

# ChinaSource

Summer 2008

Perspectives and analysis for those who serve China

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Michael Laidlaw

## Benefits from Hosting the Olympic Games

*Michael Laidlaw*

**We** stood with the throngs on the night of July 13, 2001 waiting to hear who would win the bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games. The tension was mounting remembering the previous failed attempt. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) read the result as we watched on the outdoor, big screen television: "The host of the 29th Summer Olympic Games is—Beijing!"

People were jumping up and down and screaming. We got in our car as did thousands of others to spontaneously celebrate in Tiananmen Square. Two miles from the square the traffic was at a standstill. Making use of the opportunity, we got out of the car and ran up and down the road giving high

fives and calling out in Chinese, "Congratulations China!" The smiles stretched from ear to ear as you could feel their pride and self-worth rise. They enthusiastically honked because foreigners were happy for them and in that way accepting them. I will always remember the deep joy and excitement that we

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**ChinaSource** serves the international faith-based community by identifying critical issues, formulating strategies, convening resources and evaluating results for the promotion of responsible and effective service in China.

The purpose of the **ChinaSource** journal is to provide up-to-date and accurate analysis of the issues and opportunities facing Christians involved in China service and to provide a forum for exchanging viewpoints and discussing strategies. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of ChinaSource or its cooperating agencies.

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# Countdown to Glory

*Brent Fulton, Editor*

**“Are we ready?” Jonathan Li asks in this issue of *ChinaSource*.**

A visit to Beijing 100 days out from the Games left me with the impression that preparations for the various sporting events are right on target or, in some cases, ahead of schedule. Crawling along on one of Beijing's increasingly congested ring roads, the “Bird's Nest” stadium looms through the haze, while, not far away, the famed Water Cube can be seen through a forest of cranes punctuating the surrounding skyline.

Meanwhile China's efforts to prepare culturally for the Games are evident in the

marathon race, launched 30 years ago, to develop into a modern nation.

Similarly, China's church, having rapidly outpaced any other nation in terms of church growth, now faces a long uphill climb.

Talking with many believers during this visit, I found they, too, were asking “Are we ready?”

These Christians were not referring to the Olympics. Rather their question was prompted by a sense that, in an atmosphere of growing openness and opportunity, they are being called to play an increasingly visible role in society. The church today strug-

**As China hurries onto the world stage,** there is a profound sense of urgency for the church in China as well.

“10 Dos (e.g. Do wait in line.) and Don'ts” (e.g. Don't spit on the floor.) hung prominently in public places.

Ready for the Games?

Perhaps.

The spectacle that awaits international visitors and the millions who participate via TV and the internet will not likely disappoint.

The obvious dilemma is not the preparations for the Games themselves, but rather the challenge of building a world class city where visitors feel welcome—whether they are sitting in the stands at an event or chatting with their driver while traversing the city in a taxi or ordering lunch at a restaurant down the street from their hotel. This is a challenge that will remain long after the final medal is awarded and hotel prices return to some sense of normalcy. China's frenzy of activity to ready itself for the Games is but a brief sprint compared to the

gles to strengthen its internal capacity while responding to the demands and expectations of a society that is morally adrift, searching for a solution that the church is uniquely positioned to provide.

Whether among leaders in China's official church, evangelists trained up in rural movements, or professionals serving in the emerging urban fellowships, China's Christians are finding new avenues to provide this answer as they express their faith in all areas of life. Their challenge is to do so with integrity and in a manner that shines under the glare of increased scrutiny from their society and their government.

This countdown to glory is not measured in days but in decades. Yet, as China hurries onto the world stage, there is a profound sense of urgency for the church in China as well.

*Brent Fulton, Ph.D., is the president of ChinaSource and the editor of the ChinaSource journal. ■*

## Benefits from Hosting the Olympic Games continued from page 1.

shared together that historic evening.

There is a pride and deep longing in the Chinese to be accepted and treated as equals in this world. Because of this, China wants to prove to the world that she has arrived and deserves to be respected as a people and a world power. This is the first time for China to host the Olympics and showcase their abilities to the entire world, and they have taken this opportunity very, very seriously. They have built impressive Olympic structures, the opening and closing ceremonies will be precise and spectacular (although three and a half hours long), not to mention the massive undertaking of holding and coordinating such a monstrous event. This will probably be the grandest and most impressive Games in Olympic history, but China also wants to be the star of their own party by winning the most number of Olympic medals, which is truly within their grasp.

Is China ready for the world to converge upon its country? Beijing Olympic organizers say more than 10,000 athletes will compete in the Games and more than two million domestic and foreign visitors are expected to visit Beijing. China is spending \$60 billion on Olympic-related preparations; four times as much as any previous host.

With China's rapid development, what has been accomplished in the country that without the Games would not have transpired so quickly? Thousands of Olympic articles in foreign newspapers have been written regarding China's deficiencies such as in human rights, pollution, dealings with Darfur, and so on. This is one of the few articles focusing on what has been accomplished as a direct result of holding the Games; however, I will also list a few aspects which still need work. This is not a propaganda article about all the glorious successes of the Communist Party; it is an objective analysis from daily observation with comparison from over the years. After all, in living here long-term we do not want band-aid solutions for a month-long superficial image.



Four hundred million dollars were spent on the 91,000 seat "Bird's Nest" National Stadium.

## Leadership Listening to Thoughts of Change

The IOC has stated that the Beijing Olympics "are a force for good" in opening up the country. I do not believe it will open up the country, but it has had profound effects in helping China to be aware of international standards. In the past, if another nation suggested that China needed to change, the immediate response was, "Don't interfere in our internal affairs." In a nutshell, that means, "You have no right to say what we can and can't do; get your nose out of our business. You take care of your country's problems and we'll take care of ours!" Suddenly, because China will be hosting the Olympics, how China is handling situations has become the world's business. This has been a seven-year window of time in which the world has been able to introduce international standards and expectations and encourage compliance. The government does not want to "lose face" in front of the whole world, so this has been an opportune time to push for needed changes. (By the way, in this shame-based culture, the most common motivator used in everyday life is shame.) Thirty thousand foreign journalists are expected. The country's political and social structure will never come under more external scrutiny and criticism.

**Transportation.** Since the bid, the

government has prioritized developing the mass transit system. This has been a great need as the city only had two subway lines. By the start of the Olympics, there will be seven subway and light rail lines covering about 124 miles. Even so, these added trains are still packed and traffic congestion remains a serious problem as there are three million cars in Beijing with 1,000 new cars being added each day! Although most foreigners will not dare to brave the bus or subway system during the Olympics, the new system is helping out the millions who utilize it daily.

The 75-mile long Beijing-Tianjin passenger railway is scheduled to open for the Olympics. It will be the fastest high-speed, long-distance train in China which can reach 217 mph and will shorten travel time between the two cities from 70 to 30 minutes.

Another long-term benefit is the new Terminal 3 at the Beijing Capital International Airport. It is the world's largest airport building with over ten million square feet of interior space. The terminal building alone cost \$2.8 billion; \$4.6 billion when including the entire related infrastructure. The terminal has a rail system which can transport passengers into the city within 16 minutes. The airport is expected to be the fifth busiest airport in the world by the end of the year and can have a total annual



transport capacity of about 82 million passengers. These visitors will also affect continued change and modernization.

**Venues.** China has built 37 new competition venues which can be used for years to come. Beijing is the site of 31 of those venues; 12 are new, 11 renovated, and eight are temporary structures. The true test will be judged following the Olympics by the availability and frequency of use. It has been clear that China, unlike Athens, would have no trouble completing the venues in time. Four hundred million dollars were spent on its showcase, the 91,000 seat “Bird’s Nest” National Stadium.

Some of the Olympic sites will be converted to other uses following the Games. The 17,000 seat National Aquatics Center, better known as the “Water Cube,” will be converted to a shopping area and recreation center with restaurants and nightclubs. The Beijing Olympic Village will be converted into luxury condominiums after

30,000 for the Paralympic Games. I remember meeting the person responsible for all of the volunteers and am still in awe of the responsibility on his shoulders. In a country where you are generally told you will be a volunteer (see the contradiction), it is nice to see kids who are excited to serve and want to help their country.

**English Fever.** China has been hit with English fever. This includes neighborhood English clubs, standard tests that taxi drivers must pass to keep their jobs, university students getting together to memorize and chant crazy, English slogans and English education starting in first grade. Menus have standardized translations in 10,000 restaurants. Now that’s coordination! But, that is both good news and bad news as it takes the humor out of reading the menus.

The Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) even has a committee to change all signs to proper English. Unfortunately, there are

**The IOC has insisted** that at least 30,000 journalists must have unblocked internet access.

the Olympics. These six and nine story apartments have already been sold and will open in 2009.

**Support Venues.** Hospitals throughout the city have undergone intense renovations. China is building at least 109 new hotels to accommodate Olympic travelers. In contrast, I remember when there were a handful of hotels that foreigners were allowed to stay in.

**Volunteers.** The Games are encouraging true volunteerism/altruism. This is especially interesting because this is not a place where people readily volunteer. China can now lay claim to the world’s largest volunteer project in history. Of the 730,000 people who applied to be volunteers at the Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games, 100,000 are being selected, most of whom are recent university graduates. There will be roughly 70,000 volunteers for the Olympic Games and

many more signs that need help.

**Air Quality.** Pollution is still quite serious but at least China is now thinking about it after all of the focused, negative press and the statement by the IOC that certain Olympic events would need to be postponed until the air quality reaches appropriate standards. Nearly a dozen factories are in the process of closing or relocating outside Beijing including a huge steelworks factory with 120,000 employees.

During the Olympics, vehicles with odd and even plate numbers will take turns on the road. This will reduce the number of cars on the roads by 1.5 million each day. Daily there are also 60,000 taxis on the road.

With its pledge of a smoke-free Olympics, Beijing will ban smoking in most public places, aimed at meeting China’s pledge. Please, please keep this rule in place after the Games. After all,

China has one-third of the world’s smokers!

The government will seed the clouds and do what it needs to during those weeks. I am not as concerned about the air during the Olympic Games because I remember the week of beautiful blue skies when the IOC came during the bidding process. I am more concerned about what color the skies will be in the days and years following the Olympics when the world’s eyes are not on Beijing anymore.

**Media.** The government regularly blocks Chinese access to many foreign news websites and blogs. The IOC has insisted that at least the 30,000 journalists must have unblocked internet access. China’s obligations under the “host city agreement” will help to propel a three-week unprecedented openness of internet and television broadcasting. Chinese broadcasts will continue to be highly controlled, but foreign broadcasts will certainly tell the good with the bad. Also, other technologies will be difficult to control such as video capability in cameras and cell phones. This is a great learning experience for the Chinese leadership because it is the free media that has the greatest ability to directly challenge the tight control of the Communist Party. This relative loosening will last through the closing ceremonies, and then it will be back to business as usual. However, at least they will have had the experience of seeing that somewhat loosened media is not the worst thing in the world (although it may feel like it).

During the 17 days of competition, 2500 hours of sport programs will air. That is 1,000 more hours of broadcasting than during the 2004 Athens Olympics. The expected television viewing audience is more than four billion people! China was completely closed to the outside world 30 years ago; now about 2/3 of the world will have an in-depth, multi-faceted, somewhat transparent view of this country!

**International Property Rights (IPR).** China has stepped up efforts to

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Michael Laidlaw

# Dreams of a Chinese Sports Outreach

*Tiger Lily*

**O**ne World, One Dream!" Anyone traveling around any part of China will see this Olympic theme displayed in prominent public places, especially in the capital city. With it are all sorts of billboards and banners encouraging the general population to be civilized, cultured and courteous and to contribute towards the good image of China—especially with the world descending on the nation in the summer of 2008.

When China obtained the bid in July of 2001, the country was euphoric! A matter of national pride, the Olympics will be China's great "coming out party" during which it will project its greatness and culture to the world. For centuries, it has not exerted the influence of a nation befitting its size, but it opened its doors in 1978, and over the last twenty years has sustained double digit growth. As its economy has grown, so have its international influence and its domestic challenges. With 1.3 billion people, great diversity and growth, China has always been a place of many opportunities; so what makes 2008 different?

Rapid urbanization has occurred and has increased income in the cities. Urbanites, who have influence in society, are optimistic. Moreover, there is also a growing interest in sports as the country prepares to host "the best Olympics

ever." This interest is not just seen in the greater investment the government has made in national teams, sports facilities or publicity for the Olympics. It is also more than just an admiration of sports icons like Yao Ming, Liu Xiang or Deng Yaping. Rather, many are beginning to spend more on leisure and sports, such as taking tennis lessons, mountain biking or watching matches at stadiums. This is only natural as people become more affluent and are able to spend on things beyond necessities.

The church has also benefited from growing opportunities and different avenues of service as a result of all this. In particular, there are urban churches and Christians of influence that seek to serve society in health, education and social services. This includes a focus on sports. With this focus, there is a growing group of young, urban adults who have been

influenced by and received some training in the use of sports as a tool for reaching out to the community.

A number of local church leaders, as well as Christians involved in sports education or interested in sports, have had opportunities to observe firsthand how other countries have capitalized on major sports events for outreach. Over the last few years, from these local Christians, an interested group of about 30 to 40 adults had contact with sports outreach people. They received some training and initially just prayed about what God would have them do with it. Much was unclear as no one had done sports outreach—or at least done it well in a local setting. From this group, a smaller core group of about ten emerged. They started to meet and pray together to discuss what their vision, mission, core values and strategy should be. At the

same time, they planned initial programs and worked out their budget.

Since then, they have been able to impart a vision in a few urban churches. They have explained the use of sports as a platform, implemented sporting activities to get other Christians involved and shown them how to use these programs to build relationships and reach out to the community. In addition, they have started some leadership training for those interested and have used game days for people to invite their family and friends. During these fun activities, relationships have been built. Furthermore, because this is done with a local church, there have been follow-up activities enabling them to move from friendship to discipleship. Several churches have now supported

where there are many more students or young people and greater wealth. As in all new ministries, they will have to find churches that are like-minded, have a vision for youth and open to using sports as a form of outreach and leadership training. There are also the challenges of doing all this in the context of the country's regulations, finding time for outreach if they are employed in the marketplace and finding support if they want to do this beyond the extent of volunteers. For those who want to start a business so they can creatively use it for sustainable outreach, they have a greater challenge in raising funds and developing the appropriate skills for their business. In the midst of all this, there is the challenge of maintaining their vision and calling.

**Sports may only be another strategy or platform,** but it is exciting to see local believers seizing the opportunity to ride on the 2008 wave for future activities.

this group and given them a platform to work with their youth leaders and members for community outreach.

This is a just the beginning, and while it may appear amateurish to those with experience in sports outreach in developed or open countries, it is poignant to see these young Chinese Christians using sports at a time when the country is hosting a major sporting event. It is great to see them progress as they pray and ask the Lord for a vision, for the why, what, how and where of all of this, while at the same time experimenting and implementing their strategies. Currently, they are using tools that have been developed internationally, but have adapted them so they can be understood in the Chinese church context. Their initial focus will be on three cities.

They have challenges as they move ahead with their plans. There is a lack of trained personnel, and since this is only the beginning, churches have yet to embrace this new service, especially in the rural areas. As expected, there is greater openness to sports in the cities

In some ways, there is “nothing new under the sun.” Many creative means have been used to reach out to people in more restrictive environments. It may be in the provision of social services, education or now, increasingly, through business or maintaining residence by finding legitimate employment. Sports outreach brings new avenues for both foreign and local Christians and a good opportunity to penetrate deeper into different strata of society. Professionals can reach professionals, academics and educators can influence other academics, educators and students, while business men and women can build relationships and influence the marketplace. Now, there is a *kairos* moment for sports to reach athletes, coaches and particularly men (and there are about 500 million men between the ages of 15–64) who comprise the majority of fans or those interested in sports and the sports world. Among these is a significant stratum of society—the youth.

With about 560 million youth aged 29 years and below in China, this is a strategic tool to reach a significant popu-

lation. With many vices and materialism screaming for the attention of the young people, sports is seen as a means to good health. In Mao's era, physical activity, especially sports, was encouraged so people could be physically strong. A strong nation with strong youth meant a strong work force and, eventually, a strong economy and world influence. Mao himself was an avid swimmer and promoted sports. In this same vein, the government still promotes health through sports and healthy living.

The economic growth in China and Asia will mean that more major sporting events will be hosted in the region and, with a more affluent China, there will be an even greater interest in sports and leisure activities in the country. Given this scenario, it is logical to project that churches using sports will also become a growing movement.

Sports may only be another strategy or platform, but it is exciting to see local believers seizing the opportunity to ride on the 2008 wave for future activities. They still have a long way to go in developing a sustainable platform for ongoing work, but with our encouragement and support in their personal spiritual growth as well as professional life, they will be better equipped to be holistic in their approach and integrate their faith, life, vocation and service. As they continue to grow, they will be witnesses in their own communities and eventually beyond their communities. They will also encourage others to be witnesses.

As members of the international Christian community, we can pray for them, empathize and agonize with them. We can encourage and mentor them so that they can realize their dreams, in His time and in His way, and contribute towards the impact that other Christians are already making on society. Then, we will see the fulfillment of the many dreams for this country to have a positive impact on the world beyond China and beyond 2008.

***Tiger Lily** has been in leadership roles that involve vision casting, strategic planning and implementation, and leadership training. ■*





Photo courtesy Bruce Forest

# Providing Community through Festivals

*Bruce Forest*

**L**iving in both Sydney and Athens while working on the Olympics these last eight years has given those in Fusion International an opportunity to observe firsthand how a city and a nation embraces this event. By the time the flame enters the centre of the city the night before the Games, even the most hardened critics can be swept away in the euphoria of what is unfolding around them.

Locals, who have been waiting seven years for this moment, look for ways to celebrate. Imagine what it will be like when the flame finally reaches the center of Beijing on the evening of the 7th of August! Has a country ever taken the Games' preparation so seriously? Expectation is high; people are waiting, wanting to enter into the event.

Over 17 days, an Olympic host city becomes a transformed community. People who never talk to anyone on trains and buses now readily discuss the events of the previous day's games. People seem to lose their inhibitions of talking to strangers, swept up in the magic of an event that is aptly titled, "A once in a life time opportunity."

How can local people who cannot

afford tickets to events, particularly the Opening Night Ceremony, celebrate the Games? Fusion International has sought to respond to this desire to connect and celebrate by running Opening Night "Open Crowd" Festivals where locals can gather to celebrate as a community. These take place largely where they live. It may be in a park or simply out in front of their apartments—or anyplace where the community gathers.

In China, the idea is that on the 8th day of the 8th month, for four hours starting at four o'clock, the community will gather to celebrate through an "Open Crowd" Festival—a Festival where everyone is welcomed, and particularly the children are seen and treated as the stars of the show. There are

games for hundreds of people that culminate in a giant Hokey-Pokey—a dance that draws people in through fun movements and singing together. There is face painting, balloon sculpturing, statues, bubbles, circus skills and many other activities that build relationships between the team and those attending. It is fun for all the family. However, on the 8th, people are aware of the impending moment. At eight o'clock, a hushed tone will descend across an expectant crowd; people will sit anywhere to get a view of the giant screens we have erected to watch the first moment of the Opening Ceremony. Imagine the excitement when the Chinese team (the host team is always the last team to appear) marches into the Birds' Nest!

However, it does not stop there. For the next three nights, the communities continue to gather together to run Festivals and watch events on the big screens. After four days of Festivals where locals are trained and equipped, they discuss the next opportunities to run these Festivals later in the year and on into the Chinese New Year. In fact, anytime the community comes together becomes an opportunity to run a Festival. After the event, we often introduce training for running “next steps” activities like Kid’s Clubs, Youth Day Trips and so on.

A moment in history creates a pretext that provides a perfect opportunity to bring the community together to celebrate. For over 30 years, Fusion International has been running Festivals using such sporting “moments” across the world to help local people and churches be in the heart of the celebra-

tion. What we learned in Sydney and Athens was that not only did the local communities appreciate Festivals but so did the local authorities, who in one part of the city of Sydney voted Fusion the community event of the year. Across Australia, one in five Australians has attended Fusion’s Festivals. A number of years ago, research completed in Australia revealed that the most effective way to build local community is to run events of celebration.

Why is it working? The answer is at a number of levels. It is more than simply a celebration. At a Festival, we help build a culture where people have an opportunity to experience authentic community. Deep within people’s hearts are yearnings for community, belonging, meaning and purpose. When people enter into an effective “Open Crowd” Festival this is what they experience. Fusion seeks to become a catalyst to draw open-hearted people of good will together to serve their community, bringing vision, inspiration, resources and training.

This is much broader than simply *guanxi*. In many communities across the world, there was a time when a child would grow up in a network of care that went way beyond the family and close family friends. This is what has gone missing. The African proverb rings true today: “It takes a village to raise a child.” Social scientists call it “social capital,” and it grows out of those social interactions and networks we experience in our daily lives. It is not the quality of individuals, but rather the quality of a group or community as a whole. It involves extensive networks of information and exchange based on mutual trust and reciprocity. Large extended families can benefit fellow members through their internal and external connections; so, if you belong to a large and extended fami-

ly you have many more possibilities made available to you. This is what we seek to become at a Festival and beyond—an extended family through which people can access resources in other nations and cultures. We expect that together we can create a benchmark for the whole of Beijing and beyond as to what a harmonious and inclusive society can look like.

“Open Crowd” Festivals bring the local community together in all its diversity and lay a foundation where social capital can develop. When this is experienced, rather than being strange, people find it feels strangely familiar because they are experiencing the level of community for which they were made.

Many events never quite get to that place of community. Yet, if there is a good time together with friends, a good youth gathering, a good business meeting, then, when the group gets past the issue of authority, safety builds. There is a move to inter-member identification,

a sense of cohesion and energy, and a sense that the group is travelling to an almost invisible destination. It is here that it is possible to discover valid intimacy, deep communication and hearts open to see meaning. Whether it is a marriage, a community, or a nation, shared understanding will only be there when there is trust. Trust is the glue that holds communities together. Trust is essentially a state of the spirit, not so much a state of the mind.

The beauty of an event such as a Festival is that as we go into it, we rarely have enough people to manage everything. So, we train local people to work alongside us, people from throughout the community who join in. Often, it is people of good will from the community who see the purpose clearly.

At one violent community, during last year’s World Cup in Jamaica, a lady who was watching what was happening came to the microphone and said to the crowd, “I am sick of my community being seen as the worst community in Jamaica. Who wants to join me in helping it become the best?” She issued the challenge: “I am standing with these people to make a difference.” Across the crowd a very strong “Yes” rose, and 27 people volunteered to continue running Festivals, Kids Clubs and other events to bring hope again to a community that has, for too long, felt hopeless.

Christianity does not bring division but harmony. Harmony comes from the inside. It is tied up in Jesus’ great prayer that we learn to love God deeply and love each other. A festival reflects this love that Jesus spoke about in John 17:23. The Christian church does not need another theory; what we need is a practical, workable and experiential model of transformation. The “Open Crowd” Festival is a tactic within this strategic model, and if it is produced well, all peoples and cultures can benefit from it. It invites others to find their role in building a hope-filled life.

**Bruce Forest** helps Fusion develop new works in countries around the world as they prepare for major sporting events. To respond to this article, or for more information, email [csjournal@chsource.org](mailto:csjournal@chsource.org). ■

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Michael Laidlaw

## Are We Ready?

### A View from Beijing before the Olympics

*Jonathan Li*

**F**or the one-year countdown to the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, two musicians from Hong Kong contributed a song entitled *"We Are Ready."* The three words sound like a short, yet powerful endorsement, both official and popular, of the investment and involvement in the Games from all over the country. Indeed, as one looks back over ancient Chinese civilization, this is an event of the millennia. It might be utterly redundant for me, a college professor in Beijing, to turn the three words into a question: Are we ready? Well, I would like to try to extract layers of readiness before the Games. I hope there is no harm in coming up with at least three different answers: (1) Yes, it seems so, (2) Yes, of course! (3) Maybe—so what?

#### **Yes, it seems so.**

In terms of the infrastructure, the hardware, we are almost done. The computer-generated images have become real steel and stone. Now we have the fascinating Bird's Nest, the new national stadium with an all-metal superstructure which does take the shape of a bird nest. Right next to the Nest, there is the foaming, swelling, yet square-shaped national swimming center named the Water Cube. Both the Nest

and the Cube are supposed to witness many of the most exciting moments during the Beijing Olympics, including the opening and closing ceremonies.

Situated right beside the main express way I frequently use, both of these structures with all their magnificent grandeur seem surreal or, at least, futuristic to me. The image reminds me of a taxi driver's comment in 1993, when China failed in her first bid for the 2000 Sydney Games, that if Beijing won, the city would be

modernized by a further fifty years. We have dreamed of a modernized lifestyle ever since our late Premiere Zhou Enlai proposed the "four modernizations" as early as the 1970s. For the people of Beijing, or even the whole of China, a modernized life is a better life. Since an Olympic Games can bring us modernization, which can translate into a better life, we are all for it.

In fact, we have been enjoying some of the modernizations brought about by

the year 2008. A new airport terminal, the largest architecturally ever built in the world, opened in February. Four new subway routes, including one from the new airport terminal, are now ready to handle the massive movement of people to and from the core area of the Games. Modeled after the construction and management of the Hong Kong subway, we are exempted (maybe only temporarily) from the mileage ticketing used in Hong Kong. This means we only have to pay a flat rate of two *yuan* (about 14 cents) for any number of transfers or any travel distance via the six underground lines currently available. In addition, adults pay 40 cents and students 20 cents of the regular rate of 100 cents per bus ride. The balance is subsidized by the municipal government. Hopefully, this means more public transportation and less traffic jams during the Games.

We always need better air quality. Even less traffic is desirable. The same government that introduced private cars to boost the local GDP now asks drivers to use other means of transportation “at least one day per month.” More stringent measures will be taken starting July 20, cutting half the cars on the road by permitting odd or even numbered license plates on the road only on corresponding odd and even days of the month.

The number of cars can be smaller, yet the number of people on the road remains huge: several million ride on buses and subways—each day. For the sake of the Olympics, most Beijing and other long-term residents here are forming a new habit almost overnight: queuing. We queue along the two sides of the door of a subway car; we queue for the “front door in, back door out” buses; we queue on the right side of the escalator steps, and so on. These civilized behaviors are loosely observed with the help of a uniformed team of “Civilizing Supervisors,” who always shout loudly to remind people to queue, to be polite. Moreover, English-speaking volunteers will be placed in major bus and subway transit stations

around the city to assist friends from all over the world.

Last but not least, smokers will have a hard time. Rumor has it that smoking will be banned in public places, both indoors and outdoors, as a matter of saving face, especially. For this national and international occasion, Chinese smokers will have to endure the torture of foregoing their addictions, at least for a time. Yet, the lucrative tobacco industry will not allow this ban to go permanent.

So, it seems that we are ready for the Olympics in terms of hardware and people’s physical involvement. How about the ideas, the vibes in our minds? Are we ready?

### **Yes, of course!**

In China, minds are largely shaped by the media. On the most powerful media of our time, TV, we have daily countdowns to the Games. The wedding of the last few pieces of the Bird’s Nest was broadcast live. The Olympic torch relay is covered daily, even hourly. Featured interviews of Olympic related figures are available right before the peak viewing hour. More ubiquitous is the “mobile” TV in subway cabs, public places and even people’s palms. (We have developed our own 3G mobile telephone now.) In one of the most frequently used video flashes, the holy hymn of Emmanuel leads in, only to be followed by speech fragments from the former Chairman of the International Olympic Committee, Juan Antonio Samaranch: “...was awarded to the city of Beijing!”

The repeated theme is an “Olympic Dream.” It is the dream of a nation rising up, being stronger and never to be looked down upon. Are we talking about nationalistic, patriotic passion here? Nothing but! Yet, at the same time, people are more than ready to give their time to a new fashion: learning English. To be more ready for the Olympics, English is almost worshipped in much the same way people did with Chairman Mao’s words forty years ago. Everyone is learning it, from

the three year old to the ninety year old. Police officers, taxi drivers, bus conductors, door keepers—all have their own specifically developed sets of English for Special Purposes. The most remarkable exposure, again, is on TV. An English phrase a day, Olympic-related, is taught by celebrities from all walks of life: pop stars, national heroes, Olympic medalists, business achievers and even a seventy year old guru of Peking opera.

Among all people involved in this getting-ready-for-the-Olympics, young college students in Beijing are the most prominent. Despite the frustrating registration process and rigid selection procedure, young volunteers are never tired of seeking opportunities to contribute to the Games. For most of them, this is the first, and could be the only, event in their college years suitable for their hormonal level and creative energy. They feel lucky and excited to be experiencing these historical moments and to be representing Beijing and China. My worry is that these kids may never find their schoolwork as exciting, which is true. This means they may be more reluctant to do what they need to do.

For middle-aged citizens, the Beijing Olympics inject a convenient purpose into life. Almost all the “Civilizing Supervisors” are middle-aged, under-employed workers. Frequent media exposure for their community service makes them feel proud again after years of a discounted life.

For the elderly retirees, any popular sport will serve as a socializing event. To contribute to the Olympics is such a common cause that all of them are more than happy to go for it.

After all, the aged generation used to have an eventful life. The younger generations long for an eventful life. All are satisfied by a sense of common purpose in contributing to the Beijing Olympics. All, deep in their minds, need to be sustained by something external, something grand, holy and meaningful.

Okay, why bother to ask again the

same question of whether we are ready for the Games? Don't we have two satisfying answers above? I'm not satisfied simply because the above answers are too satisfying. The next part is my own grain of salt. Are we ready?

### Maybe—so what?

Maybe we will achieve the goal of making these Olympic Games the most successful ones ever, but that success does not necessarily translate into practical value for ordinary citizens in Beijing. Maybe we can create more legends during the Games, but more concern should be given to the legend-makers' quality of life as a whole. Maybe we can win more recognition in the world, but what are we recognized as?

My life has not been uneventful, and I am a little sick of external incentives and motivations. More often than not, we do something not for our own, long-term interest, but to gain some quick fame and pride for our parents and families. We are eager to be recognized by our peers, who may not really accept us as their peers. We are in constant fear of being looked down upon, which is a feeling of the collective memories of the past two hundred years. We are asked by our great leader to be creative, yet we never tried or dared to try to make a difference.

Am I off track here? I think not. I am simply reframing the question of whether we are ready for the Olympics into something like: Are we ready to find our own identity? Are we ready to develop our own point of view? Are we ready to be modernized, physically, mentally, socially and culturally?

I do hope the Beijing Olympics of 2008 is the Great Exhibition 1851, and the Bird's Nest and the Water Cube are its Crystal Palace. The Olympic Dream of all Chinese could be the dream of a newly industrialized nation really taking off. My own dream of the Olympics is the dream of equal opportunity, individual identity, fair play and harmony in diversity.

*Jonathan Li is a college professor in Beijing. ■*

### Benefits from Hosting the Olympic Games continued from page 4.

protect the intellectual property rights of Olympic products. This is a good experience so that the government will recognize damages caused by infringement violations.

### Problem Areas

Although China has been working hard to prepare for the Games, there are still some areas that need serious attention. A few of the problem areas are:

- Great difficulty obtaining tickets.
- Logistical nightmares: Efficiency and convenience are not China's strong points, so venues are not well marked with appropriate signs, the most convenient doors are not open, and there are few places to park.
- Normal, chaotic driving: Tourists' #1 comment will continue to be, "How did we survive that trip across town?"
- Limited hotel rooms available at outrageous costs: Rooms are up to ten times the rack rates.
- Government officials' heightened distrust of foreigners: With so many activists coming with their own agendas, officials do not know who to trust.

### Countdown

For the last two decades, China has been the most rapidly advancing country in the world. Amidst this speed of development, they have been going even faster. Winning the bid for the Olympic Games has propelled them to round-the-clock work to make sure they are prepared for that upcoming date—8/8/08. The country revolves around this date daily. Countdown clocks throughout the city tick down every hour, minute and second for the Games to begin...and have done so for the past seven years! We can applaud the work that has been accomplished and can be thankful for the catalytic role the Olympics have and are playing. This is certainly an unprecedented time in China's long history.

*Michael Laidlaw has lived in China since the '80s and has observed tremendous changes in the country during that time. ■*

# please pray

1. **That God will work through the Olympics** during and after the events to accomplish His purposes for the nation of China.
2. **For the Chinese people** as they adjust to major changes in their daily lifestyles.
3. **For the sports enthusiasts** who are using their abilities to help the church with outreach.
4. **That Chinese athletes will come to know and love Christ** in the midst of an intense lifestyle.
5. **That the Olympics will allow encouraging friendships** between Chinese and visitors from many other countries.
6. **That China will achieve its goal** of making a positive impact on the international scene.



# Chinese Athletes: Their Daily Lives and Futures

D. C. Lo

**W**e see them on television. We watch them at sports events. We admire them, their strength, their agility and their intensity. Sometimes, we wonder, what must their lives be like? What goes into the making of an outstanding Chinese athlete?

## Selection

Across China, there are many sport institutes. These are located mainly in provincial capital cities although many times they are also located in the suburbs. Coaches choose potential athletes from sport elementary or middle schools and invite them to join a sports skills institute for concentrated intense training. Divers and gymnasts can be as young as six, seven or eight years old when they leave their families to live at an institute.

## Daily Life

For these young athletes, living away from their families can sometimes mean living across the country and, at other times, it can mean being in the same town as their loved ones. They live with their team members in a dormitory, and the team becomes their family. The coaches and administrators become surrogate parents. Depending on the coach, and teammates, these athletes can lead a good life at the training school or a very difficult one.

The living arrangements provide them with much time to practice—usually six to seven days per week and two to three times a day. In this situation, they have little interaction with other people outside the sports training institute.

“Over training” with not enough time for recovery is a common practice.

Therefore, most players have injuries. Surgeries are commonplace. Injuries may lead to an early end to their sport careers and chances to gain a scholarship to a university later on are lost. Overtraining leads to another outcome: burnout at a young age. Love of the sport and playing is lost.

During their training, these athletes may travel to various training bases located across the country, some at high altitudes or in the mountains in order to train at different locations and times of the year. Travel is done mostly by train

and bus, occasionally by air—but only for high profile, wealthier clubs. Many athletes will have opportunities to travel to other countries with their teams for competitions or as individuals invited to compete for clubs all over the world.

The number of athletes in any given sport is generally limited, so if an athlete wants to quit playing, the coach could make it difficult or impossible for him or her to leave for many years. The coach holds their residence permit, their future work and opportunities for education in his hand. Because of this, the athletes must work hard to please the coach and build good *guanxi* (relationship) with those who surround the sport. Many athletes are treated very well, and the coach will help them with future job placements, securing education and allow them to begin the process so they can leave the institute in a timely manner. This, of course, depends on the program, and there are coaches who will make the athletes’ lives miserable.

Michael Laidlaw





## Their Future

Most of these athletes are just elementary school graduates, and this spawns their greatest fear—the future. Most will take a few classes after completing elementary school, but the competition in China for high school and university positions and degrees is very tough. Some actually go to classes and study, either on their campus or at a sports university. Classes are offered for them once or twice a week on an ongoing basis. However, since they have very little motivation to study during rounds of vigorous training, and are left exhausted at the end of the day, real academic pursuits must wait until after retirement from playing their sport. If they are fortunate, they could be invited to attend a university, compete for the school team and study for a degree after leaving the institute. This would only apply for a small number of athletes in mostly team sports or other high profile sports. Many of the individual, lower profile sports do not have these opportunities. It is also a common practice to allow athletes to enroll in classes but not require attendance. Nevertheless, a degree is granted at the end of a required period of time. This leaves them still lacking in any real skills for the new open job market of China.

For most, their career is short and their future uncertain. In time, if they continue in the sports field, if they play in some of the ball sports, they will receive a living stipend which is usually

quite low (unless they are in men's basketball, soccer or are perhaps a national team player). In some of the other sports, the athletes pay to train themselves as well as for their food and lodging. Depending on their level of performance, years in training, number of medals and so on, they will be given a one-time payment of various amounts at the end of their career.

## Interview with an Athlete

A 26 year old athlete told me she started to play her sport because it was fun. Her parents made her quit the team for a while when they became concerned about her education, but her coach asked her to come back. While training, she said that usually athletes register for classes, but do not have time to attend. She only went to classes a couple of times per week for about a month before the tests.

She enjoys her life, being able to travel, and lives happily with her teammates. At seven am they get up; seven-twenty they eat breakfast; from nine to eleven they practice; at eleven-thirty they eat lunch, and then they rest. At two-thirty they get up; three to five they practice; six pm is dinner and ten o'clock is lights out. Free time is in the evening when most players now-a-days watch TV, DVDs, or go out and walk. Very few study.

Everyone on her team has had an injury, and all have had at least one surgery. This girl has had two knee

surgeries.

Most of the players, when they are young, have a dream to make the national team and play for their country. However, as time goes on they start to be concerned about their future. This girl's biggest goal for the future is to find a good job and a husband. She would also like to learn English.

## Changes for the future

There has been a lot of talk among sports people about the changes that have taken place in the world of high-level training and competition of athletes and the future changes that are needed. Still, today it is considered an honor to be chosen for a sports skills institute. The intense training, hard work and dedication of the coaches and athletes gives them hope for competing for their country on a national and international stage. To be able to compete and win a medal for the country is indeed a great motivating factor.

Coaches, retired athletes and administrators are aware that the training environments and systems of training athletes have to change to adjust to changes in Chinese society. Hopefully, the changes will be made sooner rather than later to afford these young people a good environment for developing not only their sport skills but also to give them more opportunities for developing their social and academic skills—to give them a real hope and future! ■

# Pure Gold

**Eric Liddell: Pure Gold** by David McCasland. Discovery House Publishers (Grand Rapids, MI: 2001), 333pp. ISBN 1-57293-130-2, \$14.95.

*Reviewed by Wayne Martindale*

Thanks to the academy award winning film “Chariots of Fire” (1981), many people around the world know that Eric Liddell won Olympic gold in a stunning world record finish in the 400 meters at the 1924 Paris games. His widow, Florence, whom he met and married in China, was pleased with the film and its portrayal of her husband.

Now, with all eyes on the Beijing Olympics, it is a good time to revisit the film or, better yet, read an excellent biography of this man who was even better in life than in the movie, by all accounts. Of the scores of memoirs and biogra-

**The meteoric rise to running fame is there.** But the bulk of the story centers on China and the unfolding character and commitment rare in the world.

phies, the best is David McCasland’s *Eric Liddell: Pure Gold* (2001).

The meteoric rise to running fame is there, exciting and satisfyingly told. But the bulk of the story centers on China and the unfolding of character and commitment rare in the world—perhaps rarer than Olympic gold medalists and every bit as amazing.

The book is worth the time and purchase price just for the story of Eric’s parents. Their difficult, fearless and devoted missionary service was the template for Eric and his brother Rob in the next generation. At a time when China was in a state of “near anarchy” and power changed hands from one

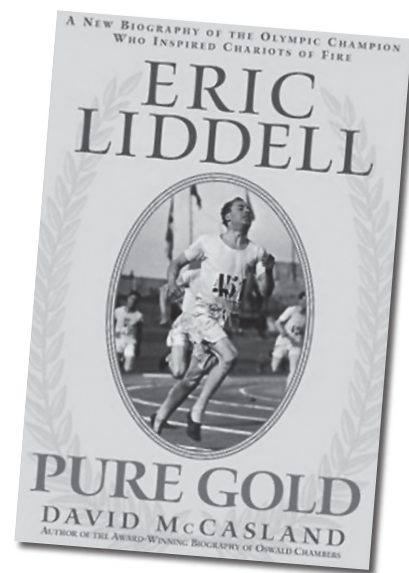
warlord to another, who in turn fought bands of marauders, Eric’s parents went as newlyweds to a pioneering mission station in Mongolia. In less than a year, the Boxer Rebellion (1900) rose against all foreigners and the Christian Chinese who had been influenced by them. The Liddells fled by cart with the help of Chinese Christians who risked their lives. Mary, seven months pregnant, was carried by sedan chair.

Over 200 Westerners died, many of them missionaries, and thousands of Chinese Christians fell to the sword while their homes and churches fell to the flame. Within months after the Boxer massacres, without knowledge of just what they would face, the Liddells returned to rebuild the burned-down station and mourn many Chinese friends who had been murdered.

Eric was born in 1902 in Tianjin.

When Eric was ten months old, the Liddells piled their two boys into a houseboat for a week-long, 200-mile journey, then into two wooden-wheeled mule carts for another two days to the north China plain, an area infested with bandits. It was barren winter, but home to ten thousand villages and ten million souls who needed to hear of Jesus’ love.

Eric’s sister Jenny was born in 1903. Ernest would be the fourth and last sibling, born in Peking in 1912. When Eric was five, the parents furloughed in Scotland and did what all missionary parents did (along with nearly all British parents who could afford it): they put their boys in a boarding school. As James returned



to China, Mary and Jenny stayed another year to make sure all was well at the School for the Sons of Missionaries. When Mary went back to China, she knew it would be another six years before she would see her sons again.

After a few years at school, Rob and Eric began to take regular possession of first and second places in running and dominated the rugby field. At Edinburgh University, Eric quickly established himself as the fastest man in Scotland. Such was his fame that a young evangelist, having trouble drawing a crowd among both the working classes and students, had the bright idea of asking Eric to give his testimony.

We have all heard that the thing most people fear more than death is public speaking. Eric was so painfully shy that he would point to Rob to give an answer when asked a question during boarding school days. As he prayed about the request to give a public testimony, he knew God wanted him to do it, so Eric made one of the most important decisions he would ever make. In giving this testimony, he opened the door to finding God’s strength in his weakness, calling it, “The bravest thing I did in my life.” The crowds swelled at meetings indoors and out to hear the Flying Scotsman. For the rest of his college career, the weekly pattern was study, run, preach. He graduated near the top of his class in chemistry, won nearly every race he ever ran, and never



said “no” to any invitation to speak when it was in his power to say “yes,” which was most of the time.

McCasland’s excellent book not only fills in the details of Eric’s pre and post Olympic life, it straightens out some misimpressions given by the movie for dramatic effect. First, Eric did not have to be admonished by his sister to go to China. It was in his heart from his youth. Second, Eric knew well before the Paris Olympics that Sunday scheduling ruled out the 100 meters, plus 4 x 100 and 4 x 400 meter relays. The decision was immediate and matter fact because his convictions were settled.

Though heavily criticized in the press for jeopardizing Britain’s chances for gold, in the end, he was the only British athlete to win two medals in individual events. In the aftermath of victory, Eric was carried on shoulders, pulled in wagons, crowned with laurel at graduation and invited to meet the highest in society. In the midst of fame and adulation, at age 23, he left to follow his calling to China.

Eric’s mission was to teach at Tientsin Anglo-Chinese College (350 students) with the goal of reaching China’s future leaders. His responsibilities were math, science, athletics, dorm director and periodic chapel talks. He conducted well-attended weekly Bible studies and camps for poor boys. He was also Sunday School superintendent and studied Chinese two days per week. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might” (Ecc. 9:10) characterized this life devoted to others.

One of the many great stories in this book is Eric’s romance with Flo. When he proposed, she had just turned 18, and Eric was about to turn 28. She was surprised, but said an ecstatic “Yes.” After Florence’s three rigorous years of nurse’s training in Canada, they were married in China. Throughout their marriage, it was obvious to all that they were deeply in love, and Eric, a marvel with children of all ages, reveled in his two daughters.

Sometimes the biography reads like thriller spy novel. As China descended first into civil war, then Japanese occu-

pation, the work became increasingly difficult and dangerous. On one of many dangerous journeys, Eric volunteers to go by boat to buy coal for the school and is robbed, then, sets out again with the money in a hollowed out French roll he carries (successfully) in plain sight.

Sometimes, in a single day as Eric traveled the country, he would be stopped and searched by armed men from the Japanese, the Communists, the Kuomintang Nationalists, local militias and bandits who would often be disguised as any of the above. He was regularly “questioned, detained, searched, and shot at.” A fellow science teacher at Tientsin Anglo-Chinese College had already been shot and killed by bandits. Even their journeys to the West were fraught with danger. On their furlough voyage across the Atlantic, ships near them were sunk by Japanese torpedoes.

Back in China, the Japanese took in-

in or out.

Only a few months before the camp was liberated by American paratroopers, Eric Liddell died of a brain tumor. Such was the affection for him that the camp turned out for his funeral in unprecedented numbers. Such was his humility that many did not know until the funeral address that he was an Olympic hero. As his friend and fellow missionary, A. P. Cullen said at the funeral: “He was, literally, God-controlled, in his thought, judgments, actions, words, to an extent I have never seen surpassed, and rarely seen equaled.”

Readers of this remarkable book will find many special features, including: pictures, maps, a bibliography, index, epilogue on principle family members and places, and a listing of all of Eric’s races in Britain and the Olympics with his place (nearly always first) and the time. I wish it also had a chronology in list form; specifics are sometimes diffi-

**McCasland’s book is easy to read and worth the extra time**—but with this caution: it will almost certainly be convicting.

creasingly violent control. Eric sent Florence, pregnant with the third daughter he would not live to see, on to the safety of Canada, where Eric planned to join them in a few months. However, before Eric could act on this plan, the Japanese placed all foreigners in Tianjin under increasing restrictions until 1800 of them, from all walks of life, including Eric Liddell, were interred in Weih sien Camp. For the last two years of his life, Eric worked with the same energy, creativity and devotion that had always characterized his life. Tirelessly, he preached, wrote devotionals, taught chemistry (writing a text for the class) and organized athletic games—even refereeing Sunday games for the nonreligious teens in the camp to keep them from fighting. He was so sought after by the young people that his camp roommates made a door sign letting people know if “Uncle Eric” was

cult to pick out of the context.

McCasland has also put together a 3-part Day of Discovery documentary of Eric Liddell’s life. It is worth watching (*The Story of Eric Liddell* from Discovery House Publishers). Another biography worth knowing about is *Eric Liddell: Something Greater Than Gold* by Janet and Geoff Benge. This one is half the length and reads quickly and engagingly and would be a good pick for younger readers or anyone who wants less than a full-length biography. However, McCasland’s book is easy to read and worth the extra time—but with this caution: it will almost certainly be convicting.

*Dr. Wayne Martindale, professor of English at Wheaton College, has taught in China with wife Nita five times since 1989, including a recent two-year teaching engagement in Beijing. He is co-editor of The Quotable Lewis and author of Beyond the Shadowlands: C. S. Lewis on Heaven and Hell. ■*

# China Games

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