperative mood as a major factor in Australia’s recent Olympic success.⁴⁰

The AOC’s key involvement in the formation of the Olympic Winter Institute of Australia (OWI) and its recent success in winter Olympic sports is another case study of how it has assisted in the formation of a uniquely efficient high performance sports model. In 1998, the OWI was set up as a joint venture between the ASC, the AIS, the AOC, the NSO’s in winter sport disciplines, the Victorian Institute of Sport and the New South Wales Institute of Sport. Also on board were sponsors such as Qantas and private concerns involved included Perisher Blue and Mt. Buller ski resorts. Although financial support was small by comparison to the summer Olympic sports, Australia won nine Winter Olympic medals, including five gold, during the five Winter Games from 1994 to 2010.⁴¹

5. An Excellent High Performance Sports Model and the Development of International Standard Facilities: Going First Class

If the 1981 starting date of the impressive AIS in Canberra is used as the launching point, the Australian sports model for high performance sport has remained relatively intact for approximately 30 years. During this time there have

been refinements to the system and increased funding to sport from both the AOC and the ASC. From all reports, the remarkable Olympic success in recent years has a direct relationship to this stable and extremely well-performing sports model. Contrast this to another Olympic nation, Canada – which has hosted three Olympic Games (1976, 1988 and 2010) – and has a high performance sports model that has undergone sweeping alterations, constantly changing policies and erratic levels of funding usually with lower spending immediately after Canada hosted an Olympics. Although they did very well with a record of 14 Winter Olympic gold medals in Vancouver, the Canadians only won their first gold medal on home soil at the 2010 Games – their third time as hosts. Clearly, the stability experienced in Australia has proven to be the more successful approach and it is something that other Olympic nations are trying to emulate.

A further reason for Australia's success is its attention to building first-class sporting facilities. A key example is the AIS in Canberra along with its affiliated state institutes and academies of sport. There were also the new venues built for the 2000 Sydney Games especially SOP in Homebush. As well, the Melbourne Olympic Park precinct – which hosted the 1956 Games, and nearby facilities such as the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre (MSAC) in Albert Park – underwent a massive renovation for the 2006 Commonwealth Games. Likewise, with Australia hosting numerous other world championships and events including the Australian Tennis Open, the World Cup of Rugby, the World Masters Games, the President's Cup of Golf – to name but a few – there was a requirement to build numerous Australian international calibre sporting facilities. The venues used for these many events and the expertise required to actually host top level international sport thereby gave an overall boost to sporting success.

Two recent examples of new and very creative sports facilities include the completion in 2010 of an ASC funded European Training Centre (ETC) located in Italy. This unique venue built by the Italians but leased to the ASC will shortly become a home-base for Australian athletes, teams and coaches who have to spend so much of their time overseas in Europe. Secondly, the opening in February 2010 of the National Ice Sports Center (referred to as the Melbourne Icehouse) in Docklands, Melbourne shows the Australian commitment to developing excellent facilities.⁴²

Another important feature adopted by both the AOC and the ASC in its sports funding was a decision to target Olympic sports in which it had the best opportunity to win medals. Thus funding assistance and support was traditionally skewed to such summer sports as swimming, rowing, athletics, triathlon and cycling where there was a record of success and the likelihood of more to come. In a similar way, the OWI concentrated on select winter sports such as freestyle skiing (aerials, moguls, snowboarding) and alpine skiing.

With so many competent and well-trained coaches, sports administrators and sport-based service companies, Australia is considered a world leader in having a large pool of professionals with sporting expertise. Many of these

individuals and companies were even head-hunted or won contracts at other Olympic Games such as in Athens, Beijing, Vancouver and London. Richard Cashman has referred to this pool of talent as the "Australian Olympic Caravan."⁴³

Conclusions: Olympism is Alive and Well in Australia!

It is clear that Australia has had unprecedented Olympic success. It has hosted two Summer Games and not only performed very well in these from a medal perspective, but both events also received international accolades as well-run Games. Australian success has been evidenced in its medal tally with a total of 449 Summer Games medals and nine Winter Games medals as well as a record of consistent participation in every Summer Olympics.

Another important feature could be summarized with the phrase that "Olympism is alive and well in Australia." The Olympic movement is thriving with excellent sporting facilities, a well-run sports system, committed athletes, coaches and sport administrators, a public keen on celebrating Olympic success and getting involved in grass roots promotion of the Games, government interest, corporate support and a media constantly covering Olympic news. When the controversial *Crawford Report* recommended a new sport policy designed to enhance more sport participation and less emphasis on the funding of elite sport, the AOC set up its own Study Group to try to effectively lobby against this change. The AOC Historian, Harry Gordon, took a swipe at the *Crawford Report* which he felt:

[...] fails to comprehend a simple truth: that Australians, both the elite athletes and the passionate supporters of sport, love the process of winning. Coming second does not entice them.⁴⁴

When many of the *Crawford Report's* recommendations were shelved, AOC President John Coates was only too pleased to report that the Australian Government "[...] genuinely got it and were not prepared 'to scale back Australia's Olympic opportunities and expectations' on their watch."⁴⁵

There have been a number of controversies surrounding the Olympics and several critics have emerged, most notably, Andrew Jennings.⁴⁶ With respect to Australia, Helen Lenskyj, in particular, has commented on what she perceives as various negative aspects of the Australian Olympic experience. Among her criticisms is that the educational programs of the AOC are somewhat of a brainwashing technique on young people since they often emphasize Olympic ideals and do not give a balanced coverage, ignoring various flaws and problems of the Olympics.⁴⁷ She also questions the legacy impact of the Sydney Games and the huge budgetary output to run such an event at the expense of sacrificing important social programs.⁴⁸ Richard Cashman, Director of the Australian Centre for Olympic Studies, in his text *The Bitter Sweet Awakening: The Legacy of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games*, has researched the positive and negative side to the legacy topic.⁴⁹ While experts would agree that not all aspects of

the Olympic movement in Australia can be painted in a totally positive light, no doubt they would conclude that Australia has been a major player in the Olympic movement, has performed very well and contributed significantly to its history.⁵⁰

In summary, Australia is definitely one of the world's most active proponents of the Olympic movement. The AOC has done an excellent job of embracing the Olympics and not only setting up a traditional approach of taking its lead from the IOC, but has gone beyond this and become a trendsetter with its own distinctive style. It would be extremely difficult to find another nation that can surpass Australia in terms of its overall Olympic experience. Australia's relatively small population and geographic isolation has not been a deterrent in pushing it to the forefront of the Olympic movement. There is a strong likelihood that there will be another Australian city, most likely Melbourne, put up a bid soon to host a Summer Olympics.⁵¹ The 1956 and 2000 Games show a proven track record and the international community would no doubt welcome a return to the island continent. The AOC has had a history of being extremely proactive in developing the Olympic brand. It has worked very closely in a partnership approach with many different entities to deliver something of which Pierre de Coubertin no doubt would be very proud. ■

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- 11 BAKA, Richard & HESS, Rob: "Doing a 'Bradbury!': An Analysis of Recent Australian Success at the Winter Olympic Games", IN: BARNEY, Robert, WAMSLEY, Kevin & MARTYN, Scott. (EDS.): *The Global Nexus Engaged: Past, Present, Future Interdisciplinary Olympic Studies. Sixth International Symposium for Olympic Research*. The University of Western Ontario, Canada 2002, 177-184.
- 12 COATES, John. "President's Address" at *AOC Annual General Meeting*. May 15, 2010 (found on AOC website www.olympics.org.au).
- 13 Ibid., p. 3. In addition to the \$88.48 million legacy fund, the AOC also positioned itself to receive \$72 million from SOCOG for the preparation and participation of Australian Olympic Teams for 1996, 1998 and 2000.
- 14 A four year cycle between summer Olympics used for planning and budgeting is referred to as a quadrennium.
- 15 AOC. *Annual Reports (2004 to 2009)*.
- 16 AOC website. www.olympics.org.au (AOC Funding – Summer Sports).
- 17 Initially the AOC was referred to as the AOF until 1990 and owned a building and had its main office located in Melbourne next to the Melbourne Cricket Ground – the main stadium and spiritual home of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. Eventually the AOC sold the building in Melbourne and the AOC office was relocated to Sydney although this move caused some ill will due to interstate politics and long-standing rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney Olympic officials. An example of the AOC's emphasis on developing a corporate approach to sport governance and maintaining high calibre management is reflected in salaries. John Coates earned \$425,263 in 2008/09 and another five top-level staff had salaries in excess of \$250,000 per annum.
- 18 Including these three, Australia has had a total of ten IOC members over the years. Besides these individuals, others who played prominent roles in the development of the AOC included Sydney Grange, Julius "Judy" Patching, and Geoffrey Henke, along with thirteen other AOC Life Members. (Refer to 2009 *AOC Annual Report*, p. 10).
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- 20 AOC Website. www.olympics.org.au. One program which the AOC does not support is the concept of an Olympic House at each Olympic Games. Several Olympic nations have established a relaxed and friendly meeting place for their own Olympic athletes, coaches, support staff, mission team, family and friends, sponsors and special guests. As the prime hospitality site for their respective NOC, these Olympic Houses also serve a very important distraction-free environment role. Apparently the AOC tried this idea once in Atlanta in 1996 but the assessment was that it got a bit "boozy" and it was never implemented again. The author was a guest at Canada Olympic House in Vancouver, 2010 and found it to be an excellent, well-run program and one that the AOC should consider implementing again.
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- 46 JENNINGS, Andrew: *The Great Olympic Swindle*. London 2000.
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- 48 LENSKEY, *The Best*.
- 49 CASHMAN, *The Bitter-Sweet Awakening*.
- 50 Over the last 60 years the AOC has had a few examples of adverse publicity. These included: the mixed reaction within Australia to the AOC decision to attend the US-backed boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics; criticism and a reprimand of Australian IOC member Phil Coles for accepting alleged financial inducements of holiday expenses by the 2002 Salt Lake City Organising Committee; a charge of nepotism associated with IOC stalwart, Kevan Gosper, for initially allowing his daughter to accept a key Torch Relay segment in the 2000 Sydney Games (his daughter eventually did not take part); and, money-losing investments by the AOC in a Queensland Casino.
- 51 Australia has put in a bid to host the 2018 and 2022 World Cup of Soccer. Once the outcome of this is known the AOC will be in a better position to move forward with plans to host another Olympics.

The First Marathon Races

1st International Olympic Games 1896

— Stavros Tsonias & Athanasios Anastasiou —

There is hardly any book or monograph on the history "Olympic Games" which does not make some reference to the first Marathon Race. Nowadays, for the majority of people, it is associated with Spyros Louis, the winner of the first race in 1896, and with the current distance of 42,195 metres. The press of the time covered the organization of the "First International Olympic Games of 1896" in detail and promoted the marathon race as a major national event. Although a great deal of different and conflicting information concerning the Marathon race has been recorded, certain points have been left unclear, particularly with regard to the preparatory and trial races which preceded the final Marathon race. Both these preparatory and trial races highlight the historical evolution of the Marathon and are an area which has not received sufficient analysis.

A lot of significant information which supplemented and clarified specific important aspects of the historic

Marathon race, came to light as a result of the Athens Olympic Games of 2004. In addition, contemporary technology which digitised the printed press of the time made it more accessible.

The beginning

Michel Bréal, a French philhellene and intellectual suggested that a marathon race should be held to commemorate the feat of the messenger from the battle of Marathon and his idea gave the impetus for the establishment of this new race.¹ During the first meeting of the Temporary Committee of the Olympic Games (12-24 November 1894) when the programme of games was agreed, the Marathon was included among the sports events. Thus, the marathon, a race which would eventually become one of the world's most popular events, was born. The programme of the games was published in the