



# GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Five Britons residing in China share their views on the Olympic Games and the differences in approach between Beijing 2008 and London 2012.

## Q1:

Which event have you watched most so far? Which event interests you the least and why?

## Q2:

Who is your favorite Olympic athlete? Who is your favorite Chinese athlete?

## Q3:

What's the difference between the media coverage of the Games in the UK and China?

## Q4:

What's your opinion of Chinese people's attitude toward the Olympics, and how does it differ from that of the British?

## Q5:

What's your opinion of Chinese people's attitude toward sports in general, and how does it differ from that of the British?

## Q6:

To what degree does its ranking on the medals table reflect a country's strength in sports, and why?

## MARK LOGAN

Head of communications, eastern China, at the British consulate in Shanghai

**A1:** I have particularly enjoyed watching the diving competitions. Being based in China, any event that is broadcast after midnight doesn't work for me as I'm already sound asleep.

**A2:** The British cyclist, Bradley Wiggins, is really cool. As a former table tennis player myself, I quite like watching Wang Hao.

**A3:** I've read quite a few articles in the Chinese media that have been very positive in response to the London ceremony. The only drawback is the time difference, which meant that a lot of people in China didn't get to see the ceremony.

**A4:** The viewing records for the Olympics, both in China in 2008 and London in 2012, are testament to a shared fascination with the Olympic movement.

**A5:** I think that interest in sports here in China is increasing year-on-year, in a large part thanks to the Beijing Olympics, and of course, as seen in the London opening ceremony, sports have played a central role in the UK's development over the last few hundred years.

**A6:** The medals rankings do, to a certain extent, reflect the sporting ability of all nations involved. Other elements are reflected as well, though, including investment in sports and the size of a country's population. The UK's strong performance in the Olympics so far is a fair reflection of these various elements.

## ROWAN SIMONS

Born in London, Rowan Simons has been living in China for 25 years. He is best known for his book *Bamboo Goalposts*, published in 2008.

**A1:** Whatever the controversy surrounding these events, I have seen one dedicated young Chinese woman smash a record in the pool and two other Chinese women (along with others) openly betraying the very principles of sport by employing team tactics in a poorly designed competition. The events I like least are those that involve guns and farmyard animals. There should be no space for either at the Olympics.

**A2:** In Beijing, it was Bolt, and we are going to see some amazing performances in the track and field events. Maybe it will be him again (Rowan's contribution came before Bolt's victory in the 100 meter sprint). My favorite Chinese athlete in 2008

was Liu Xiang, so I would like to see him at his best this time (Liu fell during his qualifying heat.)

**A3:** About seven hours in the summer! The similarities are more striking. In my experience, national broadcasters tend to completely lose all sense of perspective as soon as the Games begin. The focus is on their own nation's athletes and the stories that resonate most directly with their viewers. It is one of the wonders of the Olympics that there can be so many journalists all in one place, all reporting on the same competitions, and all telling different stories about how the same thing happened.

**A4:** Both countries are proud of their sporting achievements. In my experience, British sports fans tend to have a closer personal and cultural relationship with many popular Olympic team sports, such as running, tennis and football, as recreation. In China, table tennis has this status, but many other sports are not yet popular at a social level.

**A5:** I think many people in China still see sport as a specialist career for talented athletes first, rather than a hobby or personal interest for themselves and their families. I can say that this is changing now. As China becomes richer and better educated, the more people will seek out the sports that interest them.

**A6:** Medal table rankings are followed with interest by all competing nations. As we know, the number of medals available in each sport is unbalanced. Football, the most popular game in the world, has just two gold medals, while shooting has several. Swimmers can cover the same distance in four different styles, so perhaps we should allow sprinters to run the 100 meters backwards or on all fours?

I think the real measure of a country's strength in each sport is the underlying number of people engaged in playing that sport regularly for fun. By this count, China is a strong table tennis nation and a weak football nation.

## PHILIP ROEBUCK

The executive director of the British Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai has been living in the city for two years.

**A1:** Probably the badminton, because of the controversy and also because it received such wide coverage on Chinese TV. Two matches captured my attention, with Andy Murray securing the tennis gold medal for Britain at Wimbledon against an opponent who had beaten him a month earlier at the same venue. Also, watching Lin Dan win the badminton gold medal for China in the men's singles. The match was so close and

could have gone either way.

The least interesting event has to be shooting! Once the competitor has pulled the trigger, the outcome cannot be influenced, they either hit the desired target area or they don't. I'm not doubting the skill, but as a spectator sport there is very little to admire apart from the result.

**A2:** My favorite Olympic athlete has to be Bradley Wiggins. To be the first British cyclist to win the Tour de France and then within the space of a couple of weeks to take Olympic gold, pure genius! Favourite Chinese athlete, Lin Dan, for keeping me on the edge of my seat until the final shot and then celebrating with true passion.

**A3:** I think in the UK, we are more interested in the story behind the success and not just the success. As a nation, we will usually support the underdog and this can be reflected in the coverage.

**A4:** I think the Chinese people are very proud of their athletes' success, particularly how it shows China's prominence on the world stage. In Britain, we are just pleased that our athletes do well and hopefully win gold.

**A5:** I think the British are much more sport oriented, which is reflected in the variety of sports in which people participate on a weekly basis. I think China's emphasis on sport changed when it was awarded the 2008 Olympics. However, I don't see the participation level increasing.

**A6:** The medals table can be seen as a reflection of a country's strength in a particular sport. However, overall, what is more important, who won or who competed? If 100 people take part in a race, what's more significant, who wins the race or how many people were attracted to the race? A country can encourage a whole nation to compete in the hope that one (person) will win, or, a country can focus on one (person) to win and let everyone share in the victory. Which scenario best demonstrates a country's strength in sport?

## RUPERT HOOGEWERF

Rupert Hoogewerf is a Briton living in Shanghai and the publisher of the *Hurun Report*, a monthly magazine best known for its "China Rich List". He is currently visiting London for the Olympics.

**A1:** I watched the first cycling race as it ran through the streets of London. The cyclists raced past, and it was all over in a flash but I was proud to have seen at least one race live. My favorite sport to watch is tennis. I am quite familiar with the names of a lot of the players. I also enjoy watch-

ing swimming, athletics and rowing. I switch off the television when weightlifting comes on.

**A2:** My favorite athlete is Ben Ainslie, the British sailor who has now won gold in four consecutive Olympics. My favorite Chinese athletes are the divers. I find it amazing that they are world champions and still manage to live up to expectations in this beautiful sport.

**A3:** For me, "Olympic fever" only started in the UK after the opening ceremony. So many friends found it fascinating to watch the mixture of the serious and the humorous. Since that moment, and coupled with the success of the British Team to date, it has been Olympic fever in full regalia.

I find the coverage in China broader than in England, in that there was more coverage of athletes that were not Chinese than in Britain, where the coverage is almost exclusively about British sportsmen and only a handful of athletes.

**A4+5:** For China, it was the first time to host the Olympics and the overall response and interest in it was unprecedented. It felt like a coming of age for the country, showing the world it had arrived. For Britain, the attitude was not as passionate in the buildup, but the success of Team GB has changed all that. Now everyone is trying to get tickets!

**A6:** To win an Olympic medal is an incredible achievement, not just for an individual but also for a country. For me, I feel proud when Britain does well, but I recognize this is a feel-good factor and the real business follows on afterwards.

## DOMINIC JOHNSON-HILL

Dominic is a long-term resident in China. He is the CEO of *Plastered T-Shirts*, the clothing brand he founded in 2006.

**A1:** I've seen a lot of rowing and the bike racing, at which we really excelled. Someone in the UK told me we are good at sports in which we sit down, such as cycling, rowing and sailing, which made me laugh. It seems the UK has gone cycling crazy and the velodrome events are so popular, something I never cared about before, but now really enjoy. The least (favorite) would be trampolining, something I find quite bizarre and almost comical, but just like the cycling, I guess if you have someone you love doing it you can get into it.

**A2:** Being British, I would have to pick Mo Farah who won the 10,000m gold on Saturday night. His determination was incredible and his story is one everyone

should celebrate: He came to the UK as a refugee from Somalia aged 8 to escape war, and now through determination and hard work is a gold medalist at the London Games, inspiring millions of people. My favorite Chinese athlete would be (the diver) Qiu Bo. I always enjoy watching him beat Britain's Tom Daley.

**A3:** Quite similar I think, however with China it was more about Beijing opening up to the world, showcasing itself to the world, welcoming people from all over the world on such a scale for the first time. The Chinese media really covered this side a lot. However, this is London's third Games and it has been an international city for a long, long time. Before the Games started, the UK media dug up a lot of negative stuff too, but that really disappeared after the Games started.

**A4:** It's hard for me to answer this as I'm from the UK, but my impression is that China saw the Olympics as its chance to show the world that China has stood up and is now an international player. They (the Chinese) were very proud of how far they had come and were keen for everyone to see, which is only natural. So I felt the Chinese people were quite concerned about the world seeing Beijing and China in a positive light. The Brits didn't seem so concerned about this. To be frank, most people in the UK were concerned with winning medals, and bronze, silver and gold were all great.

**A5:** It can be very, very different. In the UK, we all play sports no matter what our age or ability. The British attitude is more about taking part than winning, which is why at the weekend you see everyone going out to play soccer from age 3 to 50. Everyone plays in teams, across the country, creating a great grassroots feeling. Many of our Olympians are not from elite sporting schools. One of our Olympic rowing gold medalists was a teacher four years ago and decided she wanted to have a go at winning a gold medal. There's not a lot of grassroots participation in sports in China, apart from ping-pong (at which China is simply the best.)

**A6:** Historically, the world's powerhouses have topped the medals table through massive investment in Olympic-based sports. This does not necessarily reflect a country's strength in sport, as the Olympics can be quite political. New Zealand is a very sporty country and quite often wins the most medals per capita, as its population is very small, but they certainly don't get near the top of the table.

The interviewees spoke to Tang Yue and Cui Jia in Beijing and Zhou Qimian in Shanghai.