

1,441 DAYS TO GO FOR ATLANTA ORGANIZING COMMITTEE TAKING NOTES IN BARCELONA

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BARCELONA – For the past three weeks, the president of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games has been holed up on the fifth floor of the Hotel Princesa Sofia on the posh Avinguda Diagonal.

He has lived the good life in a part of the city where life is the best.

Recorded jazz plays in the Maria Cristina subway station, the modern high-rise apartments are markedly farther apart than in older sections of the city, and the buffet breakfast of pastries and *café con leche* – coffee with milk – in the hotel restaurant is \$28 a head.

William Porter "Billy" Payne admits the picture he's getting of these Games from back-to-back cocktail parties and receptions thrown by Their Majesties Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia isn't the one seen by the ordinary Olympic tourist who forked over a bazillion pesetas for an un-air-conditioned hotel room and four tickets to the table tennis semifinals.

The big-picture man

But he's the big-picture man for the Atlanta committee, called ACOG for short. It's his job "to kind of thematically create what we want to leave behind" from Atlanta's Games, which open in the yet-to-be-built 85,000-seat Olympic Stadium on July 20, 1996, only 1,441 days away.

There are 110 members of ACOG's 170-member staff in Barcelona sweating with the common folk, timing news conferences with stop watches, counting the towels used in the volleyball locker rooms and cataloging the sheets of paper each computer printer spits out in the main press center.

Thousands of pounds of documents provided by COOB, Barcelona's organizing committee, are being readied for air shipment to Atlanta, where it will take two months

to complete translation from Spanish and Catalan before a final report is ready for ACOG planners.

Atlanta won its bid for the centennial Olympic Games in September 1990, two years after the closing of the Seoul Games, so this is "the first and only opportunity we'll ever get to study an Olympics in action," Payne said.

For every Olympic site in Barcelona, from the airport to the Estadi Olimpic atop Montjuic to the Vila Olimpica where the athletes live, at least four ACOG observers are shadowing their counterparts from COOB in the areas of sports, transportation, operations, security and technology.

Collecting facts

They fill out detailed questionnaires that avoid, as far as possible, opinions on how things are going and instead, "count, observe and deal with facts," according to Payne. "I'm not seeking what's wrong," said Bob Neal, ACOG's director of information services, who is studying the four computer systems in Barcelona used for credentialing, communications, competition results and broadcast commentator support.

"My opening question is, 'What were your expectations of your technology?' My second question is, 'Did the technology meet your expectations?' "

Neal intends a more modern computer system for Atlanta that will "cut down by a large percentage" the 5,000 volunteers in Barcelona assigned to technology. Olympic officials and media in Atlanta will have access to laptop terminals for communications. Roving volunteers with wireless laptops will be able to assist spectators with ticketing and transportation questions.

Eventually all the information gathered by ACOG will be compiled in a 140-page report on exactly how Atlanta's Games should be managed.

As objective and deliberate as ACOG planners are trying to be, however, some things have already been decided about how Atlanta's Games will be different.

Empty seats are visible in the Barcelona television coverage of many events that were listed as sold out. Disappointed fans have stood outside venue gates, unable to get in even though seats inside remained vacant.

Often those seats were sold to corporate sponsors to be given away to clients, reserved for athletes awaiting competition, or were in the press section.

Eight million tickets will go on sale for Atlanta's Games in 1995, and A.D. Frazier Jr., ACOG's chief operating officer, said a way will be found to solve the empty-seat problem.

"If people show up outside stadia and there are empty seats inside, we will accommodate them," he said.

Weather is similar

Barcelona's humid heat, which has wilted many spectators, is similar to Atlanta's weather in July and August. Unlike in Barcelona, air conditioning is common in Atlanta, but outdoor venues probably will include canopies over spectator stands.

In many ways, Atlanta is already ahead of where Barcelona is today in Games preparation.

Over the past 10 years, the Barcelona city government has spent an estimated \$6 billion to \$8 billion on a new freeway around the city, the Cinturo Litoral; the demolition of a warehouse and industrial districts to construct the athletes' village; a new airport terminal; thousands of new hotel rooms; and an updated communications system.

"While that number is staggering, it's a number that is irrelevant for Atlanta. Atlanta got the Games because it already has that infrastructure," Frazier said.

Atlanta's airport handles three times Barcelona's passengers. And Atlanta has four times the freeway mileage and three times the hotel rooms.

Yet money remains Atlanta's largest problem.

Television rights

ACOG expects to spend \$1.38 billion over the next four years, including more than \$512 million on new construction. To net its forecast \$132 million surplus, officials hope to sell television rights worldwide for a total of \$549 million. The three major U.S. networks are already telling ACOG not to expect anything like the \$401 million NBC paid for the rights to the Barcelona Games, while ACOG's financial assumptions are based on a rights fee increase.

"I'm confident of our figures," Frazier said, though he conceded ACOG's numbers are "an aiming point, not a budget."

Closing ceremonies

Payne is less concerned with that than his city's role in tonight's closing ceremonies, in which an Atlanta dance troupe will perform a 6 1/2-minute segment and the Olympic flag will be handed over to Mayor Maynard Jackson for display in City Hall over the next four years.

"It's going to be one of the great moments of this entire undertaking," Payne said, "which, by the time I'm through with it, will have been 10 years. I'll be crying like a baby, I know."

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