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## An Interview with David Stubbs, Executive Director, Committed to Green Foundation

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### Introduction

David Stubbs is a specialist in conservation biology and environmental management with particular application to the sport and recreation industry. Here he talks to Trevor Slack about green issues in the staging of major games and green sponsorship.

**TS: You have been extensively involved with the environmental issues that are associated with the staging of major games. Can you tell me a little bit about how and why such issues have come to be on the agenda of events such as the Olympic Games?**

**DS:** The precise origins of all this are uncertain but probably relate to a combination of factors. The first event to be credited with a “green dimension” was the Lillehammer Winter Olympics of 1994. This seems to have been a spontaneous local initiative feeding off the rising profile of green issues at the time.

A key milestone must have been the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, at which the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was represented. This event certainly struck a chord with the IOC leadership, that was eventually consolidated by including a clause on sustainability in the Olympic Charter.

Crucially, at that time the final bid preparations for the 2000 Summer Games were being made. In Australia, Greenpeace had been part of a consortium bidding to build a “Sustainable Athletes’ Village” as part of the Sydney bid. Although that specific project did not get chosen, the Sydney Bid Committee certainly picked up on the green agenda, perceiving it as another point in their bid’s favour.

As we all know, in 1993 Sydney won the bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games, ahead of the perceived front runner, Beijing. Few would seriously credit Sydney’s environmental proposals as being determinant but, all the politics aside, Sydney did win on a green ticket. Having won, the organisers were faced with a determined non-governmental organisation (NGO) community and public insisting that the 100 environmental commitments in the bid should be honoured. I am not suggesting the green element would have been ignored otherwise, but the continued vigilance of Greenpeace Australia and the Green Games Watch coalition of local NGOs certainly kept the issues in the spotlight.

Then, within six months of Sydney winning the bid, the Lillehammer Games took place and showed to the world that certain ►



environmental components can be successfully integrated into a major event. It was a promising start.

In July 1995, the IOC were sufficiently emboldened by all this to host (in conjunction with the United Nations Environment Programme) the first World Conference on Sport and Environment, at its headquarters in Lausanne. This was a very positive meeting and spawned the creation of the IOC's Sport and Environment Commission.

By now, more and more detailed environmental issues were being incorporated into the bidding criteria for future Olympic Games. It should be remembered that due to the seven-year time lag between awarding and hosting (and even longer from first joining the bid process), most of the recent Games started their bid when environmental issues were not on the agenda.

Nor should we forget the general upping of environmental awareness and legislative controls throughout the world. A number of sports, such as golf, alpine skiing and motorcycling, have been the focus of considerable environmental attention. To different degrees their governing bodies have had to respond to these issues with a range of studies, reports, guidelines and rules. In short, the sport sector, like any other business sector, has discovered that it is not immune from environmental questions and that it has to address these matters with increasing seriousness.

**TS: Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement with the team of volunteer Venue Environment Managers at the Sydney Olympics?**

**DS:** On a personal level I had been closely following Sydney's progress as it was very relevant to my main work with the European Golf Association Ecology Unit. I learnt about their idea to have a team of volunteers to help with the roll out of the environmental programme during the Games, but at first their idea had been just to use local volunteers.

I discussed this with Peter Ottesen, the Environment Programme Manager, and suggested it would be good to have some overseas participants who are experienced in sport environment issues. In the end, I worked with them for two months during the final preparation stages and during the event.

We also had in our team Anna Van Der Kamp from Green & Gold Inc, Canada, and George Kazantzopoulos, the Environment manager for Athens 2004.

To be honest, a major part of the environmental issues had been dealt with during the planning and development stages. Our role as a roving team of Venue Environment Managers was essentially three-fold:

- To monitor compliance with environmental regulations, such as checking water quality control ponds, noting provision of spill containment kits, and assisting Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials on their inspection visits;
- To observe the waste management programme, liaise with catering, cleaning and waste management managers, and report back to the Environment Programme headquarters on any issues arising;



- To be on hand in case of any environmental “incidents”.

In the event there were no dramatic incidents. The organisers had been worried about possible storm run-off causing pollution of water courses or the harbour but it hardly rained throughout the entire Games period. On my watch, the biggest issue we faced was managing the crowds at the Mountain Bike venue, which was situated within a protected forest. We had started marking out no-go areas but the “Look” Team objected to the colour of the tape – they didn’t think it would look good on TV – so alternative material had to be found and this was not put up in time.

There were also a couple of bizarre occurrences. First, there were reports of people and athletes being attacked by magpies! The Australian Magpie is a very territorial bird during the breeding season and has the unnerving habit of dive-bombing people who come too close. The second story was the influx of the large Bogong Moth, a migratory species that happened to be attracted in droves to the main stadium lights. It was not harmful, but threatened to be unpleasant for people in the cheap seats.

Above all, I feel the presence of a sizeable team of environmental professionals within or alongside the Games organisation (roughly 25 volunteers and a matching number of core staff, national Parks, EPA and Waste Board officers), significantly reinforced the message that this was a credible green campaign. And to be fair to the many Venue Managers we worked with, they were always co-operative and keen to do the right thing for the environment.

**TS: As part of the Sydney Olympics a number of the major sponsors adopted green practices. Can you tell us something about them?**

**DS:** Sponsors helped Sydney 2000 meet its environmental commitments in many ways. They provided environmentally-friendly goods, sponsored environmental projects or used the Games as an opportunity to change corporate culture. Examples include:

- Energy Australia supplied PureEnergy electricity generated using solar, wind, hydro and landfill gas power;
- Holden showcased an experimental Ecommodore vehicle that halves the fuel consumption of a full-sized family car and the Hydro Gen 1 fuel cell car;
- Coca Cola tested 100 environmentally friendly hydrocarbon refrigeration machines at Sydney Olympic Park;
- Ramler Furniture provided biodegradable cardboard tables and bookshelves for a number of venues;
- Nike’s Stand-Off Distance Singlet made of 75 per cent recycled soft drink bottles was available to runners in the Olympic marathon;
- McDonald’s showcased its ozone-friendly hydrocarbon refrigeration units at its restaurants at Sydney Olympic Park;
- Carlton and United Breweries provided recyclable PET beer bottles and PET beer cups; Lindemans Wines provided recyclable plastic wine glasses. ➤



**TS: Some of the sponsors (Coca-Cola and McDonalds) took some criticism from Greenpeace about not being as environmentally friendly as they claimed. Could you comment on this?**

**DS:** Greenpeace was not shy about criticising major sponsors when they were felt to be reneging on commitments or missing opportunities. Such striking campaigns had significant impact, all the more so for being linked with the Olympic Games.

Hijacking brands and using adapted slogans such as Enjoy Climate Change for Coca Cola were brutally effective. Even if sometimes the message was blunt and only partly accurate, its simplicity was powerful. With modern communications technology enabling the rapid spread of campaign material, Greenpeace has been able to provoke global policy changes among multi-national corporations. No matter how it arose, the fact that multi-national corporations like Coca Cola have pledged to introduce Green Freeze technology throughout their global operation by the time of the Athens Olympics in 2004 takes the "Green Games" concept onto a further dimension.

The knock-on effect on sponsors, suppliers and manufacturers associated with the Games is potentially huge. This can also come round full circle, with potential sponsors seeking events and venues with a positive environmental track record.

At the very least this is just good risk management. Nobody wants to be linked to an environmental problem story if they can avoid it. The size of some modern sports events makes such problems all the more

possible. But, above all, I sense that in the not too distant future we will see some events with their own dedicated environment programme sponsors.

**TS: I guess one of the concerns about the initiatives sponsoring companies take at events like the Olympics is that because of the high visibility they want to be seen as "green" but after the Games they just go back to their previous practices which may not be particularly environmentally friendly. Do you have any thoughts on this issue?**

**DS:** It is not very credible to change your spots just for a one-off event. Any green kudos resulting from the event sponsorship would soon be wiped out if companies reneged on their environmental commitment as soon as the cameras are switched off. Companies are under public scrutiny all the time and nobody will be fooled for long by an ephemeral campaign.

This question presupposes that companies are being cynical in exploiting a "Green Games" initiative. Maybe so, but that is ultimately counter-productive. I prefer to think that, through being involved in a green event, they will see some tangible benefits from continuing this approach – and some significant disbenefits from not doing so.

**TS: In addition to working at the Sydney Games you have had considerable involvement working as a consultant for golf courses on environmental issues. Can you tell us something about your work in that area?**

**DS:** Most of my work over the last 15 years has been in the golf sector. In particular,



from 1994 to 1999 I ran the European Golf Association Ecology Unit and this led on to being responsible for the Committed to Green Environmental Management Programme for golf courses.

Very simply, the golf sector has been strongly attacked by environmental groups for perceived ecological and social impacts. In some countries this has turned the planning process into a protracted minefield for would-be developers. Key issues are water consumption, impacts on water quality through the use of fertilisers and pesticides, and the impact on natural habitats, flora and fauna.

All of these are valid issues to deal with but there is widespread misunderstanding of the technical attributes of golf courses. Few people perceive some of the wider environmental benefits of golf, such as the fact that many courses are real havens for wildlife and that a well-managed turfgrass can function as a good water quality filter.

My work has been to try to make some sense of these issues and to put them in perspective. Arising from all this has been the notion that golf courses need to be seen to be environmentally responsible. This has led to the creation of the Committed to Green programme, in which clubs/facilities can achieve an independent label of recognition for high standards of environmental performance. We developed this in partnership with the European Commission and have had good support from leading environmental bodies such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) International and UNEP.

I feel the approach taken through Committed to Green is something that could

well be replicated to good effect in other sports. Golf is a big land user but plenty of other sports also have potential impacts on the natural environment. And when it comes to major events, all sports need to take note of these issues.

**TS: Why is it important for event organisers and sporting facilities to be seen as environmentally friendly?**

**DS:** There is perhaps a certain arrogance in sporting circles that takes the line of assuming sport is a good thing and that events being popular they do not need to worry about peripheral details. That is very old thinking and there is much evidence of changing attitudes these days. Sports bodies and event organisers have just as much need to be seen as good corporate citizens as any other organisation or activity.

Major events can be extremely disruptive on local communities. The big ones, such as Olympic Games, involve considerable public investment and infrastructure development. You cannot go far down this route these days without facing up to environmental responsibilities.

There is much talk of events leaving a positive, long-term legacy for the communities in which they have taken place. Environmental and social benefits are key elements of this.

There is also the regulatory stick – to construct facilities and plan certain activities, organisers have to carry out Environmental Impact Assessments and comply with all sorts of environmental protection regulations. So much so that environmental chapters are now mandatory parts of the bidding process for ➤



the Olympic Games, and I suspect will become the norm for most other sport event bid processes in the not too distant future.

**TS: What about sponsors, what is in it for them?**

**DS:** The added value of being associated with a well-organised event that also gains recognition for its positive environmental credentials. They may also gain new business to business contacts, improved supplier chain understanding and procurement procedures, staff motivation and incentives. Having all this tied around a sport event is potentially worth more than they could buy through direct advertising of their “eco-friendly” policies.

**TS: I would imagine that what deters some sponsors, event organisers, and sports facility managers from being as environmentally friendly as they might is the cost issue. Is this a real concern?**

**DS:** No.

**TS: If you were to give some advice to managers of sport events and facilities and corporate sponsors of sporting events as to how to get involved in environmentally-friendly practices and promoting this to their clients, what would you say?**

**DS:** Assess, discuss and commit. It does not have to be some life-changing event. There is no compulsion to convert totally overnight, even if that were possible. In fact, in many cases people are already doing much that might be termed environmentally friendly, probably without realising it.

So the first step is to make an evaluation of

where you currently stand. This can be done internally, or you might seek professional advice. Having conducted a review of your environmental performance across all the relevant categories (e.g. waste, energy, transport, water, nature conservation) it should be apparent where your strengths and weaknesses lie.

This leads on to formulating an action plan. To do this you need to involve all the relevant people (e.g. staff, contractors, public authorities, sponsors) to discuss your aims and objectives and how each partner can contribute to the process.

At this point it should be clear that there is a collective sense of purpose to go forward and embrace a more positively- environmental approach to your operation. But to go from warm ideas to making it happen, you need to make a definite commitment. This could be by way of a detailed environmental policy statement with action targets. The policy and plan must be approved by top management and they need to be seen to be supporting its implementation.

Having got this far, attention then needs to be given to communicating the policy and achievements to all relevant stakeholder groups. Often I find organisations rather tentative in this respect. They lack the final confidence to go public on their green initiatives, presumably for fear of being criticised. Ironically they then get criticised for being too half-hearted on environmental matters.

It is not a matter of being perfect – such a state doesn't really exist. But sports bodies and event organisers should be able to demonstrate reasonable understanding and care for the environment. The best way to be



sure one's programme is environmentally credible and meaningful is to work in co-operation with environmental specialists who understand your business. They may be rare but they do exist – certainly there are some good sport sector environmental specialists around the world.

The promotion of the green dimension is very important. It is one of the key reasons for going down this route. Getting the balance right is critical. That is why you need expert help and why top management has to be fully behind the initiative. They have to be comfortable putting their name to and standing up for the environmental policy. If they have the right team alongside them, there should be no fear of handling “difficult” questions from media and the public.

My final plea would be for people to see environment not as a problem but as part of the solution to better management. Working with the grain should be far more productive in the long-run.



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## Biographies

**David Stubbs'** current work is about applying environmental management principles to the sport and recreation industry. He has worked extensively with a number of golf organisations and has been appointed advisor to the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews and the European Golf Association. In 1999 he was appointed as the British Olympic Association's representative on the European Olympic Committee's Sport and Environment Working Group. In 2000 David worked for two months as a volunteer venue environment manager with the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. He is a graduate of King's College, London.

**Trevor Slack** is Professor and Canada Research Chair in Sport Management at the University of Alberta, Canada. His major research interests are in organisational change and issues relating to sport sponsorship.



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