

# Youth Olympic Games: From Vision to Success

By Ng Ser Miang  
*Sports Journal*, April 1, 2011

---

## Introduction

When Pierre de Coubertin revived the Olympic Games in 1894, he sought to do more than just create a modern sporting competition. He founded the Olympic Movement as an education movement, believing that sport would contribute to the harmonious and well-balanced development of the body, mind and character, and helped create a more peaceful and better world. It is the convergence of sport, culture and education that defines the concept of Olympism and the modern Olympic Movement. It is therefore my pleasure and privilege to share with you the Youth Olympic Games, a new creation that truly epitomizes the spirit of the modern Olympic Movement.

The Youth Olympic Games (YOG) is the brainchild of Dr. Jacque Rogge, the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The vision and the concept of the YOG were deliberated at great length by the IOC Executive Board and the IOC members. The 119th IOC Session held in Guatemala in 2007 unanimously approved the creation of the YOG.

## Vision

It is the vision of the IOC that the YOG will inspire the youths of the world to take part in sports and adopt and live the Olympic Values of Excellence, Friendship and Respect.

IOC President Jacque Rogge envisaged that the YOG, and I quote, "...is the flagship of the IOC's determination to reach out to young people. These games will not only be about competition. They will also be the platform through which youngsters will learn about the Olympic values and the benefits of sport, and will share their experiences with other communities around the globe."

## The Concept

The concept of the YOG called for the participation of the world's top young athletes in Games with equal emphasis on sports, culture and education. For the Summer Youth Olympic Games, 3,600 athletes would compete in 26 Olympic sports, stay together for a full 12 days and take part in culture and education

programs created especially for them. The host city would make use of existing sports facilities and accommodation. The standard and service level would be different from that of the standard Olympic Games.

### **The Inaugural Games**

The Inaugural Games attracted a lot of interests from around the world. On Sept. 3, 2007, the IOC announced that 11 cities,<sup>1</sup> including Singapore, had indicated their intention to bid for the first YOG.

In November 2007, after the preliminary evaluation of the IOC, the competition was narrowed down to five cities—Singapore, Turin, Moscow, Bangkok and Athens—from nine cities. In January 2008, this was further reduced to Singapore and Moscow, following a video conference between the cities and the IOC Evaluation Commission.

On February 21, 2008, the IOC President declared Singapore as the winning city to host the inaugural YOG in 2010. Singapore beat Moscow by 53 to 44 votes.

### **Co-constructing the Inaugural Games**

Singapore had just about two and half years to organize the Inaugural Games. The Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organizing Committee (SYOGOC) had worked hand in glove with the IOC, the 26 International Sports Federations, 205 National Olympic Committees and different stakeholders to co-construct this very first Games. In particular, it was a special challenge in designing the Culture and Education program, which was the defining element of these Games.

SYOGOC's mission was to create an inspiring and memorable experience for all participants, while establishing an enduring legacy for Singapore and the Olympic movement.

In the two and a half years leading up to the YOG, and during the YOG, Singapore implemented a series of programs<sup>2</sup> with integrated sports and educational and cultural elements to connect the young people with the Olympic values and one another. SYOGOC saw this engagement important before, during and after the Games.

YOG participants experienced Singapore 2010's programs in four ways:

1. Learning through workshops, forums, and events and taking part in various projects;
2. Contributing to causes and communities to appreciate how the Olympic values can help improve the lives of others;
3. Interacting through competition that is friendly and mutually respectful, living in the Youth Olympic Village, encountering new cultures, sports and communities and making new friends; and
4. Celebrating together the diversity of the Olympic Movement, in which many cultures are united through their common adherence to the Olympic values of excellence, friendship and respect.

## Olympic Education

As an important legacy of the YOG, the Ministry of Education in Singapore and the Singapore Olympic Academy produced and launched the Olympic Education Resource Package in December 2008 for all the schools in Singapore. Henceforth, Olympic education became entrenched in Singapore's education system.

## Journey of the Youth Olympic Flame

For these very first Games, the IOC Executive Board had given approval for the Flame of the YOG to travel across the five continents, stopping at one continent where athletes and young people of the continent will gather for a celebration and herald the arrival of the Youth Olympic Games. To me, it was an important proposal of SYOGOC to promote YOG and the Games in Singapore. Hundreds of thousands of youth and people around the world participated in the Journey of the Youth Olympic Flame and there were many magical moments.

## Sizzling Performances during the Games

Through the 12 days of the Youth Olympic Games in Singapore, from Aug. 14 to 26, 2010, we witnessed sizzling sports performances from the young athletes, not only in their events, but also in mixed team events comprising boys and girls of mixed nationalities within the teams. The bold call for the Games to go beyond sports did not in any way dilute the quality of the sporting competition. In fact, in some instances the Games have brought to the fore some of the world's biggest young stars, many of whom are expected to achieve even greater marks in sport in the future. Despite the competition, the athletes embraced the Olympic ideals of Excellence, Friendship and Respect. As an athlete from Trinidad put it, and I quote, "At the starting line everyone wished each other good luck; it was like one big family."

The sport competition also taught the athletes valuable lessons, which they will remember for life, as an athlete from Gabon, Jessica Oyane, said: "Through this competition, I have seen my weaknesses and what I need to improve. I will work harder to show the people of Gabon that I am doing my best, and make them proud."

## Culture and Education Program

For the first time in Olympic history, all athletes remained for the entire period of the Games where an extensive range of activities was organized for them to live together, and learn and understand one another through the Culture and Education Program (CEP). The CEP focused on 5 key themes of Olympism: Skills Development, Well-Being, Healthy Lifestyle, Social Responsibility and Expression.

---

***"You will learn the difference between winning and being a champion. To win, you merely have to cross the finish line first. To be a champion, you have to inspire admiration for your character, as well as for your physical talent."***

---

Singapore 2010 produced the world's first batch of Young Olympians influenced with the belief that sport is not just about winning, but being a champion in life.

As Dr. Jacque Rogge, IOC President put it, and I quote, "You will learn the difference between winning and being a champion. To win, you merely have to cross the finish line first. To be a champion, you have to inspire admiration for your character, as well as for your physical talent."

## **Making History**

The IOC President has said that the Inaugural YOG was a huge success and beyond his highest expectations. The Young Olympians, the National Olympic Committees and the International Federations were all extremely happy and satisfied with the Games. Young people from around the world were actively involved in making the Games a great success whether working in the Singapore Youth Olympic Games Organizing Committee, as Chef De Mission, as coaches or team officials, as contributors to the Culture and Education Program, or as Young Ambassadors or simply as spectators. There were many innovations and new ideas in sports, such as the 3-on-3 basketball, mixed and continental teams that went beyond sport competitions to promote Olympic Values and understanding. The Young Olympians competed head-on against one another in their sport and came together as teammates and friends in the CEP, discussing issues critical to them, such as the fight against doping, health and the environment.

These are the significant successes for sport, the Organizing Committee and the IOC.

This is just the beginning. This YOG will be an inspiration for generations to come. Connected through sports and by bonds of friendship, these young people will help to build a more peaceful and harmonious world. We are all part of this legacy, by living the Olympic values in our lives.

---

## **References**

1. The 10 other cities were Algiers (Algeria), Athens (Greece), Bangkok (Thailand), Belgrade (Serbia), Debrecen (Hungary), Guatemala City (Guatemala), Kulau Lumper (Malaysia), Moscow (Russian Federation), Poznan (Poland) and Turin (Italy).
2. These programs fall within five groups: Pre-Games Engagement Program (involving twinning of all Singapore schools to some 200 National Olympic Committees); Sports Program (featuring all 26 Summer Olympic sports); Culture and Education Program (special modules designed for the young athletes in the areas of Sports Issues, Global Issues, World Culture, Community Involvement, Adventure); Youth Olympic Village (with lively exhibition and performance spaces for the young athletes); and New Media (wide use of new media platforms to promote connectivity among the youth of the world before, during and after the YOG).