

# From Games Symbols to Historical and Cultural Representations: The Summer Mascots\*

By Larry Gerlach

The city pictogram of Mexico City in 1968 was characterized by the dove of peace.



Summer Olympics not only produced the first official mascot, but also the best-known examples of the genre. In contrast to Winter Games mascots (JOH, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 24–31), they have received greater media publicity and more extensive utilization because of the scope and international exposure of Olympiads. But also, given unrestrained design possibilities, they have been more ambitiously creative and commercially oriented – and successful – than their winter counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

The first de facto Summer Olympic mascot, in the original French sense of a good luck charm, is lost in time and subject to interpretation. In 1932, forty years

before the first official mascot debuted, an unofficial talisman appeared during the Los Angeles Games. A black Scottish terrier, presumably a stray, wandered into the Olympic Village, whereupon athletes anointed “Smoky” a mascot. A photograph of the dog wearing a white blanket bearing the designation “Mascot” below the Olympic rings is all that is known of mysterious canine.<sup>2</sup> Thirty-two years later, in recognition of the Olympic debut of judo, the martial art and combat sport that originated in Japan, the official Tokyo Games pin featured an unnamed cartoon-like figure wearing a judo headband.<sup>3</sup>

Smoky was indeed a mascot, but only as a personal talisman for some athletes, not as a totem for the Games, and the Tokyo figure was a souvenir image, not a mascot, despite frequently being inaccurately so labeled by Olympic memorabilia merchants and collectors. Nonetheless, the age of the Olympic mascot was at hand.

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**1968 Mexico City.** The 1968 Summer Games had no mascot, but perhaps because of the publicity accorded earlier that year to Schuss, Grenoble's unofficial Games icon, a red jaguar and white dove are sometimes

Unmistakable – a dog as mascot of the 1932 Games.

Photos: Official Report 1932 and 1968, Volker Kluge Archive



incorrectly described as Mexico City's mascots. El Jaguar Rojo de Chichen-Itza emblemized the red jaguar throne in the pre-Columbian pyramid, "El Casatillo", in the Mayan city Chichen Itza in the state of Yucatan, while Paloma de la Paz, a stylized white dove designed by Eduardo Terrazas and Lance Wyman, represented the Games' slogan: "*Los juegos de la Paz*" (the Games of Peace), symbolized by the 10,000 white doves released in the opening ceremony. An emblem and a logo respectively, the images were never presented or utilized as mascots.<sup>4</sup>

**1972 Munich.** As the visual design commissioner for the 1972 Olympics, premier German designer Otl Aicher, creator of the Lufthansa logo, produced what is still regarded as "indubitably one of the most systematic and well-thought designs in the history of the Olympic games".<sup>5</sup> Among his creations was "Waldi" ("Woody"), a Dachshund who launched the tradition of official Olympic mascots. He modeled Waldi after his longhaired Cherie von Birkenhof Aicher chose the Dachshund ("badger dog"), a breed internationally associated with Germany, because the determination, speed and agility of Bavaria's favorite hunting dog coincided with desired personal and athletic traits. Apropos Munich's "Rainbow Games", Waldi appeared vertically striped in a variety of the pastel colors used in the Olympic Stadium, colors that were intended to represent individual sports, national flags and even the uniforms of Games personnel. Aicher vetoed red and black, colors identified with the Nazis.

Design simplicity enhanced the appeal of the multi-colored canine. An instant success, Waldi was used extensively in pre-Games publicity. Even the marathon course through downtown Munich followed the dog's outline with runners starting at the back of the neck and racing counter-clockwise around the head, legs and belly to the tail, thence along the back until exiting into the Olympic Stadium. He appeared on a variety of merchandise from pins and posters to cups and toys, but more importantly for the future, some fifty licensees sold two million plush Waldis in twenty countries. Waldi's commercial success portended the revenue potential for mascots.<sup>6</sup>

**1976 Montreal.** For the first Olympics in Canada, the Graphics and Design Directorate, a committee made up of prominent graphic artists – Yvon Laroche, Pierre-Yves Pelletier, Guy St-Arnaud and George Huel – produced a minimalist mascot, the beaver, an industrious indigenous animal to represent the country's dual heritages. The name "Amik", chosen in a public contest, means "beaver" in Anishinaabe of the Algonquian linguistic family, the most widespread language among eastern Canada's First Peoples. The beaver, an important part of Canada's early economic and demographic

development because of its role in the fur trade, has always been depicted on Montreal's coats of arms and in 1975 became the national symbol. Amik was the first mascot to represent local and national history as well as the Olympics: The red sash with rings corresponded to the ribbons attached to the medals awarded at the Games.

Presented without embellishment, Amik was the first and last mascot portrayed realistically without cartoonish features or anthropomorphic qualities. A furry mass without personality, charm or distinguishing characteristics, the asexual Amik was one of least popular mascots in Olympic history.<sup>7</sup> Amik reflected the designers' intent to create a "symbol, clean and simple", but given the cool reception mascots henceforth would be enlivened with cartoonish, anthropomorphic qualities in an effort to create broad popular acceptance, especially among children, and commercial appeal.

**1980 Moscow.** The 1980 Games was the first to employ two mascots. Vigri, a baby ringed seal, was the talisman for the yacht races held in the Baltic Sea off the Pirta district of Tallinn, capital of Estonia. Perhaps nationalistic sensibilities prompted a separate mascot as the USSR had annexed Estonia after the Second World War. ('Vigri', a common Estonian term for seal, an important fishing resource, was also the name of a café and professional football club in Tallinn.) The adorable mascot, commonly featuring long silk whiskers, multicolored cap and a ribbon in Olympic colors around his neck, attracted little attention because of limited exposure.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, Moscow's ursine mascot became a beloved international icon. A bear was the overwhelming favorite among the 45,000 responses obtained from a public poll sponsored by the newspaper *Soviet Sport* and the television programme *Animal World*. And from sixty graphic designs produced by members of the Artists' Union of the USSR, Victor Andreyevich Chizhikov, renowned illustrator of over 100 children's books, produced the winning entry. The result, after six months and over a hundred sketches, was Mikhail Potapych Toptygin, better known as Misha, the diminutive of "Mikhail". Both the choice of the animal and name were obvious and appropriate. The bear had been the national symbol of Russia since the 17<sup>th</sup> century and since 2001 of the United Russia Party, and most bears in Russia fairy-tales are named Misha, from Mishka, diminutive for Medved (bear).<sup>9</sup>

Misha was acclaimed for two reasons. First and foremost was path-breaking design. Whereas the previous Summer Games mascots, Waldi and Amik, were expressionless and emotion-free symbols, the cuddly bear cub exuded personality with a warm smile and playful demeanor. The second was political. With



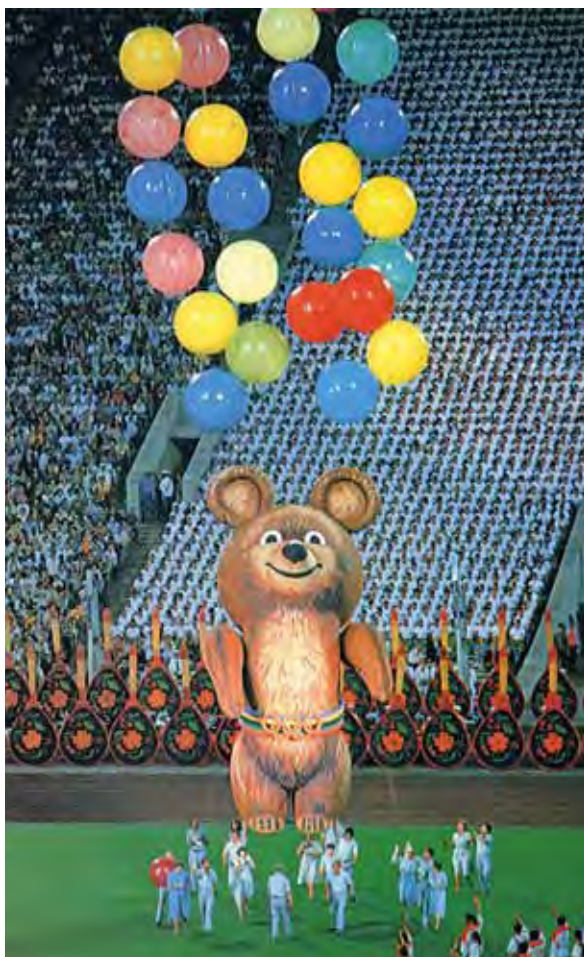
"Waldi" – the dachshund as symbol of Bavarian "Gemütlichkeit" (comfort). However: this short-legged German hunting dog has a strong self-awareness and too often too a lack of respect for bigger dogs.



"Amik" – the Canadian beaver with a belt in the COJO colours. The name, taken from the language of the Algonquian Indians who used to live in Québec, was chosen by public competition.



"Misha", the bear, took his leave in 1980 in Moscow with a tear in his left eye.



Moscow becoming the first Communist country to host the Games, Misha conspicuously honored the Olympic Movement by wearing an iconic belt that displayed the five Olympic colors and featured a gold buckle shaped like the rings. Misha's friendly, welcoming image was politically apropos given Cold War politics and the subsequent US-led boycott of the Moscow Games by sixty-five nations in retaliation for the Soviet's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

Misha was the first mascot to appear as a costumed human and to be integrated into the Games themselves. He was on hand to welcome the torch relay when it reached the Soviet Union and in the opening ceremony dozens of "Mishas" danced on the stadium floor while a card mosaic of the mascot appeared in the stands. During the closing ceremony's Grand Finale, another mosaic in the stands formed an image of the bear carrying a bouquet of flowers. It was called "Crying Misha" because a tear fell from his left eye as the words flanking him wished everyone a "happy journey"; an inflated effigy of the mascot then entered the stadium and, following the singing of the finale song, "Farewell Moscow", it was released and floated out of the stadium.

There were other firsts. Misha appeared in an animated short film and a cartoon television series, both of which became common usage for mascots in future

Games. And he was the first Olympic icon in space, accompanying Cosmonaut Vladimir Kovalyonok to the Salyut 6 Laboratory in 1981. Misha was also a diplomat, meeting Mickey Mouse in 1988 in Red Square during his first official public appearance behind the Iron Curtain three years before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Most significant for future local Olympic Committees, Misha was the first mascot of a sporting event to achieve large-scale commercial success. Inspired by the merchandizing of Waldi, Moscow organisers marketed his likeness on 100,000 posters and more than a million each of metal and plastic objects; some 1.1 million plush toys were sold worldwide.<sup>10</sup> Despite the politicized context of the boycotted Games, the cute and cuddly Misha was enormously popular and remains one of the most beloved Olympic mascots, perhaps the best of all time.

**1984 Los Angeles.** From the numerous animation and film studios in the Los Angeles area, the Organizing Committee chose legendary Walt Disney Productions to devise a mascot for the 1984 Games. Unable first to devise acceptable representations of Southern California life and then precluded by Moscow's Misha from using a grizzly bear, the state symbol, designers sought to exemplify the entire nation. The logical choice was the Bald Eagle, the official emblem of the United States. Created by Disney artist C. Robert Moore, "Sam the Olympic Eagle" was a cheerful, cartoonish character with arms and fingers for wings, a red and white striped bow tie and a red-white-and-blue top hat that, Olympic rings notwithstanding, was similar to that worn by his namesake, Uncle Sam, the personification of the American national government. As an eagle Sam not only conformed to the local Organizing Committee's "red, white, and blue" patriotic theme for the Games, but also personified the ideals of the Olympic motto – "Citius, Altius, Fortius" – swifter, higher, stronger.

Sam was both popular and controversial. Some people found the mascot's name and dress an appropriate expression of the strong nationalistic flavor of the 1984 Games given the Soviet-led boycott in retaliation for the American-led 1980 Moscow boycott. Others found of the first and only blatantly political mascot objectionable for a supposedly apolitical Olympics. Still others felt Sam denigrated the national symbol. Intended to project a "warmer, more friendly" image of the eagle, he looked more like a gregarious, bulbous-nosed, pot-bellied chicken than a stern, regal and powerful eagle. Like his 1980 counterpart, Misha, Sam was purposefully designed for use as a graphic symbol, a stuffed toy and a costumed character with special appeal to children. He appeared in numerous promotional activities and was highly successful commercially as a plush doll and emblem on a wide variety of products; ten million replicas of Sam alone were sold.<sup>11</sup>



"Sam", the eagle – mascot of the 1984 Games.

**1988 Seoul.** By means of monetary incentives, the Seoul Olympic Committee sought unprecedented public input in the selection of a mascot. A month long contest in 1982 offering a cash prize for mascot suggestions produced 4344 entries classified into sixty categories from which a rabbit, tiger, squirrel and a pair of Mandarin ducks were finalists. The Seoul Executive Board then chose the tiger, a predictable selection given the Amur (Siberian) tiger's prominence in Korean foundation mythology and folklore. Seven persons were selected to submit designs for the mascot; Kim Hyun of Design Park won the competition. The Organising Committee then sponsored another public cash prize contest to name the tiger. There were 6117 responses. From the various names proposed a screening panel, which included folklorists, recommended Hodori in April 1984. His name is literal: a "boy tiger" – Ho from tiger (*horangi*) and *dori* a masculine diminutive. Seoul initially continued Calgary's dual gender representation with Hosuni (a female "little tiger"), but she quickly and inexplicably disappeared, perhaps for marketing reasons, leaving Hodori to serve as the lone mascot. (Hosuni, however, became a rare and expensive collectible.)

The Seoul committee officially said Hodori represented the "vigorous and marching spirit of the Korean people", but the amicable feline more popularly was thought to represent the hospitality and friendliness of the Korean people. He also conformed to the cultural concept of the tiger as a sacred guardian that does not harm people, but instead through its courage and power brings good luck and drives off evil spirits.

Just as the Seoul Paralympic symbol, the tri-colour Sam Taegeuk, embodied traditional values, Hodori clearly represented Korean culture as well as the Games. Around his neck he wore a pendant in the shape of the Olympic rings attached to a band comprised of Olympic colours, and on his head was the popular *Sangmo* dance hat with its customary streamer shaped like an "S" for the host city. That Hodori bore a striking resemblance to Tony the Tiger, the "grreat!" spokes-cat for Frosted Flakes cereal, prompted rumors, unsubstantiated, that the Kellogg Company had considered filing a lawsuit for copyright infringement. Hodori lives today as the symbol of Korea's National Tae-Kwon-Do Demonstration team.<sup>12</sup>

**1992 Barcelona.** The home of IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch presented a confusing and controversial mascot. That Barcelona was the capital of Catalonia, an autonomous region within Spain, presented a challenge to mascot design in terms of political and cultural identity as well as modern versus traditional artistic concepts. Valencian cartoonist Javier Mariscal emerged from a competition with six designers with the winning mascot, a cubist Catalan Sheepdog named "Cobi".

In contrast to previous conventional animal mascots, clearly Disneyesque in origin, Mariscal produced an avant-garde drawing of a human-like canine. Cobi was "flat" in dimension, texture and color, and despite open arms was guarded in expression and gesture. Mariscal, creatively influenced by Pop art, initially commented that a Cobi was inspired by Picasso's interpretations of Diego Velázquez's masterpiece, *Las Meninas*, but later said: "I drew him when I was stoned." More clearly, Mariscal drew upon his earlier career as a "countercultural" artist. His popular party-going dogs, "The Garriris", created for the underground comic *El Viborabook* very much like Cobi.<sup>13</sup>

The vanguard, even subversive, design of a surreal dog, a stylish sharp dresser with a wry (or sly?) smile, was initially disliked, even derided. Some people considered him an artistic bastardization of Picasso. Others were outraged by the failure to depict Catalan heritage. A month after Cobi's debut, more than half the population registered disapproval, in large part because of the crude, sketch-like design. To make the mascot more acceptable to the general public, graphic designer Josep M. Trias used computers to soften the shape. Still, on the eve of the Games, fully one-third of the population disliked the mascot.

Nonetheless, with alterations Cobi became wildly popular with children. He was featured in an animated a television programme, *The Cobi Troupe*, directed by Mariscal and produced by the Barcelona Organising Committee, which ran for a season on Spanish television as a Games promotion. He was also featured in a children's book of the same name illustrated by Mariscal and written by Jaume Ferreri-Ferran. Prior to the Games, Cobi was ubiquitous, appearing in the guise of athletes engaged in all twenty-eight sports; during the Olympics he hovered as an inflated effigy at the Barcelona waterfront and toward the end of the closing ceremony a balloon-like Cobi floated up and away from the stadium. Differences of opinion aside, Cobi was one of the most successful financial mascots in history, raising mascot-related revenue double that of Los Angeles and Seoul. He adorned an extensive array of souvenirs called *Cobiana*, and saw unprecedented use in advertisements for products ranging from Coca Cola to Dannon yogurt. (Paradoxically, his image was also used in an "anti-Cobi campaign" to protest Olympic commercialization.) Despite his popularity, Cobi failed to meet the basic mascot criterion. The name (originally CoBi) incorporated the initials of the Barcelona Olympic Organizing Committee (COOB), but the mascot otherwise did not reflect anything about the city, the country or the Games.<sup>14</sup>

**1996 Atlanta.** After reviewing suggestions from a newspaper promotion and submissions from twenty designers, the Atlanta Organizing Committee decided



"CoBi" – Mariscal's friendly mountain dog with a human body. Above: "Hodori" – Korea's tiger cub with the traditional farmer's hat "sangmo".



What is it? "Whatizit". The name of the Atlanta mascot was later changed to "Izzy". It was to fascinate children.

Photos: Official Reports 1996 and 2000



on a radical departure from tradition with the first amorphous, computer-generated mascot. He was named Whatizit, aka Whatizhee, because the abstract figure could easily be reconfigured to resemble athletes in a variety of sporting poses.

The concept was innovative, but there were two immediate problems. Because the name was confusing, the committee invited youngsters to come up with a new name; but the recommendation, Kirby, was a Nintendo trademark, so he was dubbed "Izzy", short for of Whatizit or Whatizhee. If the innovative design was au courant with digital art coming of age in the 1990s, the break from traditional animal-people and national-cultural presentations was controversial. The designer, John Ryan, senior animation director of DESIGNefx, said: "The idea was to inspire the imagination." But Izzy was ridiculed and mercilessly mocked in the press as "a Sperm in Sneakers" and "Quasismurf"; television broadcaster Bob Costas called it "a genetic experiment gone horribly, ghastly wrong".

The tear-shaped blue blob with bulging eyes, white hands, red boots and a multi-colored ringed tail underwent numerous modifications partly to assuage public opinion, but primarily to meet the challenge of successfully adapting a computer image to costumes and merchandise. Among other things he was slimmed down and given a nose; stars were removed from the pupils in his eyes, a mouth replaced lips and lightening bolt eyebrows were relocated on his boots and the two caps atop his head. It was to no avail. Vastly unpopular, Izzy generated less revenue than expected and was absent from the opening ceremonies and other formal

Olympic activities. But if the amorphous figure was unpopular with adults, he was enormously popular with children, accustomed to abstract animated characters. Izzy starred in a cartoon television programme as well as a video game, "Izzy's Quest for the Olympic Rings," and a computer adventure game, "Izzy's Adventure".

What wuzzi? Nobody then – or now – knows what "Izzy" is or was. Without an identity or appealing attributes, the indeterminable fantasy figure rivals Magique, Albertville's 1992 Winter Games icon, as the least successful Olympic mascot. As Laurie Olsen, ACOG communications director put it: "The pain and suffering inflicted on an Organizing Committee for a failed mascot is not easy." Still, futuristic Izzy presaged the age of digitally designed mascots.<sup>15</sup>

**2000 Sydney.** Sydney presented the first mascot trio. The Organising Committee wanted to return to native animal representations, but decided against the globally familiar Kangaroo and Koala. Katoomba graphic designer and illustrator Matthew Hattan and design consultant Josef Szekeres agreed, producing three indigenous creatures less well-known outside of Australia – a Kookaburra (terrestrial tree kingfisher bird), a Platypus (venom-producing semi-aquatic mammal with the duck-like beak, body of an otter and beaver tail that is the animal emblem of New South Wales) and an Echidna (spiny anteater). The mascots were unusual – the Platypus and Echidna are the only mammals in the world that lay eggs (monotremes), while the Kookaburra is known locally as a laughing jackass. They eschewed previously successful life-like representations (Misha) and avant-garde images (Cobi) to craft cartoonish likenesses of the animals. Their names, chosen from hundreds of public entries, represented place and time: Olly (Olympic), the Kookaburra; Syd (Sydney), the Platypus; and Millie (Millennium), the Echidna.

Allow me! "Olly" (Olympic), the Kookaburra; "Millie" (Millennium), the Echidna; and "Syd" (Sydney), the Platypus – the mascots of 2000 (left to right).



Hoping to increase public acceptance, the committee gave them forced and unconvincing layered meanings: Olly supposedly represented air as well and universal generosity; Syd represented the earth, the environment and the energy of Australia and its people; and Millie represented water and was a techno-whiz and information guru.<sup>16</sup>

The Organising Committee regarded the trio as “a key element of marketing and general games promotion in the public mind”. But the public was ambivalent about the trio and they soon were subjected to considerable ridicule. The triumvirate was eventually overshadowed by an unofficial mascot, Fatso the Fat-Arsed Wombat, created by Sydney cartoonist Paul Newell. Fatso, whose sheepish smile and protruding rear-end spoofed Olympic commercialization and hypocrisy, was popularized by the comedy team Roy & HG on their satirical sports/comedy programme *The Dream*. While efforts by the Sydney Organising Committee to marginalize Fatso failed, the official mascot trio ultimately carried the financial day with sales exceeding \$300 million.<sup>17</sup>

**2004 Athens.** Hoping to use the Olympics to emphasize heritage, the Athens Organising Committee initially considered using the Minerva owl, sacred symbol of ancient Athens, as its mascot. It was a historically appropriate idea, but one with limited promotional or commercial prospects. Connecting ancient and modern Greece was more effectively realized when out of 196 worldwide submissions from companies and individual designers, Spyros Gogos of the Greek design agency Paragraph Design Ltd. won the mascot competition with ancient figurines presented as brother and sister “dolls.”

Instead of a modern design, the dolls, clumsy looking – especially in costume – with triangular bodies, long necks and club feet and virtually indistinguishable save for the colour of their tunics, Athena orange, Phevos blue, were close replicas of archaic 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE terra-cotta *daidala* (objects of worship). Their names were drawn from multifunctional deities of Ancient Greek mythology: Phevos, also known as Apollo, the god of light, medicine, law, philosophy, music; Athena, the goddess of wisdom, courage, civilization, heroic endeavor and patron of Athens. To the Organising Committee, the mascots represented “participation, brotherhood, equality, cooperation, fair play [and] the everlasting Greek value of human scale.”

Historical representations are normally lauded, but despite support by curators at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens some Classical scholars and anthropologists denounced associating religious icons with modern concepts of toys as insulting, even blasphemous. Dr. Panagiotis Marinis, President of the Societas Hellenica Antiquarium,



Divinities from Hellas Post: “Phevos” (blue) and “Athena” (orange) – a reverence to the god of light Apollo (Phoebus) and Athena, the protecting goddess of the 2004 Olympic city.

charged the mascots “mock the spiritual values of the Hellenic Civilization by degrading these same holy personalities that were revered during the ancient Olympic Games.” A threatened lawsuit to ban the mascots never materialized, and the attempt to forge an historical connection between Ancient Greek history and Modern Greece was both popular and effective.<sup>18</sup>

**2008 Beijing.** While a team led by Min Wang, the design director for the Beijing Olympics, developed emblems, symbols and pictograms, “China’s Picasso”, folk artist Han Meilin from Jinan, Shandong Province, fashioned the most numerous, elaborate and culturally multilayered mascots in history. Originally called “The Friendlies”, the five mascots were renamed after three months because local officials feared the title might be misinterpreted as “friend lies” or “friendless”. Now collectively known as “Fuwa”, literally “good-luck dolls”, they represented four of China’s most popular animals and the Olympic flame – Beibei the Sturgeon, Jingjing the Giant Panda, Huanhuan the Olympic Flame, Yingying the Tibetan Antelope and Nini the Swallow. (The panda and antelope are endangered species.) They were five because it is a lucky number that corresponds to the number of Olympic rings and the Chinese elements – fire, water, wood, gold and earth.

Han drew 1000 models before deciding on child-like characters stylistically reflecting traditional folk art and ornamentation. Designed to appeal especially to children, they were given two-syllable rhyming names, a traditional Chinese means of expressing affection for youngsters. More subtle was the political implication: The first syllable of each name formed a sentence, “Bei Jing Huan Ying Nin” (“Welcome to Beijing”), an adroit greeting given the initial worldwide controversy over Beijing’s hosting the Games and the subsequent international protests over the occupation of Tibet during the torch relay. Following the ancient Chinese tradition of using symbols to spread blessings, each mascot was identified with cultural blessings: Beibei prosperity, Jingjing happiness, Huanhuan passion, Yingying health and Nini goodness. They were also given athletic representations: Beibei aquatic sports; Jingjing, strength

“Bei Jing Huan Ying Nin”. Five dolls say: “Welcome to Beijing”. The red “Huanhuan”, here on a Chinese stamp block, symbolized fire and Olympic Spirit.



sports; Huanhuan ball games; Yingying: track and field; and Nini gymnastics. And their colors matched the Olympic rings: Beibei blue, Jingjing black Huanhuan red, Yingying yellow and Nini green.

The undeniably cute mascots were controversial. Confusion and misunderstanding arose from their excessively elaborate headdresses, multiple representations and strained associations. Internet bloggers, eventually censored by the Chinese government, called them “Wuwa” (witch dolls) and blamed “The Curse of the Fuwa” for recent calamities: Jingjing for the earthquake in Sichuan, Huanhuan for international torch relay protests, Yingying for rioting in Tibet, Nini for a Mongolian locust infestation and Shandong train wreck, and Beibei for South China floods and even fears the Yangtze River’s Three Gorges Dam might fail. Although a nationwide survey showed forty percent of the people were indifferent or disliked the mascots, the Fuwa eventually became enormously popular, especially with children, thanks in part to the government’s massive, nationwide merchandizing campaign. They also appeared in theatrical performances, a video game and an animated cartoon television series, *The Olympic Adventures of Fuwa*.

If the mascots were commercially popular, netting in excess of \$300 million, their creation was problematic. Han Meilin, who had suffered, even been tortured, during Mao’s Cultural Revolution 1966–1976, was familiar with Olympic design having created the granite and copper Five Dragon Clock Tower sculpture for Atlanta 1996. But he became thoroughly disenchanted with the creative process and the final products for his home Games. The Beijing Organising Committee kept pressing for animal mascots, making new proposals and requesting changes during the design effort. That Han, who tried unsuccessfully to quit the assignment, had two heart attacks during the design process added to the notion the Fuwas were a curse. After the Games he completely disavowed the mascots, even banning them from an exhibition of his work. The Beijing committee, he said, refused to compensate him for his labor: “I was supposed to be paid one Yuan for making the Fuwa, but haven’t yet even gotten that.”<sup>19</sup>

One-eyed: “Wenlock” greets the Olympic guests at London Airport.

**London 2012.** With single Olympics and Paralympics mascots, London both returned to the lone talisman tradition of the first seven Summer Games while breaking new ground with futuristic high-tech creations for the digital age. Designed by Grant Hunter of the London-based design firm, Iris Agency, both anthropomorphic characters, shiny metallic animations supposedly formed from the last two drops of steel left after the Bolton steelworks forged the final support girder for London’s Olympic Stadium, dramatically extended the boundaries of mascot design. If the ingeniously avant-garde creations looked to the future, London organisers turned to the past by explicitly honoring history in naming them Wenlock after William Penny Brookes’ Much Wenlock Games in Shropshire, immediate precursor to the Modern Olympics, and Mandeville after the Stoke Mandeville hospital in Buckinghamshire, where Ludwig Guttmann’s rehabilitation programme was the forerunner of the Paralympics.

The names were universally lauded, but the designs were widely lamented, not unlike the reaction to Wolff Olins’ controversial Organising Committee’s logo. The heads of both decidedly non-British, Cyclopean Semenoids, bore a single eye, purportedly a camera lens to “record everything” and a yellow taxi light paying homage to London’s iconic black cabs. The three points atop Wenlock’s head represented the medals podium and thus achievement, while Mandeville’s helmet-shaped head featured three crescents in the Paralympic colours. Wenlock on each arm wore five Friendship bands in the five colours of the Olympic rings, while Mandeville’s right arm boasted a single “Personal best timer” to monitor performances. The sleek steel droplets lacked a mouth, ears and nose; their streamlined arms and legs had no fingers or feet. Body colouration was symbolic: Mandeville’s steely blue symbolized determination, while Wenlock’s combination of gold, silver, bronze, and orange supposedly exuded warmth. Each displayed the logo of their respective London Games.

Because the playful Pixar-like creatures, personifying friendship and striving to do one’s best, were expressly





designed to appeal to youngsters, the London committee hired Michael Morpugo, prominent juvenile literature author whose work includes *War Horse*, to write a children's book, *Out Of A Rainbow: The Original Story of the London 2012 Mascots*, to explain the origin and nature of the mascots. The book was subsequently adapted as an animated film. Wenlock and Mandeville also appeared in comic strips and animated shorts. Nonetheless, the designs and the efforts to cloak the unconventional mascots with variegated personalities and interests increased confusion and prompted heavy criticism in the British media. A columnist for *The Globe and Mail* described them as resembling the offspring of a "drunken, one-night stand between a Teletubby and a Dalek" (extraterrestrial mutant). If the London mascots were not adorable, fetching or cuddly, they may well prove prototypical in developing futuristic designs.<sup>20</sup>



**Rio 2016.** Instead of representing folklore, culture, or symbolism, the 2016 Rio mascots, are humanoid ambassadors reinforcing internationally held impressions about the natural and musical enchantments of Brazil.<sup>21</sup> The Olympic mascot, Vinicius, with the physical attributes of a bird, cat, and monkey, represents the diversity of exotic wildlife inhabiting the tropical jungles. The Paralympic mascot, Tom, his head covered with leaves, embodies the vast forest flora. Their names, chosen after three-week public voting on three sets of possibilities, honour Vinicius de Moraes and Tom Jobim, pioneers of the Bossa Nova, Brazil's best-known musical genre, whose work includes the classic *The Girl from Ipanema*. Created by Birdo Producoes in Sao Paulo, each magical male mascot embraces the popularity of social media with its own Facebook and Twitter account.

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Since their debut in 1972, mascots have become increasingly conspicuous and important components of Summer and Winter Olympics. Unique to a particular Games and designed for maximum popular appeal, they have appeared in a variety of guises, most often an emblematic native animal, but also invented

creatures and abstract animations popular in the age of high-tech computer graphics and even historical human figures. Whatever the form, they are invariably anthropomorphized, enabling them to project human-like personalities, qualities and activities. Initially, a single talisman sufficed, but from 1988 to 2016 multiple figures have been the norm; twelve of the sixteen Games have created two to five mascots. The characters are normally asexual, but five times distinctly male and female mascots were paired. To enhance the perception of mascots, Organising Committees, especially since Sydney 2000, have imposed on the icons strained, invariably incongruous, functions, social values and cultural belief systems. And to increase public acceptance of mascots, the committees have broadened popular participation in the selection and naming process as exemplified by Sochi's electronic balloting. Although the quality and appropriateness of design has varied considerably, giving rise to "best" and "worst" lists.<sup>22</sup> All mascots, designed by preeminent artists and endorsed by the local committees, are significant Olympic icons to be appreciated and understood for the rationale and roles they represent.

The transformation in design concepts followed the dramatic changes in the conception and utilization of mascots. The role of mascots quickly expanded from peripheral publicity marks for a particular Olympics to prominent corporate advertising ambassadors with an extensive presence, including people dressed in costume, in community relations, pre-Games promotions, appearances during opening and closing ceremonies and attendance at sports events. The commercial potential suggested by Waldi and Misha led Organising Committees, most dramatically after Barcelona, to contract with a numerous licensees to market mascots as toys and especially as emblems on souvenir products as a means of generating ever more substantial revenue, upwards of one-third of recent local budgets. Cultural representation has always been the initial consideration in conceptualizing mascots, but expanded media coverage and especially, the poignant example of Salt Lake 2002, has accentuated their use in depicting the distinctive cultural and historical heritage of the host city, region and country. Of course as official Games symbols they must graphically represent the Olympic Movement; every mascot except Waldi 1972 has in some fashion displayed the five rings, the IOC mark; some, by virtue of their physical traits, have personified the Olympic motto. The global exposure of mascots on licensed products and promotional materials produced by sponsors and suppliers likewise transmits widely the Olympic brand.

Mascots have achieved a conspicuous place in Olympic history. To William Wardle, President of the Olympic Trust of Canada, and his associates the significance of mascots

"Vinicius" (Olympics/ left) and "Tom" (Paralympics) will dance the Bossa Nova in 2016 in Rio.



is fundamental: "Within the Olympic Movement, the emergence of the mascot concept symbolizes, perhaps better than anything else, the transition of the Olympic Games from a contest of elite athletes to a sport festival as a component in the promotion of the Olympic principles throughout the world."<sup>23</sup> Whatever the case, that the evolution of mascots does mirror larger developments within the Olympic Movement underscores the basic point: The significance of mascots extends far beyond the visual image they project. Once peripheral talismans, they have become important chapters in the history of specific Games and the overall Olympic Movement. Their story, individually and collectively, remains to be fully told. ■

- 1 The best treatment of summer mascots through Beijing is olympic-museum.de/quickview/all\_mascot.htm; see also <http://www.olympic.org/results?q=mascots> and <http://www.topendsports.com/events/summer/mascots.htm>.
- 2 [olympics.time.com/2010/05/21/those-loony-olympic-mascots](http://olympics.time.com/2010/05/21/those-loony-olympic-mascots).
- 3 [www.theolympicdesign.com/deu/olympic-collection/.../mascots-2d](http://www.theolympicdesign.com/deu/olympic-collection/.../mascots-2d).
- 4 <http://2012olympicsblog.co.uk/2011/05/top-five-best-olympic-mascots>. The *Official Report of the XIX Olympiad*, four volumes, does not mention either the jaguar or the dove.
- 5 Richard B. Doubleday et al., "Graphic design evolution in Olympic Games," and Ramin Shaikhani, "The Munich 1972 Olympic Games, Germany," *Neshan*, 16 (Spring 2008), [www.neshanmagazine.com/articles.asp?id=134](http://www.neshanmagazine.com/articles.asp?id=134).
- 6 *Die Spiele: The official report of the XXth Olympiad Munich 1972* (Munich 1974), vol. 1, p. 59, 269, 275; Markus Rathgeb, Otl Aicher (London: Phaidon Press, 2006); <http://2012olympicsblog.co.uk/2011/05/top-five-best-olympic-mascots>.<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waldi>; Mark Sinclair, "72+", *Creative Review*, (22<sup>nd</sup> February 2007), 17:35; Kyle Whelliston, "Meet the Mascots: Waldi," 8<sup>th</sup> July 2008, <http://www.swifterhigher.com>; <http://olympic-museum.de/mascot/mascot1972.htm>; Robert K. Barney, Stephen R. Wenn and Scott G. Martyn, *Selling the Five Rings: The International Olympic Committee and the Rise of Olympic Commercialism* (2002), pp. 106, 317 n. 21.
- 7 *Official Report: Games of the XXI Olympiad Montreal 1976*, Vol. 1, p. 354; "Montreal 1976 Amik" in: *Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics: The Look of the Games: Canadian Olympic Mascots 1976-2010*, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2012, [designkultur.wordpress.com](http://designkultur.wordpress.com); <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1153902/amik-the-beaver-badge-olympic-mascot-graphics-and-design>; <http://olympic-museum.de/mascot/mascot1976.htm>.<http://olympic-museum.de/mascot/mascot1980.htm>.
- 8 For images of Vigri, see <https://www.google.com/search?q=vigri+olympic+mascot>. For the regatta at Tallinn, see *Report of Games of the XXI<sup>st</sup> Olympiad Moscow*, Vol. 1, pp. 101-133.
- 9 After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was some support in the Russian Parliament for having a bear as the new Russian coat of arms – with the proposers pointing out that "Russia is anyway identified in the world with the Bear".
- 10 It is sometimes said that Misha was the first Olympic mascot to have a girlfriend. I have found no confirmation of this. Perhaps the notion derives from him meeting the torch relay with a costumed figure named Gugutse. But Gugutse, a Moldavian fairy-tale hero, was a boy. *Official Report of Games of the XXI<sup>st</sup> Olympiad Moscow*, Vol. II, pp. 305-306, 418-419; [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misha);<http://olympic-museum.de/mascot/mascot1980.htm>; Kyle Whelliston, "Meet the Mascots: Misha," [swifterhigher.com/post/26225340490](http://swifterhigher.com/post/26225340490). For Chizhikov see <http://russia-ic.com/people/general/cl442>.
- 11 *Official Report of the Games of the XXIII<sup>rd</sup> Olympiad Los Angeles 1984*, Vol. I, pp. 246-247; Wayne Wilson, "Los Angeles 1984" in: Findling and Pelle, *Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement*, pp. 210-211; <http://olympic-museum.de/mascot/mascot1984.htm>;<http://disney.go.com/disneyinsider/history/legends/bob-moore>.
- 12 *Official Report: Vol. 1. Organization and Planning*, 636; <http://olympic-museum.de/mascot/mascot1988.htm>; <http://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/olympic-games-seoul-1988-hosuni-tiger-113426512>.
- 13 See Javier Mariscal, *The Garriris* (Madrid: Sins Entido, 2011); <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/2010/04/15/mariscal-he-conseguido-trueba-se-aficione-comic/424943.shtml>; <http://olympic-museum.de/mascot/mascot1992.htm>. <http://olympic-museum.de/mascot/mascot1996.htm>.
- 14 Cobi has received considerable attention. See the *Official Report of the Games of the XXV Olympiad Barcelona 1992*, Vol. 3, pp. 321-325;<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cobi>; The Cobi troupe: Visita a Barcelona (1992); Robert E. Rinehart, *Players All: Performances in Contemporary Sport* (1998), pp. 136-138; Donald McNeill, *Urban Change and the European Left: Tales from the New Barcelona* (1999), pp. 47-48; John Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia: Catalan Nationalism, Spanish Identity, and the Barcelona Olympic Games* (2000), pp. 63-64, 73, 110, 129; Andy Robinson, "Cobi," *Olympic Torches and Mascots*, in: *Olympic Message*, pp. 22-25; and Miguel de Moragas, "Barcelona 1992", in: Findling and Pelle, *Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement*, pp. 231-232.
- 15 *The Official Report of the Centennial Olympic Games: Atlanta 1996*, Vol. 1, p. 130; [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Izzy\\_\(mascot\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Izzy_(mascot)); Felicia Levine, "Dizzy Izzy isn't busy, is he?" in: *South Florida Business Journal*. 6<sup>th</sup> August 1996; Frankie Kowalski, "The Great Adventures of Izzy – An Olympic Hero for Kids," in: *Animation World Magazine*; Cazeneuve, "Lions And Tigers And Bears:" Rovell, "More marketing disaster than success;" and "Izzy's Quest for the Olympic Rings," *Moby Games* 1995.
- 16 *Official Report of the XXVII Olympiad*, Vol. II, pp. 215, 248, 279; n/a, "The mascots of the Games of the XXVII Olympiad," *Olympic Review*, No. 13 (February-March 1997): pp. 5-8; Magdalinski, "Place and Significance of Mascots," pp. 81-87; <http://olympic-museum.de/mascot/mascot1996.htm>; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000\\_Summer\\_Olympics#The\\_Mascots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000_Summer_Olympics#The_Mascots);[http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/olympics/news/2000/09/02/sydney\\_mascots](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/olympics/news/2000/09/02/sydney_mascots); Cazeneuve, "Lions And Tigers And Bears"; Rovell, "More marketing disaster than success."
- 17 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatso\\_the\\_Fat-Arsed\\_Wombat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatso_the_Fat-Arsed_Wombat); Rob Salisbury, "The Rise of Fatso – The Fat Arsed Sydney Olympics Wombat," *Strategic Resources International*. February 2001; <http://www.strategicresources.com.au/fatso.html>; The dream with Roy and H. G: the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, (DVD).
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- 23 "The Mascot of the Calgary Winter Games," in: *Olympic Torches and Mascots*, p. 13.