



SPORT



Athens Olympic site in ruins 10 years on from 2004 Games

NICHOLAS PAPHITIS AND THEODORA TONGAS AP NEWS.COM.AU AUGUST 14, 2014 1:10PM

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Cost of the Olympics - 10 years on from Athens



Cost of the Olympics - 10 years on from ...



The Beach Volleyball Olympic Stadium at ...

IN AN obscure corner of a park sits a forlorn reminder that, 10 years ago, Athens hosted the 2004 Summer Olympics.

The crumbling miniature theatre is inscribed with the words "glory, wealth, wisdom, victory, triumph, hero, labour" — and it is where visiting Olympic officials planted an olive sapling that would bear their names for posterity.

Once a symbol of pomp, the marble theatre is now an emblem of pointless waste in a venture that



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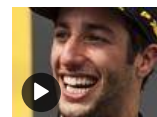
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Why Ricciardo is getting filthy rich

RISING Formula One star Daniel Ricciardo is becoming one of Australia's most bankable sporting names, and it's not just because of his driving.



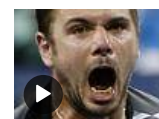
Kyrgios cruises into third round

left a mixed legacy: a brand-new subway, airport and other vital infrastructure that significantly improved everyday life in a city of 4 million, set against scores of decrepit sports venues built in a mad rush to meet deadlines – with little thought for post-Olympic use.



Before and after: The Athens Olympic softball stadium in 2004 and 2014.

TEENAGE sensation Nick Kyrgios has powered past Andreas Seppi and is through to the third round of the US Open.



Tennis star snaps at 'drunk' fan

STANISLAS Wawrinka was not in a great mood on the court. He was struggling to beat an inferior opponent. Then one rowdy fan yelled out.



Let's go shopping: Deadline Day bonanza

WITH four days to go until the transfer window slams shut, here's a shopper's guide to the big 11 stories still to be resolved before deadline.



Updated: European Transfer Centre

THERE'S sure to be plenty of transfers over the European summer and you can keep track of all the big moves in our Transfer Centre.

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Toddler's potty mouth a viral hit



Before and after: The Athens Olympic Aquatic Centre in 2004 and 2014.

BREKKIE WRAP: A TODDLER has become a viral internet sensation after her foul-mouthed reaction to the Ice Bucket Challenge.



iPhone 6 'to have mobile wallet'

BACK in January, Apple's Tim Cook said he was "intrigued" with mobile payments. Now come reports the iPhone 6 will be your mobile wallet.



Weatherill and Palmer — new best friends

JAY Weatherill wants to cast the spotlight on Budget cuts to SA. When you want the spotlight, you go to Clive Palmer, who thinks Mr Weatherill is somewhat of a hero. Then it got ... well, gross.



Malaysia Airlines giving flights away

THE embattled airline has turned to giveaways in an attempt to lure customers back, as passengers and crew desert it.



Brad and Ange's surprise wedding

ANGELINA Jolie and Brad Pitt are now husband and wife, after a wedding in France described as a "family affair".



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The Olympic Aquatic Centre in Athens.



The beach volleyball Olympic venue in Neo Faliro, southern Athens.

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The Olympic softball stadium at the Helliniko Olympic complex in Athens.



The abandoned softball venue.

'THE BIGGEST MISTAKE IN OUR HISTORY'

As Greece groans under a cruel economic depression, questions linger as to whether the Athens Games were too ambitious an undertaking for a weak economy. While economists agree it would be unfair to blame Greece's meltdown on the 17-day Games, the post-Olympic era is seen as a decade of lost opportunities — including failure to significantly boost the country's sporting culture. It's a lesson to which Brazil may pay heed, as it races to complete projects ahead of the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

"We didn't take advantage of this dynamic that we got in 2004," said former Olympic weightlifting champion Pyrros Dimas, a Greek sporting hero-turned-Socialist member of Parliament.

"We simply made the biggest mistake in our history: We switched off, locked up the stadiums, let

them fall to pieces, and everything finished there.”

“We spent a lot of money for some projects (that) are shut and rotting,” said Dimas, who won his last Olympic medal in an Athens arena now reinvented as a lecture and conference venue. “There were projects that should have cost 2 and 3 million (euros) and suddenly became so big that they cost 13 and 14 million. There was no control.”

The latest government estimate sets the final cost of the Games at 8.5 billion euros (\$12.2 billion), double the original budget but a drop in the ocean of the country’s subsequent 320 billion-euro (\$460 billion) debt, which spun out of control after 2008.



The Olympic Aquatic Centre in Athens.



The view of the former Olympic Village in Athens, Greece.



The remains of a fountain decorated with the Olympic rings and graffiti-defaced marble blocks dedicated to Greek Olympic medal winners are seen at the Olympic village in northern Athens.



The Olympic Baseball Stadium at the Helliniko complex.

Former organising committee chief Gianna Angelopoulos has commissioned the first independent survey of the Olympics' overall economic effect. It will aim to weigh Olympic overspending and waste against a possible boost to the crucial tourism industry — arrivals have almost doubled since 2004, from 11.7 million to 20.1 million — foreign investment and employment.

"The Olympics were very important in increasing the brand awareness ... of Greece," said economist Theodore Krintas, managing director of Attica Wealth Management. "But we did very, very limited things on a follow-up basis."

Andrew Zimbalist, a US economist who studies the financial impact of major sporting events, said experience shows that hosting the Olympics does not generally promote economic development: "At the end of the day, the main benefit to be had seems to be a feel-good experience that the

people in the host city or the host country have," said Zimbalist, a professor of economics at Smith College.

"But that's a fleeting experience, not something that endures.

"Why couldn't Athens have simply invested ... in development and transportation and communications and infrastructure, and not hosted the Olympics?"

The cost of hosting the Olympics and ensuring a city is not left with white elephants is a key issue facing the International Olympic Committee and new president Thomas Bach.

Scared off by the record \$51 billion price tag associated with the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, several Western European cities declining to bid or dropped out of the race for the 2022 Winter Games.

Reducing the cost and focusing on long-term sustainability is part of Bach's "Olympic Agenda 2020," a package of reforms that will be voted on at a special meeting in Monaco in December.



The Beach Volleyball Olympic Stadium at Faliro Olympic Complex.



Inside the derelict buildings at the Helliniko Olympic complex.



The swimming pool in the former Olympic Village.



The abandoned canoe/kayak venue in southern Athens.

FACILITIES LEFT TO ROT

In Greece, few of the sporting venues — mostly purpose-built permanent structures — have seen regular post-Olympic use. The badminton venue is a successful concert hall, but the empty table-tennis and gymnastics stadium is up for sale, and the beach volleyball centre has been rarely used and was recently looted.

Most venues are padlocked.

The seaside site of Athens' old airport hosted half a dozen venues. Politicians have dithered for a decade over how to use the sprawling plot — meaning facilities have simply been left to rot. Lengths of large tubing lie near abandoned runways. Decommissioned jumbo jets sit near where planners once dreamed of building a water amusement park. This year, private investors won a tender to develop the entire area into a residential, commercial, hotel and leisure centre, in a 7 billion-euro (\$10 billion) investment.

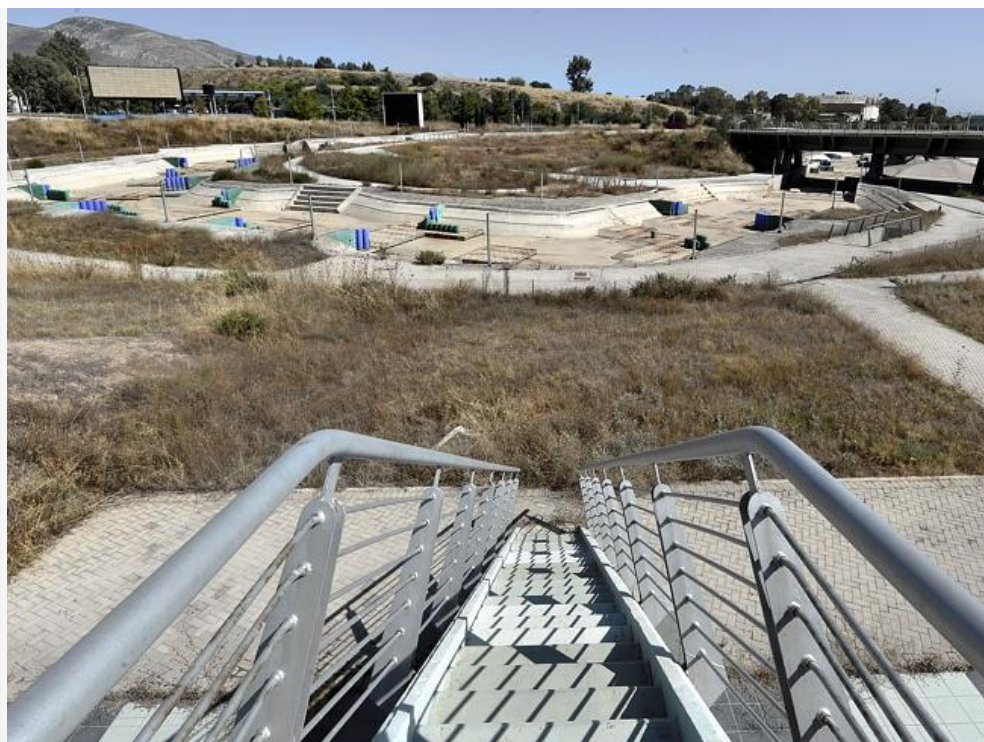
Greek Olympic Committee head Spyros Capralos, a senior member of the 2004 organising committee, said the state of the sporting venues "puts our country to shame." The former swimming champion and two-time Olympic water polo competitor blames bureaucracy and lack of foresight.



The Olympic Baseball Stadium.



The Olympic Canoe/Kayak Slalom Centre.



The Olympic Canoe/Kayak Slalom Centre.



The vandalised pedestrian bridge near the Olympic stadium.

"Nobody was thinking what would happen the next day," he said. "Many of the sports facilities were constructed just to be constructed ... and nobody thought that they required a lot of money for maintenance after the Olympic Games."

In their haste to meet implacable construction deadlines, government officials didn't even secure proper planning permits for several venues, including the elegant crown on the main Olympic Stadium — a steel canopy by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava.

Greece's sports ministry says it has finally rectified the permits oversight, which until now hindered necessary repairs and maintenance, and funding has been found to conserve the roof.

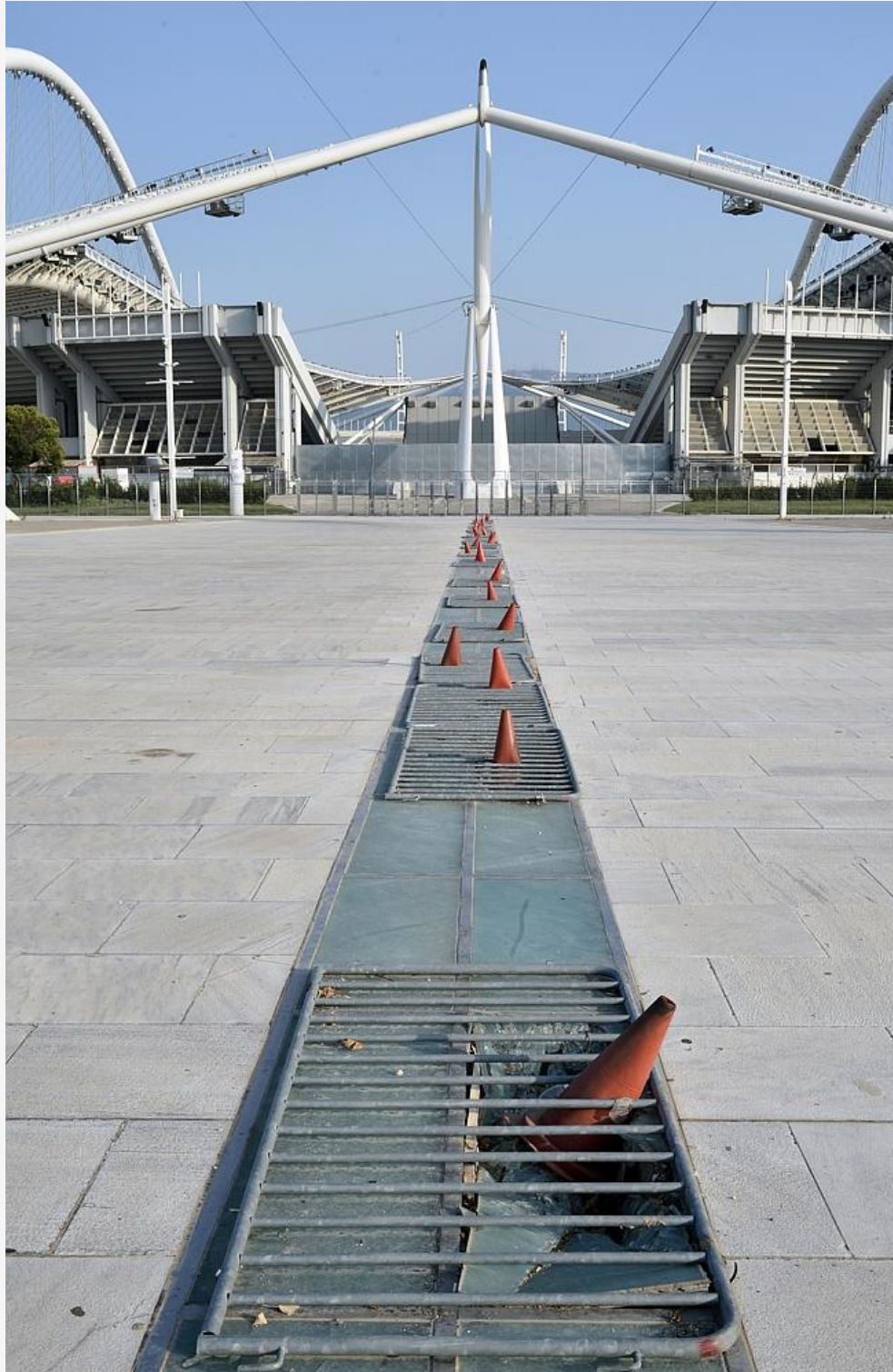
Overall, Capralos insisted, the Games were a boost for Greece, mainly due to non-sports infrastructure pegged to the Games that otherwise might never have materialised.

"It saddens me that public opinion has come to believe the Athens Olympic Games were not

successful," he said. "They were very much so, both from the sports aspect and through projects that gave life to Athens — tourism has increased, there is a modern airport, roads, the metro, phones work properly and when it's very hot, the power system doesn't collapse."

Capralos believes the legacy of the stadiums can still be salvaged.

"Simply, someone must do whatever is needed for the venues to be taken over by the private sector — because I don't think the state can be a very good entrepreneur or venue manager."



The view outside the Olympic Stadium in Athens.

Originally published as '[Biggest mistake in our history](#)'



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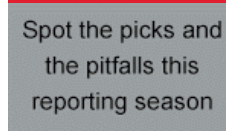
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