

The Beckett Olympic News Parabola

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Even the logo fits the parabola - we hated it - now we love it (?)

I have a theory based on longitudinal in-depth empirical research (I can show you the envelope) and some twitter exchanges with @Benfenton that has created a universally applicable model for news coverage of Olympic Games.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you the The Beckett Olympic News Parabola: U

No trendy graphic visualisations are needed. For the home nation the curve starts at the top of the U-shaped news parabola when the announcement is made that you have 'won' the Games. This is a weird word to use when you consider how much expense and trouble 'winning' the Games creates and how little useful legacy is ever left. But boy, does it feel good to have beaten the French (and the rest of the world) to this prize!

In the British case, this joy was cut tragically short by the appalling events of July 7th in London. But even if that ghastly act of terrorism had not happened, there would have been a pretty rapid downward trend as the costs mount, small shops and businesses are relocated, duck ponds are filled in and small furry creatures removed from their natural habitats.

Early expectations are rapidly dashed. Stories follow about ticket distribution and prices, corrupt contracts, hotel over-charging and general commercialisation of the noble Ancient Greek ideals. In the final straight you will get security scares and, in less well-organised countries, a race to complete stadia. Our version of this is traffic congestion. This is the bottom of the curve.

But once the Games actually start – indeed, I would guess one week before – all scepticism is brushed aside. The news parabola curves steeply upwards. The function of the Opening Ceremony is to facilitate this. However crap they are, they send a signal to the media and the world in general that normal news judgement is now suspended, swamped by a ritual of global resonance.

This upturn is mainly because all the hacks now get excited. They have their plastic photo passes and goodie bags and can start to access the venues. They have a massive financial and professional investment in making this as compelling as possible. And with thousands of journalists in town all doing that, it has a positive effect. A bit like a Moonie wedding. Once the actual sport starts then the natural drama of the Olympics (higher, faster, longer etc) takes over and my curve continues to rocket upwards.

I assert that this model applies to all Olympics. I recall talking with Chinese officials before Beijing and it worked for them, though their down-curve included novel factors such as human rights abuses.

Of course, the curve will be shaped differently for 'foreign' news media covering someone else's Games. Generally, it lacks the early elation. But otherwise it's the same pattern. Lots of stories about the crap weather in London and how bad our food is, before general excitement about the events and how well the plucky [fill in your home nation here] does.

So, that's the Beckett Olympic News Parabola. All I need now is an illicit rings graphic to illustrate it.

Update: delighted to see that the [Daily Mail's Suzanne Moore agrees with me](#) – see below

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McDonald's chips, missiles...The problems will vanish when you watch the Games with an excited 11-year-old

By SUZANNE MOORE

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Wow, so the Olympics are quite soon! I only just realised. Rather like the organisers.

Actually, I am no sports expert but are we doing a 'reverse Andy Murray'? While we pretended he could win, we preferred it that he lost and cried.

So the Olympic narrative is now non-stop salivation over the ways we can cock it up.

Scroll down for video



Even for naysayers the Olympics will only come along once in a lifetime