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## Is Sydney Ready for the Olymics and are the Olympians Ready for Sydney?

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It is now less than a month from the opening of the Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia, where it will be winter when the games begin and spring when they end. It will be fall in the Northern Hemisphere before the games end, and summer nowhere, except perhaps in Lausanne where the sun always shines at the Court of Juan Antonio the Great.

If you believe in signs and omens, developments over the past few weeks should leave you with an uneasy feeling. Two weeks ago there was a power failure at the Sydney airport, the second in two months despite the \$350 million dollar upgrade of the facility. More than 500 flights were delayed, diverted or canceled leaving thousands stranded. This latest collapse of service took place five days after federal Finance Minister John Fahey proclaimed "Sydney Airport is ready." The airport is expected to handle some 150,000 passengers per day at the high point of traffic for the games.

Once on the ground Olympic visitors will have to depend on a problem plagued rail system that will be required to handle some 34 million passengers during the games. Unfortunately delays, derailments, and driver error are dogging this system which has been expanded for the games. Equipment failure, accidents, and rookie drivers will pose a major challenge to the city's ability to cope with the deluge of humanity moving about from venue to venue.

In an attempt to solve the problems Ron Christie was appointed Rail Czar with power and checkbook to match. He is confident that the trains will run on time and urban transport will not turn into an Olympic sized problem. It is not clear if Mr. Christie wishes to be known as the Mussolini of Sydney.

In the ongoing war on performance enhancing drugs the Sydney games will see the opening of a new front with a combination of urine and blood tests to detect use of EPO. A natural substance governing the red cell count in the blood, synthetic EPO can also be injected into the blood and greatly increases the oxygen carrying capacity of the blood and thus the endurance of the athlete. A good distance runner has a normal red cell (Hematocrit) level of 45-48. Synthetic EPO can increase that count to 60 resulting in as much as a twenty-second advantage over a 10,000 meter race.

The good news then is that the IOC will test. The bad news is that the testing may not be all that effective. The blood test can detect EPO for three weeks, but the urine test is good for only three days. An athlete must be positive on both tests to be declared in violation.

This is only one drug and one testing program, but others are also in place. Unfortunately the detectors continue to fight a losing battle with the detectees. The human growth hormone HGH and the newer insulin growth factor IGF are both undetectable. And even as this is written there are people hard at work out there in search of new drugs and new masking techniques to defeat the IOC and those interested in the fight against performance enhancing drugs.

As I have noted before this cat and mouse game seems a terrible waste of time and energy. Technologies, training techniques, and dietary regimes have all been highly developed to produce the winning edge. Drug use is no more an objectification of the athlete as these legal techniques, and in many cases no more hazardous to health.

One other troublesome development at this Olympics has been the decision by many of the top eligible professionals not to participate. Men's tennis will be without Pete Sampras and two other top twenty players. The Women's competition will be without three of the top ten players: Martina Hingis, Mary Pierce, and Nathalie Tauziat.

In basketball many of the NBA players no longer seem interested in the competing at the Olympics. The novelty of the Dream Team is gone. Notable for their decisions not to compete this year are Tim Duncan of the San Antonio Spurs and Kobe Bryant of the Los Angeles Lakers.

In the baseball competition the best will also be absent, as Major League Baseball chose not to participate in the same way that the NHL and NBA have done.

It is becoming clear now that opening the Olympics to the big money professionals has been a mixed blessing. The initial glow is gone and seems that high paid professionals are not willing to perform for small bucks and glory. They do not need the Olympics to get their endorsement contracts and establish their celebrity status.

In addition the Olympics is a different kind of competition for a different type of athlete. Certainly these are professionals, but for them this is the primary venue of competition in their careers, and it is the dream of this event that has driven them through most of their athletic lives.

Despite whatever problems there may be with transportation, drugs, corrupt leadership, obscenely excessive commercialism, and a host of other warts that will appear in Sydney, the Olympics are still one of the great athletic competitions in the world. You will see performances that will amaze and astound and that may be enough.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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