



Blame it on Rio

Sites focus on the positive as games come to troubled land

The buzz in the sports world next week will be all about the 2016 Summer Olympics, which open on Friday in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Unfortunately, much of the buzz to date has been generated by mosquitos instead of sports fans. The tiny, winged pests are responsible for transmitting the Zika virus in the latitudes that Brazil inhabits. The virus can cause devastating birth defects along with other less severe symptoms.

And if that wasn't enough to put a damper on the games, the host country is also experiencing a severe economic recession, its president is facing impeachment, some of the water sports venues are dangerously polluted and violence by drug gangs and the police have many on edge. The Russian track team has been banned from the games for doping and athletes from other countries are skipping the games because of Zika.

Of course you wouldn't know any of this if you got all of your information from **Olympic.org** or **Rio2016.com**, the games' official websites. Granted, these sites are marketing tools to promote the games and put them in a positive light, so I don't expect them to dwell on the negative. But they are so free of any reference to the problems these Olympics have faced that they appear to be operating in an alternate reality. Olympic.org does have a section on anti-doping policies, but it doesn't mention any countries or athletes that have run afoul of the rules.

Olympic history

Strip away the marketing and commercialism and the Olympics are about the ability of the human spirit to triumph over adversity. They're a contest to determine the best athletes in the world through pure competition.

Olympic.org focuses more on this aspect of the games, along with the people who make it happen. This includes administrators, volunteers and sponsors, as well as the athletes.

The site has lots of information on the upcoming Rio games. It is also an archive of information and images on past games, dating back to the Athens games in 1896. It also looks forward to future games, such as Pyeongchang 2018, Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022.

For past games you can look up results of all the contests, medal counts, information on participating countries, photos, videos, highlights and all sorts of other information. For future games you can keep track of the progress of the host city, learn about its culture and review the selection process.

The site has information on all of the sports in both the summer and winter Olympics. There's a brief history of the sport, reviews of past Olympic medalists, photo galleries and news releases. You can look up the results from any events of past games.

Other sections give information on athletes, past and present, and participating countries. There's tons of photos, videos and stories covering a wide variety of Olympic-themed topics. The site is cleanly designed with good typography, imagery and navigation.

Her name is Rio

While Olympic.org has extensive coverage on the Rio games, it's the site for all of the games, past and future. Rio2016.com focuses on this summer's games. As a result it's more useful for someone who wants to go to, or just follow the games.

A column of buttons down the left side of the screen gives you instant access to information on the torch relay, tickets, schedules, guides, sports, athletes, countries and Olympic news.

The schedule section clearly lays out the dates and times for all events in all of the sports. The Guides section has photos, maps and information on all of the venues. There's also downloadable spectator guides for all of the sports. They give a history and explanation of the sport, the schedule and venue information.

Rio2016 is more visually dynamic than Olympic.org, with bigger pictures and brighter colors. It's nicely designed, easy to navigate and useful for fans.

Like all human endeavors, the Olympics aren't perfect. They are oversold to cities that overspend to host them in the hopes of a magical economic transformation. Historically the city does not get a good return on its investment. What it does get is two weeks of magic as remarkable athletes put on amazing displays of what's possible when people push their abilities to the limit.

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