

The Legacy of Montréal 2006: The economic, social and political impacts of the 1st World Outgames

Mark Tewksbury

Co-President of the Organizing Committee of the 1st World Outgames

An address to the Metropolitan Montreal Board of Trade
Thursday, 23 March 2006.

This address was made in both French and English, but is transcribed here in English only.

Bonjour tout le monde. Good morning everyone.

It is with great pleasure that I join you here this morning. I would like to warmly thank the Metropolitan Montreal Board of Trade for this invitation, most particularly the Board's president, Mme. Isabelle Hudon, as well as members of the business community who have joined us this morning in order to gain a better understanding of the 1st World Outgames, being held in Montreal from 26 July to 6 August, 2006.

This morning, our Chief Executive Officer Louise Roy is here with us, as well as several members of the Outgames team. I would like to also acknowledge my Co-President, Ms. Marielle Dupéré, as well as those members of the Organizing Committee who are present. Lastly, please allow me to recognise the Mayor of the Ville-Marie Arrondissement, Mr. Benoit Labonté. Mr. Labonté is not only a friend of the Outgames, he is a supporter 'sans pareil' of our organization, and for that we wish to thank him.

Finally, I would also like to draw notice to the presence of candidates in the upcoming by-election in Ste-Marie-St-Jacques, Ms. Nathalie Malépart and Mr. Martin Lemay.

I first became involved with this project a little over five years ago. At that time Tourism Montreal had identified the LGBT community as an important niche tourism market and I had been part of a video that promoted this magnificent city to that community. The long-term goal of that strategy was to bring a large international LGBT event to Montreal, solidifying the city as a popular destination for this global niche market that loved to travel and had the disposable income to do it regularly. I know that Charles Lapointe is here today, and I would also like to salute him for his vision that has come to life through the hosting of these Games. For us Charles is the Godfather of our games...

I had been living in Toronto, but became a Montrealer shortly after we won the right to host Games, wanting to be a part of this from the ground up. Now, some of you might remember that we were originally awarded the Gay Games. We are still asked, what happened? And we have gone from answering, why games, now to why two games? This morning I will address these issues, but will do so not by going back to what happened but by looking forward and sharing

the goals and results of our project to date. Because it is in the delivery where the real differences become illuminated.

Sport has the power to transcend culture, nationality, religion — in essence, “difference”. It levels the playing field; not just in sport, in life. It brings people together in a way unlike any other activity, breaking down barriers and building bridges.

The 1st World Outgames will do just that, bringing together lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) athletes from around the world in unprecedented numbers for a celebration of sport, culture and human rights. In the spirit of true inclusiveness, the Outgames are open to all, regardless of sexual orientation; all are welcome to participate. There is no gay test at the door. Everyone can compete. In fact, we encourage everyone to play sport together; our only requirement is that you come with an open mind.

The goals of the 1st World Outgames are many-fold: at its most basic level, we are an event, and we want this event to serve as a joyous sport and cultural celebration for the larger community in great venues where participants can reach their goals. But within this mission are several other goals:

1. We have been preoccupied with creating a successful business model that creates an economic gain for the city and for the LGBT sport movement;
2. We want to leverage the power of sport to make change at a political and societal level, and;
3. We want our event to leave a positive legacy both locally within the Montreal community, but also globally, ensuring that Montreal is seen as the birthplace of a sustainable LGBT sport movement.

With 35 sports, 6 cultural activities, Opening Ceremonies at the Olympic Stadium presented by Cirque du Soleil, over 12,000 registrations to date, from 109 countries – including China, India, Pakistan, and Cameroon - we are certainly shaping up to be one of the largest participatory events in the world.

A human rights conference will begin on July 26th, opened by the United Nations high commissioner on Human Rights, Ms. Louise Arbour. Two thousand people will be at the Palais du Congrès for sessions on 5 major themes, lead by an unprecedented calibre of presenters, including Supreme Court Justices from South Africa, Argentina and Australia. Superstar tennis legend Martina Navratilova will close the conference on July 29th. From the conference will come the MONTREAL DECLARATION, a statement for equal rights for LGBT people around the world, keeping in mind that in many countries one can still be persecuted or even killed for being gay. A few hours after the close of the conference Martina will read the Declaration at the Opening Ceremony of the Outgames. 8 days of sport and culture in 5 main hubs of venues, including Parc

Jean Drapeau, Centre Claude- Robillard and the Olympic stadium, will follow. The 1st World Outgames will close on August 5th.

The event itself is coming together great. But what about the other objectives?

From the perspective of a business model, that of Montreal is unique from a number of aspects. Having observed similar LGBT events of the past, we noted that there was huge development potential. At the same time, we observed that certain methods and practices needed to change in order to realize this potential. The existing model was based on delivery by community-based organization comprised of volunteers. Such a historic model simply did not function well in the present day. So we set about to change it.

This proved to be one of the main points of divergence that resulted in our split from the Federation of Gay Games. The last four Games were all failures from a financial perspective, despite great participation success. Local organizations lacked solid financial partners, the events were delivered in isolation of the cities that had welcomed them, and they left financial deficits when the Games were over.

So we took what was historically a community and volunteer-based model of delivering an event and brought a new level of professionalism to it, aiming for the level of an international sport event. This was possible due to the power of our partnerships, which has essentially gone through three phases.

First, from the very beginning of the process of bidding for Games, Montreal 2006 developed strong partnerships with government, tourism and the local LGBT sport community. These relationships gave us an important foundation, and the initial support of public and tourism funds created a twofold benefit: We were able to hire professional staff to deliver the project at a new level, and we were able to create relationships with financial partners who continue to this day to follow us through the delivery of the project.

The professionalism of our marketing and communications department allowed the second phase of partnerships with the corporate community to happen. Never before have LGBT sport games had such mainstream sponsors, including Bell Canada, Labatt Blue, CGI, Radio-Canada, Air Canada, VIA Rail, GlaxoSmithKline, Speedo, among others. These sponsorships constitute 22 % of our budget.

The third phase of partnerships has involved relationships with suppliers and in-kind sponsors. The 1st World Outgames is running a global marketing and communications plan valued at nearly \$10 million. Media partners have enabled us to spread the Outgames message to over 4 million people in over 80 countries each month, our website hits are numbering 300,000 and plus each month, our newsletter is reaching over 75,000 people worldwide. Outgames travel partners

are offering Montréal as a destination and recent suppliers like Speedo and Mikasa are now on board with the Outgames.

So what does this all mean? For Montreal in terms of economic return: over 170 million dollars.

For the LGBT sport community, and beyond, a new business model is getting people's attention. Our budget of 33 percent public funds, 29 percent earned revenue from registrations, 22 percent corporate sponsorship and 15 percent other earned revenues has translated into a successful model, particularly the level of professionalism that has come from the strength of the initial partnerships.

For other goals, let me give you some brief examples of what is happening from a social and political perspective. Keep in mind that as progressive as some of the western liberal democracies have been in terms of legislation, sport remains one of the last closets in our society. We saw that done right, sport can break down some of those barriers. And that is exactly what is happening with the 1st World Outgames.

1. The support of the government and business communities has also translated into important partnerships with the Quebec and Canadian sport federations who have sanctioned 31 of our sporting events. Our rowing regatta, for example, is featured in the international calendar of FISA, the international governing body for the sport of rowing. Our figure skating events, for the first time ever, are sanctioned by Skate Canada, the national governing body. Our events are supported by mainstream sport bodies and will be delivered to the highest technical standards.
2. Given the enormous support for equality for the LGBT community here within Montreal, Quebec and Canada, the combination of sport with a human rights conference is unique and turning out to be hugely important. By bringing people here we get to show the world how an open, inclusive society works, and collectively inspire others to keep working for that elsewhere in the world. The UN recently denied the largest LGBT human rights groups – ILGA World, observer status at the UN. With the Montréal Declaration we will be able to utilize other mechanisms at world institutions for the advancement of our rights.
3. We have been able to bring together sport leaders from around the world to create the Gay and Lesbian International Sport Association (GLISA), for the sustainability of the LGBT sport movement. Like the Montreal Outgames, GLISA is modeled after the idea of raising the standard of professionalism day in and day out in the movement. GLISA now has 85 member organizations worldwide, and will be applying for IOC status this year. GLISA is involved with initiatives combating homophobia in sport with the Canadian Olympic Committee and other leaders in the sport system. GLISA has become a voice at the mainstream sport table for LGBT people.

All these elements will leave a great legacy, not only for the Montreal community, but for the global gay and lesbian sporting community.

For the LGBT sport movement, the Outgames will leave a legacy of a winning model to enable the delivery of an enormous international gathering. For the next World Outgames, which will take place in Copenhagen in 2009, our Organizing Committee has already begun a plan of transferring technology and information to assist that host and to grow the LGBT sport movement in the years to come. Lastly, GLISA launches in 2007 continental Outgames in North America, in the city of Calgary, and further continental events in Asia Pacific beginning in 2008, and will work in close collaboration with the annual Eurogames in Europe.

For Montreal, the Outgames will leave a legacy of economic impacts exceeding 170 million dollars, while also positioning the city as an international destination of choice. Montrealers will enjoy, I am certain, being part of the celebration and will embrace this event, which will attract to this city the largest number of participants and visitors since the 1976 Olympic Games. But the Outgames are, at the end of the day, more than just numbers. They provide a unique opportunity for Montreal, Quebec and Canada to position themselves globally as a place where human rights are advanced, with the support and massive participation of the entire community. The Outgames will mark our city as a model of tolerance and inclusion, because to respect of the rights of gays and lesbians is to respect the rights of all persons – the right to be different.

Thank you, merci.