

SPORT FOR ALL

Catching the Olympic spirit
By Mark Redvers

WATCHING THE OLYMPIC GAMES brings out the amateur athlete in everyone: kids who watch the athletics and swimming events immediately want to head down to the local track or pool to emulate their heroes, adults vow to fit more exercise into their schedule.

This summer's Olympics, to be held for the first time in China, promise to have the most success ever in persuading people to incorporate some kind of sport into their everyday lives. The two-week feast of sport in Beijing is certain to notch up record global audiences, with the vast majority of the host nation's 1.3 billion population glued to their television sets for the duration of the Games.

When local hero Liu Xiang, he of poster-boy looks and lightning stride, makes his expected appearance in the 110 metres hurdles final, the entire nation is likely to come to a standstill as people watch an anticipated gold-medal performance from the nation's best-ever track star. Likewise, superstar basketball player Yao Ming and his team-mates are under immense pressure to deliver, as are the nation's swimmers, divers and gymnasts, disciplines where Chinese sportsmen and women have excelled in recent years.

Their success – along with the continuing brilliance of badminton and table tennis players – has had an impact on sports participation nationwide. The increased affluence of recent years has seen more and more people take up golf, join gyms and play tennis, activities that are, in addition to providing significant fitness benefits, clear signs of having made it to the ranks of the middle classes.

Corporate encouragement has also played its role in popularising sport both in China and other parts of the world. Setting up sports-assistance programmes, as Hutchison does worldwide, has the multiple benefits of fostering goodwill, helping team building and bonding among the workforce and, of course, ensuring that employees are fitter, happier and more productive.

At its most basic level, sport is about running, walking or swimming in a non-competitive way, a means of



ensuring that the heart and lungs are given a thorough, and regular, workout. It is highly unlikely that anyone living in the modern age is unaware of the extensive medical proof showing that regular exercise, and a healthy diet, can significantly reduce the risk of heart problems and, ultimately, promote longevity.

For modern-day kids, participating in sport is a far more stimulating pastime, in mental and physical terms, than long hours spent in front of a monitor playing computer games. Among the leading world sports figures who are passionate about encouraging youngsters to play real, not cyberspace, games, is multiple Olympic medallist Sebastian Coe.

“Today’s children live in a world of conflicting messages and competing distractions,” says the man who was one of the world’s best ever middle distance runners, excelling in the 800 and 1,500 metre distances and winning four Olympic medals, two of them gold. “Their landscape is cluttered. Their path to sport is often obscured. When I was growing up, my heroes were two Olympians who lived in my home town. These days, young peoples’ heroes change from week to week.

“For many, they are not even real people but cartoon or video game figures. Young people in the developed world have a range of what a friend of mine calls SBAs – ‘Screen Based Activities’ – to entertain them, to keep them occupied, to soak up their leisure time: computers, DVDs, game consoles, videos, and TVs.

“Using the undeniably strong forces of the Olympic movement, I want to build a much stronger global alliance, using government and sports organisations, and businesses to inspire youth to get into sport, to get into recreation to make sure they enjoy it enough to stay into it; to strive to make clear the benefits of such involvement for them and their communities. To me, sport is the hidden social worker in the community. It’s also a great educator and motivator.”

Sports participation and sponsorship are both integral parts of the Hutchison approach. Apart from the obvious advantage of having employees who are fit, healthy and active, helping promote sport in the community generates enormous goodwill and, at the same time, acts as a subtle marketing device. In Hong Kong, for example, people immediately associate Watsons Water with athletics because of its close relationship with local track and field through the Watsons Athletic Club, which was founded in 1989 to promote the wellbeing of local youth through participation in sports. Here we look at examples of Hutchison’s three distinct approaches to supporting sport – marketing, lifestyle and sponsorship.

Marketing

Golf is a sure-fire winner for a relaxed and convivial day out and, when clients are asked along, it allows the chance to build stronger customer relations. Last year a number of such events were held in Tianjin and Shanghai by the Hutchison Whampoa Property



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Group, with the aim of getting to know customers and clients better and to raise awareness about the various Hutchison brands.

The Westgate Mall in Shanghai was also the scene of three totally different events – a squash tournament, a ping-pong competition and one of fencing’s most prestigious events, the Foil World Cup, featuring 119 people from 16 countries. Brand awareness and sales were raised and the mall was also more than happy with the increased volume of people passing through its doors.

Over in the city of Chongqing, the anniversary of the

HELPING TOMORROW’S STARS

CHILDREN showing promise in sports have been given a big pre-Olympic Games boost thanks to an A S Watson (ASW) scheme to help improve standards and awareness.

The Hong Kong Student Sports Awards have so far helped more than 2,000 youngsters from primary, secondary and special schools over the past three years. This summer, before the Olympic Games begins, a select group of 30 outstanding students was sponsored on a visit to the Chinese capital, Beijing, where they saw some of the Olympic Games venues, together with top training institutes used by the nation’s elite athletes.

The visit was a thrill for the students, who had a sneak peek at the fabulous Bird’s Nest national stadium, scheduled to be used for opening and closing ceremonies and major athletics events, and the aquatic centre, known as the Water Cube, where swimming and diving competitions will be held.

In addition, the students saw the top training institutes in the city that have produced the current crop of outstanding Chinese athletes. Visits to Beijing Sports University and Tsinghua University were also on the schedule.

Throughout the year, ASW actively encourages participation in sports through its award scheme. The 2007-2008 academic year saw 800 talented athletes selected for Sports Students Awards, which bring a cash scholarship, a certificate, the chance to participate in a leadership workshop and the opportunity to be selected for the Beijing sports exchange tour.

“We hope this will encourage students to pursue their dreams in sports and develop their potential to the full,” said Dominic Lai ASW Group Managing Director.





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Metropolitan Tower was marked by a badminton competition that aimed to reinforce corporate image and enhance the relationship with tenants.

Lifestyle

Seb Coe would heartily approve of the Hutchison Group's support for sport. Throughout the group, encouragement and sponsorship is given to in-house sports clubs and other community-based organisations that encourage people to swap the sofa for a few hours of vigorous activity.

Employees have the option of participating in a wide variety of sports such as golf, war games, keep-fit classes and athletics events. The TOM Group, for example, which has offices in Hong Kong, Beijing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Shanghai, has a broad spread of activities during the year that includes yoga, badminton, football, basketball, tennis and table tennis. "The feedback has been very positive," said a spokesman. "These programmes are great fun and really bring people together and encourage teamwork."

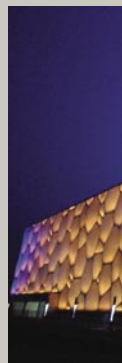
BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

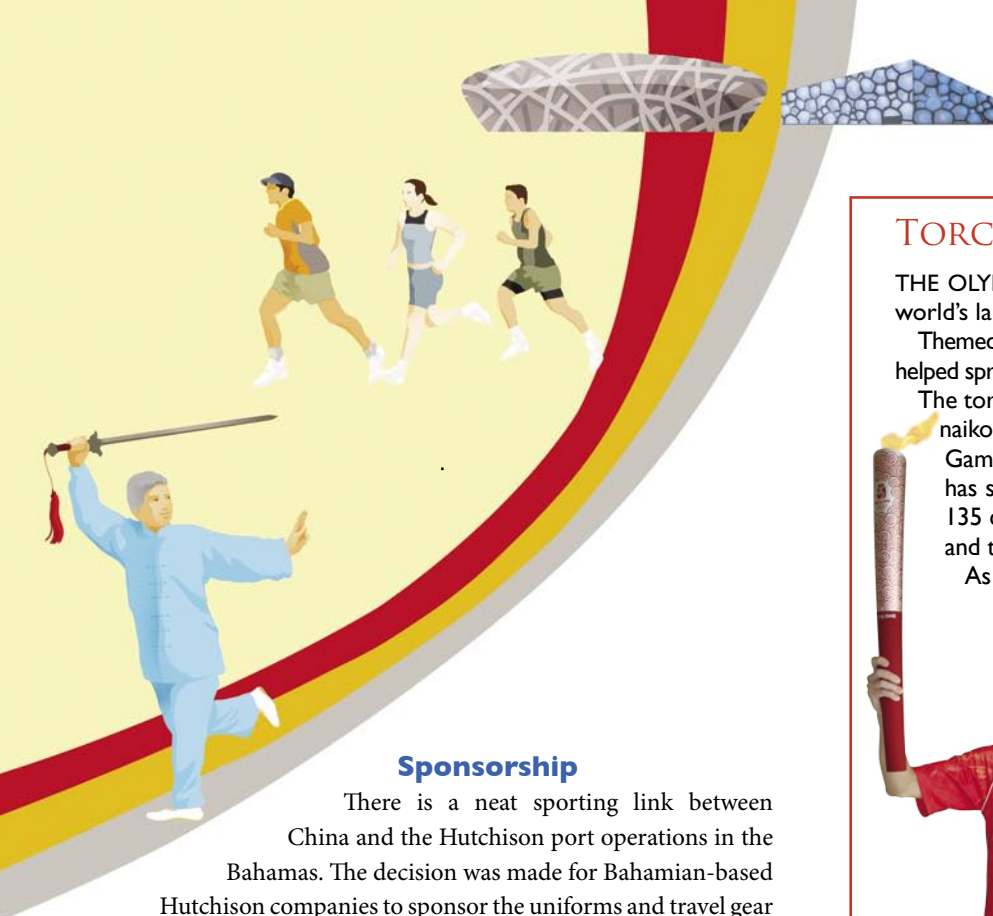
THE DETERMINATION of China to be viewed as a modern, forward-looking nation is reflected in the radically experimental design of the two main Olympic Games sporting venues in Beijing.

The national stadium and the aquatics centre are not just outstandingly inventive sports venues – they are two of the most imaginative architectural creations anywhere in the world. By the end of August, the entire television-viewing world will be familiar with the distinctive shapes of these iconic structures.

The national stadium was dubbed the Bird's Nest very early on in its construction life for its resemblance to...a bird's nest. The shell of the building is a series of interlocking steel girders; when viewed from a distance it looks like a giant spider's web.

The stadium, designed by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron and built at an estimated cost of USD486 million (HKD3.65 billion), is capable of holding a total of 91,000 spectators, and will be used for the athletics





Sponsorship

There is a neat sporting link between China and the Hutchison port operations in the Bahamas. The decision was made for Bahamian-based Hutchison companies to sponsor the uniforms and travel gear for the Special Olympics athletes and officials on their trip to the Shanghai Games last year. The athletes came back with a haul of 28 medals, including their first-ever gold medal.

Over in Canada, the energy company Husky sponsors a totally different kind of sporting event – world-class showjumping. The Husky Energy Classic Cup Competition, held near Calgary last year, is a popular competition now in its eighth year. The theme of last year's event was "Celebrating Husky's Community Partnerships".

Husky also sponsored an Olympic Gala to celebrate the

events and the opening and closing ceremonies.

Close by is the aquatics centre, another architectural marvel, in this case designed by the Australian company PTW. The Cheung Kong Group is one of the major sponsors. From the outside it looks as if it has been made of giant blue soap bubbles, hence its nickname, the Water Cube. The effect is made possible by the use of the translucent material ETFE that allows the colour to be changed.



IMAGINECHINA

During the two weeks of competition, the Water Cube, which has 6,000 permanent seats and 11,000 temporary seats, will see a total of 42 gold medals awarded.

TORCH SHOWS THE WAY

THE OLYMPIC torch relay is an integral part of the world's largest sporting event.

Themed the "Journey of Harmony", the torch relay has helped spread peace and friendship around the world.

The torch's journey began on 24 March at Panathenaikon Stadium, where the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896. The torch has since journeyed through five continents and 135 cities, even making a stop on Mount Everest and taking a ride on a dragon boat.



As far as the Hutchison employees in Hong Kong are concerned, perhaps the biggest cheers were heard when the torch arrived in the territory to begin the Chinese leg of its journey. HWL Deputy Chairman Victor Li was among the 119 torchbearers to spread the Olympic spirit throughout Hong Kong. "I feel very privileged," he said. "It is an experience I will never forget."

achievements of athletes from Canada and China. The event was attended by Olympic medallists from both countries and included ethnic dance, music and martial arts.

Programmes such as these, using popular sporting figures, are effective ways of associating companies with positive, feel-good community events. A similar approach is taken in India, using the nation's most popular sport, the game of cricket, along with other fun sports such as pool and table tennis.

The latter sport helped ease China back into the international community during the 1970s. Ping-pong diplomacy, whereby China's stars showed off their dazzling skills overseas, proved to be hugely popular worldwide and was the catalyst for the nation to embark on a more ambitious sports-building programme, ultimately leading to participation in the Los Angeles Games in 1984.

The fact that China is now hosting the Games indicates the great strides the nation has made during the past two decades. There is even speculation that the nation could top the medals table but whatever the final result, sport will be the winner.

The past decade has seen rapid growth in largely middle-class sports such as golf and tennis, where a comfortable income is usually needed for participation. These days, it is the younger, office-bound generation who are probably in need of exercise; old timers can be seen doing their daily Tai Chi routines throughout the nation, knowing full well that stretching of the limbs and regulated deep breathing, ensures a happier and healthier life. 