



By John Coates AC,
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FINDING OPPORTUNITIES IN A NEW NORMAL

John Coates has been a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) since 2001, Vice President from 2013-17 and 2020-the present, and a member of its Executive Board from 2009-2013 and 2020-the present. He is currently Chair of the IOC's 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games Coordination Commission. A graduate in law (LLB), Coates has been President of the International Council of Arbitration for Sport and Court of Arbitration for Sport (since 2011); President of the Australian Olympic Committee Inc. (since 1990) and Chair of the Australian Olympic Foundation Ltd (since 1995). He was Chef de Mission of the Australian Olympic Delegations in Beijing, Athens, Sydney, Atlanta, Barcelona and Seoul. At the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, Coates was awarded the Olympic Order in Gold. In 2006 Coates was appointed to Australia's highest civilian honour as a Companion in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AC) "for service to the development of sport nationally and internationally through the Olympic movement promoting the wellbeing of youth and values of tolerance, understanding, peace and mutual respect between peoples of the world".

How the International Olympic Committee has approached re-planning for Tokyo 2020 amid ongoing uncertainty. And why the first postponed Olympic Games will spearhead a new approach for the future.

One thing we all learned in 2020 is that certainty is only ever an illusion. You can come very close to something immense and suddenly it feels remote and full of unknowns. This was our experience with the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020.

The Covid-19 crisis that led to the historic postponement of these Games is unlike any other I have faced in my 40-year career in sports administration.

This crisis has been chronic; constantly evolving – hour by hour, day by day. We have had to take decisions in a global context of uncertain and rapidly changing information. And, in common with so many organisations this year, we have had to change direction.

Pivoting will be a familiar concept to anyone working in the sporting goods sector. Indeed, sports brands have provided some of the year's best examples. We've been humbled and inspired by your adaptability and commitment to continue supporting athletes during this period of unimaginable challenge for your businesses.

Pivoting, however, does not come easy on the scale of the Olympic Games. As an organisation, the IOC has been required to work in entirely new ways, and in ever closer collaboration with a large coalition of partners.

Of course, every crisis is also an opportunity. And the decision to postpone the Games by one year has set in motion a process that promises considerable long-term benefits – to the ways in which the IOC works as an organisation and also to the model of the Games.

As Chair of the IOC Coordination Commission for Tokyo 2020, I've been at the helm of a new joint taskforce, bringing together the IOC, International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and Tokyo 2020 with stakeholders from across the Olympic and Paralympic movements.

The body was created to streamline and accelerate decision-making as we approached the phases of redefining the product and re-planning the Tokyo 2020 Games to meet the new reality.

Together, we have worked through over 50 measures designed to maximise the cost savings – to the tune of potentially USD 280m – and increase efficiencies in Games delivery.

Examples include reducing the workforce, adjusting transport service levels, simplifying venue overlay and optimising use of new technology.

In addition, we are looking to simplify the Torch Relay, while maintaining the overall duration, the Look of the Games, and making the production schedule more efficient.

The efforts have been enormous, and they continue. We look from venue to venue, sport by sport, leaving no stone unturned. The only red lines – that we will not cross – relate to the athlete experience and field of play.

Finally, we must consider different scenarios, given the still-evolving context and the ongoing development of vaccines. These scenarios range from best case in which the virus is controlled worldwide, to different regional scenarios and cover a range of aspects including health, economic conditions, public policy/regulation and public opinion.

Practically, this means we are working with the joint taskforce and Japanese authorities to identify baseline operational requirements and Covid-19 counter-measures (social distancing, PPE, cleaning standards, etc.).

We will use these counter-measures to build a toolbox of solutions that can be rolled out when and if required. One such example is testing, which is central to the process for enabling participants to travel safely to Japan from around the world. We are closely monitoring the development of new tests, which will have a significant bearing on how this works.

In each scenario, we must also apply each measure to each of the Olympic Games functions. What does it mean for the Olympic Village, for example? Or for venue access? Or for public transportation? How will it impact spectator and fan experience?

The result is that we are planning for Tokyo 2020, Beijing 2022, Paris 2024, Milano Cortina 2026 and LA28 at once. The coordination required is immense, from the top levels of government right down to the individual volunteers, who will each carry some responsibilities for implementing the solutions.

What helps is that there is enormous goodwill and willingness from everyone to share best practice. We truly feel that we are all together on this journey, in which there are no passengers.



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In particular, the process has strengthened the IOC's collaboration with International Federations as well as other sports organisations such as Formula 1 and many of the European football leagues. We have learned from their experiences as their competitions have resumed; and we take encouragement from their success.

In the long-term too there will be positive benefits from new partnerships and coordination structures. Most significantly, the work we have completed together to redefine and simplify Tokyo 2020 is likely to become the new model for the Games.

In effect, the process has accelerated efforts initiated under Olympic Agenda 2020 to make the Olympic Games more efficient and sustainable for future hosts. The focus is on reducing volume, not services – for example by finding creative solutions to shorten venue rental periods.

Already, the teams from Paris 2024, Milano Cortina 2026 and Los Angeles 2028 are studying how to apply the new standards and the wealth of knowledge and experience shared through the taskforce. There is great enthusiasm, in a context where everyone is applying a new, post-Covid 19 filter to their vision and legacy programmes.

An example is the proposed revised venue plan for Paris 2024, with efficiencies enabling a reduction in the total number of venues to be used.

With Beijing 2022, which will take place just six months after Tokyo, the unique opportunity is to build and sustain audience engagement from one Games to the next – the first back-to-back Olympic Games since 1992.

And the story we will tell is also significant. The message we will bring to life in Tokyo is that we are #StrongerTogether. There is enormous power in working together, with a strength of purpose, towards a common goal.

I have seen it every day, from the start of this crisis, in the extraordinary efforts of our colleagues in Tokyo, including the Tokyo and Japanese governments, and from all our Olympic Movement stakeholders – partners, media International Federations, National Olympic Committees....

The common goal is Tokyo 2020, where we will all experience the joy, universality and shared humanity of the Olympic Games in a new and truly powerful way.



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