

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH Monday, October 1, 2001

# Greek tragedy looming for 2004 Games

## Failure to get the politicians on board is harming Athens' Olympic preparation

THE success of Sydney is proving as great an albatross for Athens as winning the World Cup in 1966 was for English football.

The Sydney Olympics provides the template for any city hosting multisports events and those who worked there can name their price in international sports management.

In Athens last week, as the International Olympic Committee's co-ordination commission came to town to check on preparations for the 2004 Games, the place was swarming with Australians who had helped make the event Down Under a success.

Yet at the end of it the co-ordination commission left Athens well aware that sprinkling Australian accents around Athens would not suddenly solve fundamental problems.

Denis Oswald, the chairman of the commission, even sounded like past England football managers talking about years of hurt when he reminded the Greeks they had waited more than 100 years for the Games to return and "we don't want to miss this opportunity. There will be another 100 years to wait."

Behind those words is an acceptance by the IOC that in Athens they are caught between a rock and a very hard place. They cannot take the Olympics away and can only hope it will be all right on the night — although this would be more down to a Greek ability to improvise rather than any Sydney expertise.

What has rocked the IOC is the realisation that a problem they thought had been solved at Sydney has reappeared. At Sydney, IOC insiders claimed credit for learning the lessons of Atlanta and made sure they had the politicians on board. In Atlanta they were not and the Games were a nightmare.



**Mihir Bose**  
IN ATHENS

In Sydney, Michael Knight, the New South Wales politician and the man who masterminded the Australian success, had something like dictatorial powers.

Even the day before the Games started much of the Australian press was convinced the event would be a disaster but Knight, who made few friends in the Australian press and even fewer friends in the Australian National Olympic Committee, took crucial decisions that only he as Olympics minister could.

While the romantics of the Olympic Movement may talk of how the Games enshrine the principle of ancient Greece's love for sport and democracy, the fact is for modern games to work you need a dictator and Athens 2004 has no such person. And, the nature of Greek society makes it difficult to see how they could even acquire one.

The nearest equivalent to Knight in Greece could be Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, the charismatic woman who secured the Games for Athens.

Last year when Juan Antonio Samaranch, then president of the IOC, showed Athens the yellow card for their lack of progress, he virtually forced Greek Prime

Minister Costas Simitis to appoint Angelopoulos-Daskalaki as head of the organising committee.

The feeling in IOC circles was that just as she had magically conjured an Athens win over the favourites Rome, she would now be able to do the same and get the Games in order.

She has made a difference. Craig Reedic, the chairman of the British Olympic Association who is also on the co-ordination commission, was impressed by the progress in marketing and accreditation. But the main problems are with the construction of stadiums and here Angelopoulos-Daskalaki can do nothing for this is a government issue.

The outsider may think the solution is easy: bring Angelopoulos-Daskalaki into the government as Olympic minister and get her to knock heads in the departments of public works and sports responsible for construction.

But in Greece Angelopoulos-Daskalaki has even less chance of getting into the present government than Tottenham have of winning the English Premiership.

Angelopoulos-Daskalaki hails from the conservative right while the government is from the left and in a society where everything can take a political hue, the twain cannot meet.

One result of this emerged on Friday when the co-ordination

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commission held its plenary session to tell the organisers what needs to be done.

But while Angelopoulos-Daskalaki and her aides made notes, absent from this crucial meeting was anybody from the government. When Oswald was questioned on this, he replied: "Yes that is problem. We must address that in future Games."

The IOC hope is that for Athens 2004 the Greek government will get over its political crisis which had distracted ministers for much of the summer.

But one thing Athens has already put paid to is any talk of the Games being permanently staged there. When this was mentioned to one Greek, he reacted as if he had been struck. Instead, he spoke of how Greece was a very small country, only 10 million people, and of its growing economic problems.

The Greeks may make much of the Olympics coming home, but they have so many headaches getting everything ready they don't want to host the event more than once in every 100 years.