



Going For Green

How can we help our favourite sports become more sustainable? **Alison Clayton-Smith** investigates and finds many sporting event organisers are aiming for more than just gold.

The more sporting events, and events in general, toe the green line, the more that increases pressure on others to perform at a minimum level', says Meegan Jones, author of *Sustainable Event Management: A Practical Guide*. Meegan has worked on sustainability issues for events such as the Glastonbury music festival and the London Marathon. So, what are organisers doing? And how can participants and attendees make their environmental contribution?

The international scene

Sporting events can be local, national or international but it's the large-scale, international events that seem to attract the most attention in relation to environmental concerns. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) started its work on Sports and the Environment in 1994 with the Olympics and is not only still involved with the Olympics but also with organisations such as The International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA). Its aims include promoting environmental considerations in sports. Meegan suggests that such initiatives can be looked at under three main areas: infrastructure (e.g. buildings); overlay/operations on the day (e.g. transport); and legacy (impact long-term). Clearly, large-scale international events, particularly those that are one-off, pose challenges in all three.

Summer 2010 will be dominated by the FIFA World Cup in South Africa. Through FIFA's Green Goal programme, stadiums in South Africa have incorporated elements like rain water capture and energy efficiency into their infrastructure. But Meegan points out that the biggest potential area for negative environmental impact is the transportation and care of spectators. According to a feasibility

study by UNEP, international travel to South Africa is set to account for more than 65% of the carbon footprint of the World Cup, a footprint which is estimated to be more than 8 times that of Germany 2006. Durban and the City of Cape Town have led the way in terms of carbon offsetting initiatives. However, the South African government only focused on planning for carbon offsetting in November 2009 and there are now concerns about whether the goal of being carbon neutral is achievable.

Of course, in the UK, the big forthcoming event is the London 2012 Olympics. Organisers are aiming to comply with the British Standard for Sustainable Events Management (BS8901). Their sustainability plan includes consideration of the event's long-term environmental impact and one of its aims is to add to local habitats. In January 2010, Olympic Delivery Authority Chief Executive, David Higgins, said 'We are cleaning up industrial land and creating the green backdrop for the London 2012 Games that in legacy will become the UK's largest new urban park in over a century'.

Local level initiatives: Football and triathlon

Not all sporting events are complex international occasions but that doesn't mean their organisers can sit on the sidelines. Two examples of environmental initiatives going on at a local level are in Football and Triathlon.

Recently, The Environment Agency and The Football League Trust announced a partnership to improve environmental performance and promote green issues. The Trust oversees Community and Youth Development for 72 Championship, League One and League Two clubs and provides funding for their community programmes. That funding will now partially depend on a club's environmental

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performance. Initiatives include: low energy floodlights (MK Dons); rainwater harvesting for pitch irrigation (Exeter City); and Plymouth Argyle held the world's first carbon-neutral football match.

Triathlon is one of the UK's fastest growing mass participation sports. In 2008, Crystal Palace Triathletes (CPT) organised the first carbon neutral triathlon in the UK, as a result of concerns raised by its 2007 competitors. CPT's report on the event points out that: 'Everyone wants to swim in clean water, to cycle and run in places where the air is fresh.' In other words, if you want to participate in the sport, you need to take care of the environment that sport takes place in.

For its 2008 event, CPT estimated that nearly 12,000 miles were travelled by competitors, race volunteers and suppliers and 95% of the race carbon footprint came from transport. Aside from participating in carbon offsetting initiatives, which included donating money to a local wood conservation scheme, they've also actively promoted car sharing and the use of public transport.

What can organisers do?

Some sporting bodies are drawing up guidelines for their area. At British Triathlon, Events Organiser, Natasha Cuthbert says 'Environmental responsibility is a key consideration for us in the British Triathlon Event Accreditation process. There are many simple ways that Event Organisers can reduce the environmental impact of their events at all levels from the club fund raiser to the British or National Championships. For example:

1. Do as much of the administration for the event as possible online, from registration through to the publication of results.
2. Use recycled or recyclable materials wherever possible (race bag, awards, event signage, etc).
3. Encourage all involved to be environmentally aware as well, e.g. make it easy for them to recycle everything they bring, encourage car sharing.
4. Leave the area used by the event exactly as you found it.
5. Tell people what you are doing to help the environment - it could help with your relationships with key stakeholders, such as the local authority or sponsors.'

Meegan Jones highlights recycling and composting as an easy win. But, she says, don't forget to make sure items are actually recycled and composted. Sounds obvious but sometimes people don't follow through. One of the most useful

initiatives she's seen has been offering a deposit refund system on cans and bottles. 'Immediately that gives you an almost 100% recycling rate.'

Better than recycling for food-related items, Meegan says, is composting. Ensure that food traders use compostable bags and trays and get them to include their preparation scraps in the compost bins, so there's not too much dry material. To ensure other non-compostable items don't get put in the bins have volunteers standing by to check that nothing unsuitable goes in.

Encouraging ideas like composting can be a great way to develop community engagement. A sports club may not have much use for compost but the local allotment holders might. They can act as volunteers on the day, checking the bins and then ultimately taking away the compost when it's ready.

What about participants and spectators?

If you attend or participate in sporting events, you can play your part too. Jon Alexander completed the world's first eco Ironman-distance triathlon last year, travelling by train to the race in Barcelona and sourcing eco-friendly kit. And don't forget to ask the organisers what they're doing. The Crystal Palace Triathlon went carbon neutral because competitors asked the question.

So, do sporting events get the winner or runner up medal? Meegan says that a few years ago you didn't really see anything on music festival websites about green initiatives but this has changed. Sporting events need to catch up. Given the passion that sport arouses, there are significant opportunities to take positive steps and raise awareness of environmental concerns. 

Useful contacts:

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UNEP Sport and the Environment
www.unep.org

London 2012 and Sustainability
 Tel: 020 3201 2000
www.london2012.com

FIFA Green Goal Programme
www.fifa.com

Environment Agency and the Football League Trust
 Tel: 08708 506 506
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Crystal Palace Triathlon
www.crystalpalace-tri.co.uk