



AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF OMEGA'S CUTTING-EDGE OLYMPIC TIMING TECHNOLOGY

# LONDON CALLING

BY ROBERTA NAAS



**T**his summer's London 2012 Olympic Games represent several milestones for **Omega**: This year is twenty-fifth time the brand has served as the Official Timekeeper for the Games. In fact, Omega was in London in 1948 in the same capacity. Additionally this year also marks the 80th anniversary of the first time Omega served as Official Timekeeper of the Olympics—having started in Los Angeles in 1932.

London this year is hosting the Olympic Games for the third time—the only city to host the games more than twice. And this year Omega unveils several critical new innovations, including new start pads for track and swimming that were several years in the development.



*“THE BRAND BRINGS 450 ON-SITE PROFESSIONALS AND 800 TRAINED VOLUNTEERS TO TIME THE GAMES”*



The cutting-edge timekeeping and data handling technology that Omega employs to record, display and archive all the results of every event in the Olympic Games and of each and every competing athlete is - to say the least - mind boggling. On the track, every event is timed to 1/10,000th of a second, and the brand takes 2,000 pictures per second from right before the start of a race to its finish, as backup. Because the Olympic Games are shown live around the world, Omega has just three seconds to collect all the data, determine the results and post it on the scoreboards and in the press rooms - all without a shadow of a doubt as to the winner.

“Timing the Olympic Games is not just about timing,” says Stephen Urquhart, President of Omega. “It is a technology and complete systems that are constantly being improved thanks to input from the athletes. We value the input and feedback from them, without it we

could not be 100 percent fool proof. The association we have brings forth the development of some of the most significant innovations in timekeeping and data handling technology—timekeeping that has changed the way we view fractions of seconds and finishes.”

Years to prepare

The data handling and timing equipment takes years to establish and implement. The brand brings 450 on-site professionals (supported by another 800 trained volunteer assistants), 420 tons of equipment (including 70 public scoreboards and 320 sport-specific scoreboards), and miles of cables and optical fiber.

#### THE OLYMPIC PARK

**THE CREATION OF THE** stadium, the various basketball, handball and other courts, the Velodrome, as well as the addition of the Aquatic building (in the shape of a stingray) took the city of London seven years to accomplish. Two years were spent in the planning phases, and the remaining years to build everything. The Stadium sits on a 40-acre island surrounded by the restored BowBack Rivers, with five new bridges connecting the island to the rest of the Park.

While some of the buildings will remain after the Olympic Games, others will be dismantled -- some permanently, others to go on tours around the world to host other events. The Aquatic building was created so that the wings of the stingray could be taken down to scale the venue smaller and keep it for additional events. Similarly, the stadium was created in tiers to accommodate 80,000 visitors during the Olympics, but its legacy capacity that it will be reduced to after the games is 25,000 visitors.

“Working in an Olympic environment is exciting,” says Peter Hürzeler, Omega’s foremost master of timing technology. “We work closely with the athletes from Olympic Game to Olympic Game to determine better, more efficient ways to time starts, finishes and intermediate points. In many instances athletes can have the same finish time and it is just a difference of 1/1000th of a second.”



## NEW TECHNOLOGY

**WITH EVERY OLYMPIC GAME**, Omega develops additional technology. This year, technological premieres include a new Open Water Gate and Quantum Timer for swimming and cycling, and new launch pads for track.

According to Hurzeler, one of the most challenging sports to time is swimming marathons. Omegas new Open Water Gate is set up this year not only at the beginning and end of the race, but also in intermediate positions so new timing information can be available. The gate at the finish line has touch pads with vertical transponders antennas, while those in the intermediate positions have horizontal transponder antennas to pick up the signals “on the fly” from the transponders the swimmers wear on their wrists. High-def cameras mounted on poles at the finish line serve as a reliable backup system and for too-close-in-time finishes to be properly ranked.

Additionally, the new Quantum Aquatics Timer and Quantum Timer - which mark resolutions to one millionth of a second -- mark the beginning of a new generation of Omega Timing products. The resolution is 100 times greater than with previous devices. The precision is achieved through the use of a component created by Micro Crystal (a Swatch Group company) that is embedded in the timer. It enables sixteen independent clocks to time sixteen separate running times - and the Quantum Aquatics timing is the same technology as the Quantum Timer that is redefining cycling timing at the Velodrome track this year.

“It is generally 1948 that is considered the birth of the modern timekeeping era, thanks to technology developed during World War II, but we keep pushing the envelope in creativity and technology. Timekeeping is really a creation of confidence. Athletes have to know that we listen to their needs and we react - always with an eye to providing the perfect, unquestionable timing.”



## ATHLETES INPUT

**IN FACT, IT WAS THANKS TO** athletes' input that the brand created the all-new track starting blocks - which took seven years to perfect. Omega said runners didn't like the pressure they had to put on the previous starter blocks. The new blocks require much less “push back” and measure the time and the power the runner has on the block when taking off. They also measure to such precise time that it is significantly easier to determine a false start: leaving 1/1,000th of a second too early is a false start. This system has been in use for the past two years as a backup, or shadow, to the regular system while being thoroughly tested before taking center stage at the Olympic Games.

For the 2016 Olympics to be held in Rio, Omega has two new athletic events to plan the timing for: Golf and Rugby, which officially join the Summer Olympic Games -- promising, if possible, even more enlightening and exciting moments.

“We value our relationship with the International Olympic Committee, and we are truly pleased to be at the service of the hundreds of talented athletes who make the Olympic Games so incredible. The new events just give us another challenge to conquer,” says Urquhart. ●



# THE OMEGA OLYMPIC WATCHES

To commemorate the Summer Olympic Games, which begin July 27, Omega has added three London 2012 Limited Edition timepieces to its Olympic Timeless Collection. Two models are new Seamaster Aqua Terra 44mm Chronographs. One features a bicolor case crafted in 18-karat rose gold and stainless steel with a stunning integrated dark blue leather strap. The second version is created in stainless steel with a steel bracelet.

Additionally there is an Omega Seamaster 1948 Co-Axial London 2012 Limited Edition watch, which is a redesign of Omega's first automatic Seamaster from 1948, the same year of the last London Olympics, which Omega also timed. All three of the Olympic watches are stamped with the “London 2012” Olympic emblem on the case back.

## THE OMEGA HOUSE

Omega unveiled plans for an exclusive club that will be open on a membership and by-invitation basis during the Olympic Games. The doors will open on the 28th of July and Omega will host events and provide visitors with an oasis of calm in the heart of London's historic Soho district through the 12th of August. Omega's significant design changes during the Olympics will transform the various rooms and outdoor garden into themes reminiscent of each of its watch collections. There will be a Ladymatic room with swirls and stars in the silvery white neutral palette with chandeliers and floral wallpaper in the schematic, a Speedmaster Lounge that evokes a space-theme and features moon effects, and a host of other intriguing rooms.

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