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Memory Lane

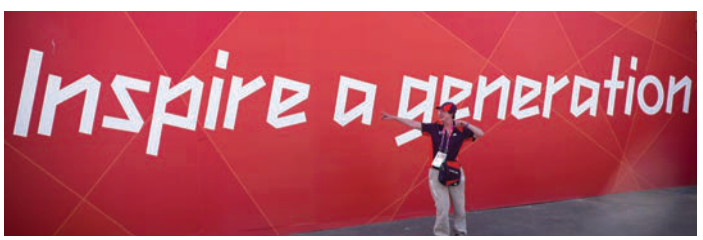
Having led the implementation of eye care at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Dr Penny D'Ath and Professor David Thomson recently revisited Olympic Park in Stratford

IT IS hard to believe that the countdown to the London Olympics started a decade ago with Sebastian Coe putting in the bid for London 2012.

In 2008 we first contacted the Olympic medical team to see if there was an opportunity to become involved in organising the eye care for London 2012. Shortly after this, the London 2012 chief medical officer and her team visited us at City University London, and the idea became a reality. Next to join our group was University College London's Dr Clare Wilson who would head up the ophthalmology team and finally, in 2010, Caroline Christie joined to lead on contact lenses.

From over 400 applications, our excellent team of 52 optometrists, contact lens opticians, dispensing opticians and ophthalmologists was chosen to cover the eight-week period of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Two years on from London 2012, we revisited the Olympic Park with one of the optometrists from our London 2012 team, Margaret Lawrence, for a trip down memory lane.



A stroll in the park

The park in 2014 is spectacular, with flowers, water jets for children to run through and benches for us more mature members of the public to relax on and watch the world go by.

First stop was the Aquatics Centre where Tom Daley practices regularly. From there, it was to the tangled red coat hanger arrangement of Anish Kapoor's 'Orbit' sculpture where you can go to the top and take in the views of the park.

The Athletes Village – now renamed East Village – was our home for eight weeks during the Games. As stated in the original legacy, housing is affordable, with choices of renting, shared ownership or intermediate renting available.

As we wandered down the quiet streets, still with their Olympic-inspired names – Victory Parade, Cheering Lane and Celebration Avenue – to the The Sir Ludwig Guttmann Health and Wellbeing Centre, we were reminded of our really enjoyable time in the Athletes Village.

Turning into Liberty Bridge Road, a bit of charm gained us entry and a guided tour of the optometry rooms.

The facilities today

We were told that the top floor which optometry had shared with dentistry during the Games is now going to be part of the St Barts' dental school. Moorfields Eye Hospital will move into half of the second floor, sharing the remaining half with an X-ray suite.

The triage room, once laden with tonometers, corneal topographers, visual field instruments, an autorefractor and an OCT, has been turned into a meeting room. It was hard to imagine that this room had once been the heartbeat of the eye clinic, where patients from all corners of the globe were triaged ahead of their eye examinations, or examined by the ophthalmologists.

Our three consulting rooms, where 1,406 patients from 154 countries during the Olympic Games and 870 patients from 102 countries during the Paralympic Games received full eye examinations, are currently GP consulting rooms with examination couches.

Our old dispensing room is now another meeting room. Here we had dispensed 973 pairs of spectacles and 50 pairs of contact lenses during the Olympic Games and 749 pairs of spectacles, seven low vision aids and 14 pairs of contact lenses during the Paralympic Games.

"London 2012 was, and always will be, one of the highlights of our professional careers"

The Olympics and Paralympics saw very different challenges, with patients in the Paralympics tending to have more complex ocular conditions. This was perhaps not surprising, as almost 20% of all the 4,200 Paralympic competitors met the criteria for visual impairment. There were also several referrals made to the hospital eye service during the Paralympics for conditions such as retinal detachment, exudative macular degeneration, corneal ulcer, macular oedema, Stevens-Johnson syndrome and orbital cellulitis. In comparison, there were no referrals to the hospital eye service during the Olympic Games, although 19 competitors presented with minor ocular injuries. Twelve of these injuries arose from contact sport, with water polo causing the most injuries.

Down the corridor in the meeting room we would gather at 6.30am ahead of the clinic opening at 7am. These first appointments proved to be popular with the non-competitor patients. In comparison, the competitors preferred the 1–4pm slots.

Leaving a legacy

London 2012 was, and always will be, one of the highlights of our professional careers. This trip down memory lane on a sunny day brought back the feel-good factor and the smiles that so captivated the nation. While there were no Usain Bolts or Jonnie Peacocks in evidence, or even any flag- waving crowds, there was still a carnival atmosphere.

Much has been made of whether or not London 2012 met its legacy ambitions of inspiring a generation. While only two years ago, it is clear the area has thrived after receiving 60 years' worth of regeneration.

Did the eye care team achieve its aim to showcase UK optometry and provide good documentation of how to set up a clinic and what sorts of patients to expect? We feel that, with our amazing team, we did leave behind a legacy. The information gathered from our clinic went to the Winter Olympics in Sochi, and will go to the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and to the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio to ensure eye care provision at events like the London 2012 Olympics will not have to be planned from scratch.

As we pass the baton on to the Glasgow 2014 volunteers, we wish them the greatest success. And to *OT* readers, a trip to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park comes highly recommended.

Image credit: Ruth Davies, Margaret Lawrence, Hamish MacDonald and Katie Kotting

Commonwealth Games

Optometrist Gillian Bruce volunteered at the London Olympics in 2012. She speaks to *OT* as she prepares to offer eye care to athletes at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow this month:

"I had the privilege of volunteering at the London Olympics two years ago and was one part of a committed team which provided a world class optometry service in a fun-filled, exhilarating atmosphere. When the opportunity arose to play a part in generating a similar service, this time on my own doorstep, for the Glasgow Commonwealth Games, I was delighted to get involved.

"I will be part of the optometry team practising from the polyclinic in the Athletes' Village. From 8am–10pm daily during the Games, there will be optometry care on hand for athletes and their entourage. From sorting out eye infections and removing foreign bodies, to replacing lost or torn contact lenses and repairing spectacles, we will provide a full service."