

# After Rogge: the Olympic leadership challenge

Few people know the challenges facing the new International Olympic Committee president better than Michael Payne. Writing for *SportsPro*, the IOC's first marketing and broadcast director examines the issues waiting on Thomas Bach's desk as he arrives in Lausanne.

By Michael Payne

On 10th September, Thomas Bach was elected the ninth president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and became the most important man in world sport. Bach will serve a minimum eight years with the potential for a further four-year renewable mandate. In all likelihood, Bach will serve until 2025 and oversee the election of the city to host the 2032 Olympic Games as well as setting the sports agenda well into the middle of the 21st century.

This was only the second election of an IOC president since 1980. Over 33 years the sports world has been totally and dramatically transformed.

Times change. When Juan Antonio Samaranch was elected IOC president in 1980, the Olympic movement was being torn apart by boycotts, a pawn between the political superpowers. Most commentators were writing the Olympic movement's obituary, with few cities stepping forward to bid for the Games. Broadcasters had yet to discover the potential power of sport to build their channels, and sponsorship was in its infancy.

The changes brought about by Samaranch reverberated throughout the entire sporting world. He handed over the IOC reins to the Belgian Jacques Rogge in 2001. Over the next 12 years, Rogge consolidated the foundations created by Samaranch, built up the IOC's financial resources and raised the stakes in the global fight against doping.

Rogge has steered a reassuringly steady course. He identified many of the key

issues when he became president – from the importance of engaging young people in sport in the digital age, through to the fight against the continued onslaught of chemists and doping, along with the potentially far more sinister corruption of sports results through match fixing and illegal betting.

The Olympic movement now looks to be far healthier than at any time in its history – especially following the very successful Games in London, Vancouver and Beijing. But, for all Rogge's steadiness, the future is unlikely to be plain sailing. Potentially major storm clouds are brewing on the horizon. And others will undoubtedly and unexpectedly emerge – think of the socio-political movements which have sprung up to question governmental priorities in hosting costly global sports events, or the growing media frenzy and calls for boycotts of Olympic sponsor products as a result of Russia's new gay legislation.

The new IOC president will need to bring real strategic leadership and vision to the role. Only this will ensure that the Olympic movement and the wider sports movement continue to thrive, to be a true source of connection and inspiration, and stay relevant. The office of the IOC president enjoys tremendous prestige and, with the right strategic vision and focus, has unique power to change how the world embraces sport for the betterment of individuals and societies. It will be interesting to see whether Bach realises the potential of the power at his disposal.

Bach's in-tray is already filling – five key issues must now be at the top of his to-

do list when he arrives at the president's office in Lausanne.

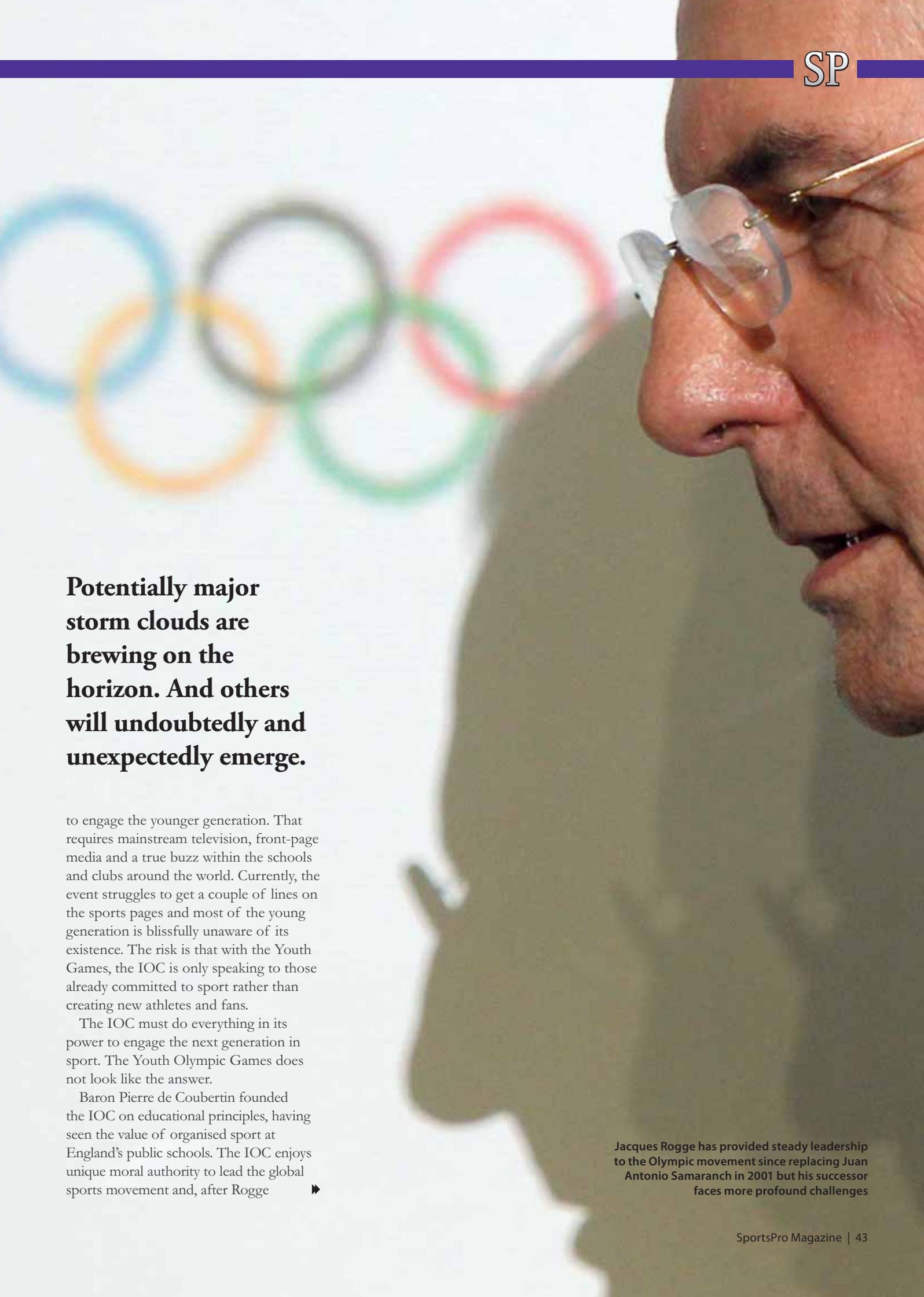
## Connecting with young people

The cornerstone of Rogge's youth strategy was the creation of the Youth Olympic Games – a mini version of the Olympics. However, with no television or real sponsorship revenues, this event is starting to prove a very expensive experiment, draining valuable resources.

The only way the Youth Games will succeed is if they become a real platform



The Youth Olympic Games concept is a pet project of Jacques Rogge but hard work is required to capture the imagination of the audience its creation was intended to serve



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to engage the younger generation. That requires mainstream television, front-page media and a true buzz within the schools and clubs around the world. Currently, the event struggles to get a couple of lines on the sports pages and most of the young generation is blissfully unaware of its existence. The risk is that with the Youth Games, the IOC is only speaking to those already committed to sport rather than creating new athletes and fans.

The IOC must do everything in its power to engage the next generation in sport. The Youth Olympic Games does not look like the answer.

Baron Pierre de Coubertin founded the IOC on educational principles, having seen the value of organised sport at England's public schools. The IOC enjoys unique moral authority to lead the global sports movement and, after Rogge

Jacques Rogge has provided steady leadership to the Olympic movement since replacing Juan Antonio Samaranch in 2001 but his successor faces more profound challenges



**The inclusion of sports like snowboarding has helped to make the winter Games more relevant to young people but such vision has not always extended to the summer programme, and it may be time for shooting, which could survive without the Olympics, to make way for new events**

succeeded in gaining the IOC full observer status at the UN, it should now use this authority and power to engage the world's governments to ensure that physical education is as much a part of any school curriculum as maths or languages. With the growing concern about obesity and healthcare, one of the best investments a government could make would be to ensure its population aspires to lead a more active and healthier lifestyle. The IOC president could build his legacy on this single programme alone, in much the same way as Samaranch is credited with saving the Olympics. The potential for such an initiative is enormous and the world is crying out for Bach to now take the lead.

## Making the summer Games more relevant and compelling

Watch the Winter Olympics and it is edgy and youthful. There is short-track skating, snowboarding, slope-style skiing and much more. All are recent additions to make sure that the winter Games connects with young people.

The IOC has struggled to bring that same strategic vision to the summer Games – all the more surprising given that one of the pillars of Rogge's presidency was 'youth engagement.' Concerned about the overall scope and size of the summer Games, Rogge pursued a rigid policy of capping the number of sports at 28 and the number of athletes at 10,500. For a new sport to join, another must be removed. Over the past 12 years, baseball and softball have been dropped to be replaced by golf and rugby sevens.

Earlier this year, as a result of an unfathomable bureaucratic decision-making process, wrestling was surprisingly put forward for elimination. Within minutes of this shocking decision, the IOC executive board realised the error of their ways and promptly shortlisted wrestling for inclusion on the 2020 programme along with baseball/softball (now in a new merged federation) and squash.

The IOC is right to check the uncontrolled growth of the Games, risking that they become too large for cities to be able to host them. But Bach now must overcome bureaucratic and political barriers to shake up the sports involved in the summer Games.

To tap into sport with the DNA of youth, the IOC needs to look at the world's growing city population, which often has limited access to sports facilities. Urban street sports are a key new trend. Skateboarding and inline skating would bring an edge to the Games. They have been handicapped by the lack of a clear governing body – though that did not prevent snowboarding joining the winter programme, where Samaranch effectively organised a hostile takeover of the sport by the FIS (International Ski Federation) as a way to fast-track it into the Olympics.

Kite surfing should be embraced (though not as a replacement for windsurfing), along with sports disciplines (extensions of existing sports) from three-on-three street basketball through to surfing.

And if there is a need to drop sports to provide more room on the programme,

be truly radical and ask yourself: 'What is the role of shooting and guns in a movement established to be a role model for young people?' The sport of shooting, with its strong structure of sporting clubs, would survive perfectly well without the Olympic tag.

Should soccer evolve on the Olympic programme to indoor soccer and beach soccer? This would provide a new platform to properly develop these sports disciplines rather than continuing to pretend that Olympic soccer captures anyone's imagination in comparison to the FIFA World Cup.

## Cultivating future bidding cities

The race for the right to host the 2020 Olympic Games, won by Tokyo, represented the smallest field of cities in three decades. With only three final candidate cities – Istanbul, Madrid and Tokyo – the IOC is far closer than it may realise to the danger of returning to the bleak days when there were no bidding cities at all.

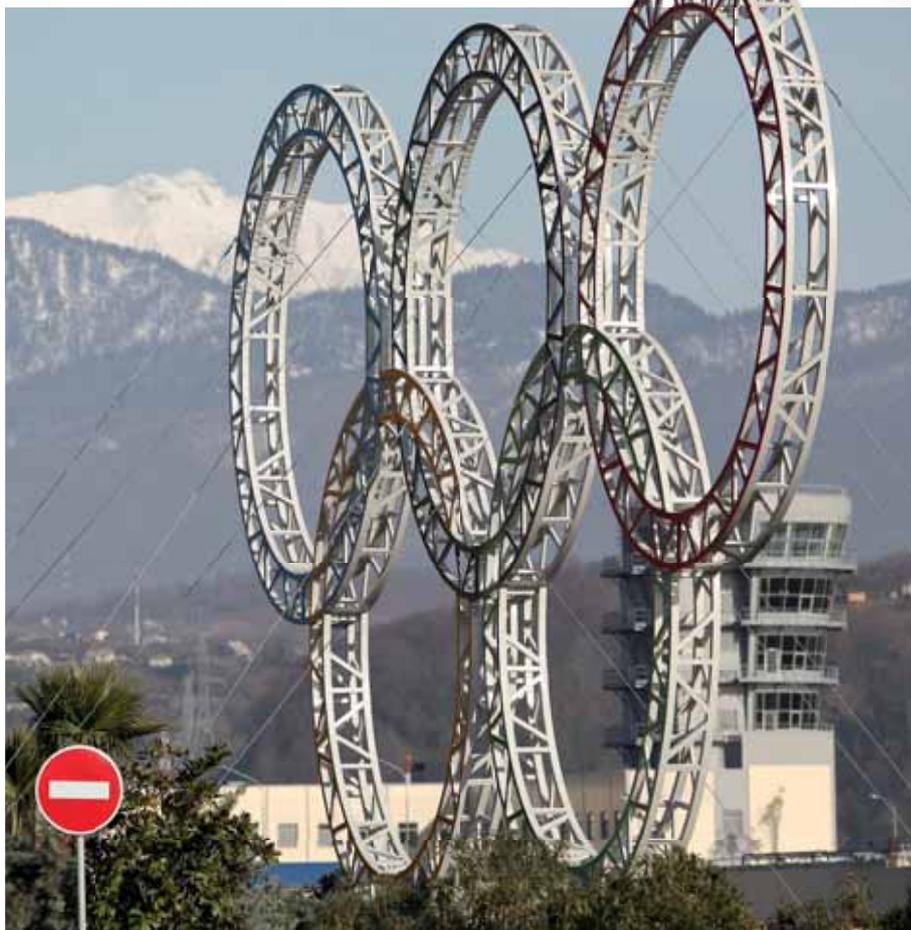
This may sound fanciful, but it did happen. When I began my Olympic career in the early 1980s, the IOC was struggling to find any candidates – Los Angeles withdrew its initial candidature for 1984, after the public voted against spending any public money on the undertaking, and Tehran was brought up short in its Olympic ambitions as soon as the Shah of Persia was exiled by the Islamic revolution; a management change at the top is not exactly conducive to inviting the world to party!

There can arguably be no greater responsibility for the IOC president than to ensure the continued successful staging of the Olympic Games, and that requires strong, healthy bidding cities. The selection of a host city is in part a risk management exercise by the IOC, ensuring through the bid process that the city has the wherewithal and understanding of what it will take to stage the Games.

There is a fine line between managing risk and creating suffocating bureaucracy which makes the bidding process overly complicated and far too expensive. Such are the current IOC bidding protocols, requiring submission of technical plans and detailed reviews, no city can even begin to think of bidding without a budget of at least US\$50 million. Sochi admitted to spending over US\$100 million in their campaign for the 2014 winter Olympic Games, and many commentators have suggested it might even have been double that.

There is no question that if Lillehammer, arguably the most successful winter Games to date, had to go through the current bureaucratic and costly bidding process, they would never have bid. The new IOC president must strive to find a balance between an appropriate technical review and one that can promote and encourage bidders. The mere process of bidding must also bring clear promotional benefits for the city, and not see them suffocated under a barrage of complex and often illogical rules, and permit national industries to come forward to support their campaigns.

Perhaps one of the most radical ideas proposed by some of the presidential candidates was to bring back visits to the bidding cities by IOC members. This is something that Rogge has wholeheartedly refused to debate after visits were banned following the Salt Lake City scandal. But the decision of electing a host city is far too important to be left to a series of presentations which, in the digital age, allow bidders to muddy the waters between reality and hopeless dreams. Bringing back a single visit to each city could reduce the cost of bidding. Again the new president should be bold, and not be governed by fear of short-term media headlines and possible criticism.



**The bid to bring the winter Games to the Russian resort of Sochi in 2014 cost over US\$100 million and taking steps to make Olympic campaigning more accessible is an urgent priority for the IOC**

## Responding to a changing marketplace

Over the past three decades the IOC has stepped back from the brink of bankruptcy, from zero revenues to building a multi-billion dollar portfolio of broadcast and marketing partnerships. The revenue has grown in leaps and bounds, providing a key financial lifeline to the 205 National Olympic Committees around the world and some 35 International Sports Federations.

And although many of the principal broadcast and sponsorship agreements have been negotiated through 2020, revenue increases are now flat at best, and in some markets from Canada to Australia the IOC is struggling to avoid a major reduction in rights fees. New markets in South America and Asia are helping to offset some of this shortfall, but the days of automatic guaranteed rights fee increases appear to be over.

The IOC's global sponsorship programme, TOP, is the longest-running

international marketing programme of its kind and has generated billions from the world's foremost brands, from Coca-Cola to Samsung. But it is also starting to look tired as companies change their marketing focus to fit with an ever faster, more digital, environment.

Bach will have his work cut out to maintain strong revenues, never mind grow them. The Olympic family, for the first time in recent history, is going to have to come to terms with limited increases, if any, in their revenues.

The opportunity for growth is still there, but will require a significant realignment and rethink of the IOC's marketing strategies. The IOC owns one of the world's greatest brands, with compelling and clear values. It has the potential to develop a whole new marketing model through an innovative digital strategy. The same energy and vision that the IOC leadership brought to the founding of the TOP programme three decades ago needs to be reactivated in the development of the next marketing effort to sustain ►



German Thomas Bach is congratulated by the departing Jacques Rogge after his election at the 125th IOC Session in Buenos Aires on 10th September

the Olympic ideal. The IOC originally established the gold standard for sports marketing – it must do so again.

## Tackling the evils of doping and illegal betting and match fixing

Jacques Rogge operated a zero tolerance policy on doping and has been at the forefront of the debate on how the sports movement should come together to tackle match fixing.

It is now more than 15 years since the IOC led the way to form WADA, the World Anti-Doping Agency, and finally brought governments on board to take their share of the responsibilities, as opposed to just criticising from the sidelines. But with daily news headlines bringing new shocking revelations as to just how endemic doping had become, even sanctioned by those very governments who were attacking the IOC for lack of action (and we are not just talking of former eastern European nations here, but several – again, not just one or two – leading western democracies), the time has clearly come for a further rethink on the whole process. Counting the number of out-of-competition tests, whose costs are starting to spin out of control, is clearly not the answer.

In these ever-changing times, the new IOC president will need great leadership and a true strategic vision to ensure that when he hands on the Olympic torch to his successor in a decade or more from now, he does so with an Olympic movement stronger than the one he inherited; with a global youth generation engaged with the Olympic values and sport.

He will have to find the right balance between managing the operations, not letting bureaucracy suffocate great vision and new thinking, and providing strong leadership from the front.

He will also have to prepare the organisation for the worst. Over the course of 119 years, the Olympic Games have been cancelled three times – all as a result of the outbreak of World Wars. But in the last decade alone, the IOC has come scarily close to having to cancel or postpone the Olympics three times. Could Salt Lake 2002 have taken place if 9/11 had happened two months later? Would the world have travelled to Beijing if Sars had broken out in 2008 as opposed to 2003, and would the world have been able to even get to Vancouver 2010 if the Icelandic volcano had erupted a few months earlier?

A visionary, a bureaucrat, a stateless politician, the job of IOC president is not for the faint-hearted. It remains a huge job.

Jacques Rogge has led the IOC effectively and efficiently. He cemented many of the achievements of his predecessor. But for the new president, expectations, hopes and needs have never been higher. The Olympic motto is: 'Faster. Higher. Stronger'. It also applies to those who lead the Olympic movement.

Good luck, Thomas Bach.

You will need it. ■

## Michael Payne



Michael Payne was the IOC's first marketing and broadcast director – serving the Olympic movement from 1983 through to 2004, under

President Samaranch and then President Rogge. He now serves as a strategic advisor to leading global sports organisations, from Formula One to the FIVB, governments, media organisations and corporations.

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