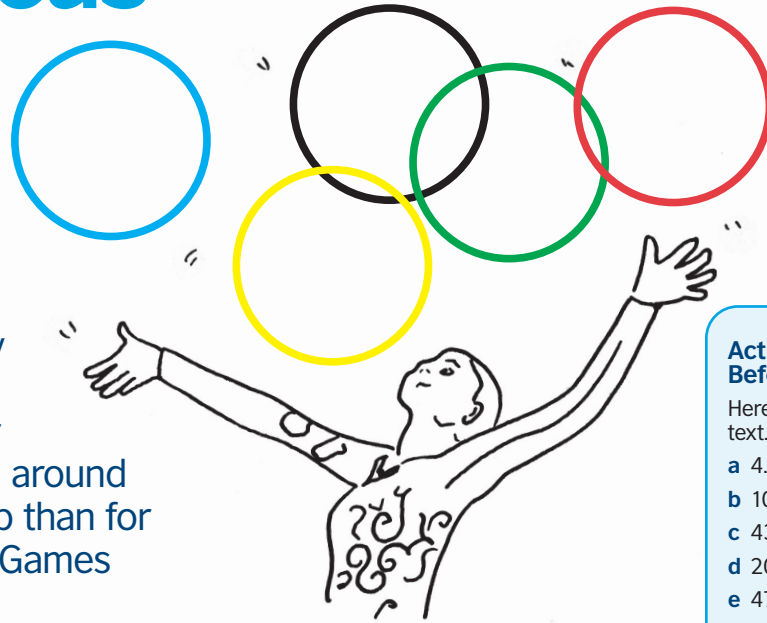


# The five-ring circus

by A. J. Dalton

The 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing set a lot of new records. In total, 4.4 billion television viewers watched the Games during its first ten days, the most in history by a long way. Also, in just one day in August, the entire Beijing subway system transported 4.1 million passengers, a higher number than ever before. More people from around the world participated through spectatorship than for any other Olympic Games. Truly, the Beijing Games were the most global ever seen.



The records did not stop at just the logistics either. Human sporting performances also set new standards. Who can forget Usain Bolt's electrifying world records in the 100 and 200 metres? Or the eight gold medals in swimming won by Michael Phelps; more golds won in a single Games than by any other individual athlete in history? A higher number of countries (87) managed to win a medal than in any other Games as well.

In fact, more records were set by the Beijing Games than any other Games before. A grand total of 43 world records and 132 Olympic records fell at Beijing: a record number of records! The bar has been set very high indeed. Will the UK, hosting the London 2012 Olympic Games, ever be able to match such an achievement? Well, the UK certainly made progress of its own in Beijing . . .

1 Any two countries watching the same Games will experience those Games differently. For the UK, the Beijing Games was a great success, since British athletes won a total of 47 medals, far more than the target of 35 that the country had set itself. The UK hoped to come eighth in the medal table and ended up coming fourth. There were many impressive performances by British athletes, most of whom became overnight celebrities. Chris Hoy won three golds in the cycling, the 13-year-old schoolgirl Eleanor Simmonds won the heart of the nation when she took a swimming gold in the Paralympic Games, and the list goes on. By contrast, however, Australia was less successful than usual. Traditionally, there has always been a friendly rivalry between the UK and Australia in sport. International news headlines were made when John Coates, the head of the Australian Olympic Committee, was asked what he thought of the British

swimmer Rebecca Adlington winning gold. He replied: 'It's not bad for a country that has no swimming pools and very little soap.'

2 Yet the UK's winning performance in Beijing does not necessarily mean the London 2012 Olympic Games will be a success. The credit crunch is already causing great problems for the organisers. The cost of building a new Olympic stadium in the UK is twice what was originally forecast. Some experts estimate that the entire Games will cost the UK a crippling £20 billion, ten times the original budget.

3 Many people in the UK say that people who live in London should pay a lot of the bills, since a high percentage of the money will be spent on improving London transport and venues. Why should someone in Scotland, for example, pay extra tax to improve the lives of Londoners? At the same time, Londoners are saying they should not have to pay for the Olympics, since any profits from the Games will be shared by the whole country. So, rather than bringing the country together, the London 2012 Olympic Games seems to be dividing the country. In its bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games, the UK promised that the Games would leave a lasting legacy. Let's just hope that legacy is a positive one.

4 Will London deliver a successful Games? Well, the early signs haven't been good. The part of the closing ceremony of the Beijing Games that was organised by the UK included a red bus, David Beckham, umbrellas, bowler hats and UK pop stars. It was a bit of a hotchpotch, to be honest. Yet there's still time for the UK to pull it all together. Everyone likes a challenge – just like in sports, eh?

### Activity 1: Before you read

Here are some numbers from the text. What do you think they refer to?

- a 4.4 billion
- b 100 and 200
- c 43
- d 2012
- e 47
- f 13-year-old
- g £20 billion

Now look at the text quickly to see if your answer were correct.

### Activity 2: Sporting idioms

The article says: 'The bar has been set very high indeed.' This idiom comes from the sporting event called the high jump. It means China set a high standard for a modern Olympic Games. What sports do you think the idioms below are taken from?

- a Entering the homestretch
- b Infighting
- c A game of two halves
- d Falling at the first hurdle

Now see if you can match the idioms to paragraphs 1–4.

### Activity 3: Comparatives and superlatives

Complete the following sentences that describe some of the records described in the article.

- 1 More people watched the Beijing Olympic Games \_\_\_\_\_ any other Games before.
- 2 The \_\_\_\_\_ number of passengers that the Beijing subway system has carried in a single day is 4.1 million.
- 3 Michael Phelps won \_\_\_\_\_ gold medals in a single Games than any other athlete.
- 4 Usain Bolt is the \_\_\_\_\_ man ever to run the 100 and 200 metres.

## Fun corner

A person from London is called a Londoner. But where in the UK do you think these people are from?

- 1 a Geordie
- 2 a Brummie
- 3 a Scouser
- 4 a Mancunian
- 5 a Cornish person
- 6 a Cockney
- 7 a Manx person

## Word of the day

A 'three-ring circus' is an idiomatic expression used to describe a situation that is confusing, sometimes amusing and usually full of action.



- Answers**
- a Horseshoeing, paragraph 4
  - b Boxing, paragraph 4
  - c Football, paragraph 1
  - d 110m hurdles, paragraph 1
- Activity 2**
- 1 than
  - 2 largest/highest
  - 3 more
  - 4 fastest/quickest
- Activity 3**
- 1 Newcastle
  - 2 Birmingham
  - 3 Liverpool
  - 4 Manchester
  - 5 Cornwall
  - 6 centre of London
  - 7 the Isle of Man