OLYMPIC CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

Olympic City: St. Louis
Country: United States of America
Edition of the Games:
1904 Olympic Summer Games

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

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<td>June 2004</td>
<td>Locals &amp; Visitors</td>
<td><a href="http://www.stlsports.org">www.stlsports.org</a></td>
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The St. Louis Olympic Centennial Celebration was a commemorative public event to mark the 100-year anniversary since the hosting of the 1904 Olympic Games in the City.

This one-off celebration was combined with a range of supporting sporting events throughout the month of June, each of which were strategically selected to increase the positioning of sport within the City and within the lives of its residents. The overall vision behind these proceedings was to promote the City externally as an attractive destination for sporting events while simultaneously increasing the perception of St. Louis as a sporting City internally within its own communities.

Organised by the non-profit St. Louis Sports Commission, the Centennial capitalised on the increased public attention around sport and the Olympics in the lead up to the 2004 Athens Games a few months later. This included the hosting of the United States Olympic trials for both diving and the women’s marathon as part of the celebrations. It also saw the City play a central role in the Athens 2004 global torch relay, being one of only three American cities to take part in what was the first ever international staging of this ceremonious procession.

As well as focusing on the 1904 Games, the organisers used the programme to shine a light on the broader Olympic history of the City and the role it had played in the development of the Olympic movement in the United States. This saw many of the City’s own Olympic athletes, both past and present, invited along to the various events.

The Centennial Celebration was very well received by local citizens and helped to put St. Louis on the map as an event host. Approximately 10,000 members of the public turned out to the official Centennial Celebration while a large number of the local athletes, politicians and businesses that were first engaged by the programme remain heavily involved in sport in the City today.
OBJECTIVES

Celebrate Olympism and its values

With so much time having passed since hosting the Olympics, there was a degree of disconnection between the City, its residents and the 1904 Games. The Centennial Celebration was seen as a wonderful opportunity to re-establish this missing connection with the City's Olympic heritage and to spread the Olympic Values among citizens. To achieve this, Olympism and its associated values were placed at the centre of the strategic communications plan. This plan placed a heavy focus on inspirational stories from St. Louis's Olympic past as well as personal testimonials connected to Olympism from famous local Olympians past and present.

Promote the City by leveraging its affiliation with the Olympic Movement

The Centennial Celebration was used as a promotional platform to highlight the City of St. Louis as a great place to host elite sporting competition. The organisation of several Olympic-related competitions showcased an ability to successfully organise and deliver large-scale events to a national and international audience. By leveraging the emotional power of the Olympic connection, organisers also helped generate a feeling of goodwill and support amongst the local population for sport and the hosting of sporting events in the future.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Internal & External Stakeholders

- St. Louis Sport Commission
- City of St. Louis
- Surrounding Municipalities
- Spirit of St. Louis Marathon (now called Go! St. Louis)
- Washington University
- Local sports clubs
- United States Olympic Committee
- Local private partners

Finance and Cost

The total cost for the programme was approximately US$1,100,000.

This figure included approximately US$ 1,000,000 for the Olympic trial events and approximately US$ 100,000 for other satellite events related to the celebration.
Use of the Olympic Brand

The Olympic Rings were featured heavily during the Centennial Celebration. This was specifically the case around those events that were linked to the upcoming Athens Games, namely the qualifying trials and the Olympic Torch relay.

Human Resources and Time

There was a team of 6 full-time staff members involved in the planning and delivery from 18 months prior to the event. The team grew to a total of 20 as the event drew closer and the operational and logistical plans began to take shape.

EVALUATION

The success of the programme was evaluated through combined quantitative and qualitative measures. Harder measurements around the number of events hosted during and after the event were combined with softer studies into shifts in attitude amongst both local citizens and wider audiences regarding St. Louis and its connection with sport.

KEY CHALLENGES

Connecting past and present

The 1904 St. Louis Games were only the third edition of the modern Olympics, predating even the introduction of the famous 5 Olympic Rings. There were no witnesses still alive to provide first-hand accounts of the Games and there was very little footage or material relating to the Games on record. Furthermore, the first half of the twentieth century saw U.S. cities like St. Louis totally transform such that only a handful of the original infrastructural elements from the 1904 Games remain. This created a difficulty in connecting local residents to what was being celebrated.

The organisers combatted this by blending the commemoration of the 1904 Games with a broader celebration of the City's overall Olympic heritage and its wider contribution to the Olympic movement even after the St. Louis Games and across the subsequent 100 years.

Measuring soft legacy

Two key aims of the organisers were to improve the external perception of St. Louis as a destination for top class events and enhance the internal civic attitude towards the position of sport. The intangible nature of both of these outcomes meant that measurement was not an easy task.

To help capture these softer intangible outcomes, the St. Louis Sports Commission worked closely with local educational and research bodies on a series of local observational studies. These studies measured movements in the responsiveness of local community to sporting events, alongside their knowledge and appreciation.
of the City's Olympic past as well as changes in the broader perception of St. Louis as a sporting destination.

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tell a compelling story

Even though none of today's living residents had experienced the St. Louis Games, the organisers found that the use of stories was one of the key communication devices behind the success of the Centennial. Focusing on sharing interesting and inspirational stories in the media helped to create a buzz amongst citizens and to establish a real connection between the local communities and the City's Olympic heritage. It was discovered that people were particularly drawn to the stories behind the remaining sites and venues left in the City that hosted Olympic events, as well as hearing directly from famous local Olympians as they shared their own emotional personal success stories.

Balance history and innovation

The core focus of the Centennial Celebration was of course the commemoration of the 1904 Games and the respectful treatment of the historical elements being presented. However, it was also recognised early on that to remain engaging and interesting, a degree of innovation needed to be introduced for it to be a success. This saw organisers integrate new technology and creative presentations into the historical exhibitions on offer. Musical performances by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra were combined with fireworks displays, while virtual lookbacks at the St. Louis in 1904 captivated locals who had never before seen their City in this way.

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http://www.stlsports.org
Additional resources can be found through the following links:
http://library.la84.org/SportsLibrary/JOH/JOHv12n2/johv12n2i.pdf
http://library.la84.org/SportsLibrary/JOH/JOHv12n3/johv12n3ae.pdf