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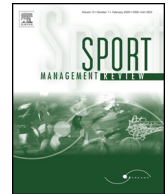


Image recovery from negative media coverage of a sport event: Destination, venue, and event considerations

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ABSTRACT

The successful hosting of test events in the lead-up to a major event is not only a useful logistical tool and systems evaluation, but also signals to the world that the host city is ready and competent to host the main event. With the intense scrutiny of the media on all aspects of the venue, the city, and the competition, test events offer the potential for a city to establish (or enhance) its reputation as an event host, or to create doubt in its ability to host major events. The case follows the media coverage of the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships held on the Gold Coast Queensland, Australia, which served as a test event for the newly renovated Gold Coast Aquatics Centre in the lead-up to the 2018 Commonwealth Games. The case considers the implications and impacts of negative media coverage of an international event on the destination image of the host city. The case highlights the need for image recovery strategies for stakeholders within the destination who are concerned with the city's ability to host international sport events.

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Teaching note and overview for use in class

Set on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia, the case follows the disastrous coverage of the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships, which served as a test event for the newly renovated Gold Coast Aquatics Centre. Test events are an increasingly common method of verifying the readiness of a new or renovated facility in the lead up to a major or mega event (Broudehoux, 2007). Often used prior to a major or mega event, the successful hosting of a test event is a useful logistical tool and systems evaluation. But most importantly, it signals to the world that the host city is ready and competent to host the main event. Often as major events themselves, test events attract significant media attention, which can be magnified by their joint status as a warm-up to an even larger mega-event. With the intense scrutiny of the media on all aspects of the venue, the city, and the competition, test events offer the potential for a city to establish, enhance, or in some unfortunate cases, diminish its reputation as a viable event host. As students progress through the case questions, they will have an opportunity to address issues that arise from a test event that goes badly.

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The case is presented from the perspective of Lisa Smith who has been called in as a crisis consultant by Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ), and Gold Coast Tourism – the state and local bodies responsible for tourism in the city of the Gold Coast. TEQ's vision is “to leverage the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games to generate overnight visitor expenditure, enhance the brand image of the Gold Coast and Queensland globally and leave a marketing legacy for other future major events” (TEQ, 2015, para 5). As the crisis consultant, Lisa has been tasked with protecting the brand image of the Gold Coast as a world-class sport event destination. In the wake of a cold, rainy, miserable Pan Pacific Swimming Championships (a Commonwealth Games test event), Lisa must determine a strategy to blunt the negative perceptions of the Gold Coast arising from the test event, and to assist the Gold Coast in its vision “to be globally recognized by 2016 as a world-class leisure and business events destination famous for its unrivalled variety of entertainment, excitement and fun” (TEQ, 2015, para 5). Issues associated with the role of events in destination branding, and ways to recover from negative exposure in domestic and international broadcast and social media are covered in this case study. Further, students have the opportunity to consider the views of various stakeholders in the process. The case is multifaceted in that it encourages students to consider the immediate questions at hand and allows for further development of strategic event plans and is suitable for both undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

1. Events in destination branding

Destinations often bid for and host large international events with the intention to help shape the image and profile of the city (Xing & Chalip, 2006). Destination image is, “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination” (Crompton, 1979, p. 18). How visitors perceive the destination contributes to the location's ability to attract tourists and maintain competitiveness. Hosting large international sport events such as the Commonwealth Games provides increased media exposure and attention to the host city and country (Green, 2002). Destinations often utilize events in their destination marketing efforts to increase both direct, which includes visitor expenditure during the actual event, and indirect tourism that focuses on the effects the media coverage of the event has on brand awareness and recognition of the destination as an attractive location to tourists (Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003; Getz & Fairley, 2004).

Likewise, the event also seeks to create a strong brand image. Keller (1993) defined brand image as consumer-held perceptions as determined by brand associations. These associations are linked in memory and create meaning of the brand for the consumer (Keller, 1993). Events provide these linkages between the brand image of the host community and the events it hosts (Chalip, 2004). Due to these linkages, potentially reciprocal effects and transfer of image of event to destination and destination to event through strategic marketing initiatives could possibly be expected (Brown, Chalip, Jago, & Mules, 2004). Xing and Chalip (2006) suggested that events seem to have a bigger impact on the destination's image than vice versa, with size and status of the event as key determinants of sport event image (Gwinner, 1997). Thus, it is useful for students to consider the role of events in destination branding.

The instructor can include an activity that requires students to consider the role of events in destination branding and the destination in event branding. Tybout and Sternthal (2005) described brand positioning as, “the specific, intended meaning for a brand in consumers' minds” (p. 11). Competitive positioning requires that marketers identify an appropriate frame of reference so consumers know what to expect of the brand while also establishing associated points of parity and difference (Keller, Sternthal, & Tybout, 2002). Understanding how the brand meets consumers' goals is key and can be explored by asking: (1) who should be targeted? (2) what goals does the brand allow the target to achieve?, and (3) why would the brand be chosen over others (Tybout & Sternthal, 2005). Once determined, students can develop a positioning statement to ensure a clear vision of the brand. Lastly, it may be useful to have students identify frames of reference by discussing what expectations they perceive visitors to the Gold Coast will experience based on how GCT has positioned itself. Likewise, the same can be accomplished with the Commonwealth Games. Following this activity, students can consider the relationship between the 2018 Commonwealth Games and Gold Coast brand through the following exercises:

1. Describe the current brand positioning for Gold Coast Tourism.
2. Describe the brand positioning for the 2018 Commonwealth Games.
3. Discuss the ways in which these two brands support (or do not support) one another to attract tourists to the Gold Coast.
4. List each element of the desired/sought after brand image of the 2018 Commonwealth Games held on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia.
5. Analyze the stories, social media, and media coverage of the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships. Place each element/comment from your analysis into one or more of the categories you listed in question 4. Note whether the comment (a) supports the brand image, or (b) detracts from the brand image. While select quotes from media have been included in the case, the instructor may choose to ask the students to conduct a more complete search of media coverage of the event from media databases such as Factiva. Note to instructors: we understand that one can interpret ‘social media’ a number of ways. Therefore, instructors should clearly outline parameters for the social media analysis based on the needs of your course. Specifically, the instructor should outline what sources should be searched, specific platforms for the search, a date range, and whether word searches and/or hashtags should be employed. Instructors could either define these parameters within an instruction prompt or use this as a class activity and have students generate ideas and create their own parameters. By facilitating the activity, instructors can prevent wild interpretations while using student-led learning.

Table 1
Image restoration strategies.

Strategy	Summary
Denial	
Simple	Outright denial responsibility for the crisis
Avoidance	Shifts the blame to another party
Evasion of responsibility	
Provocation	Acted in response to another
Defeasibility	Lack of ability or information
Accidental	Act was a mishap
Good intentions	Meant well by action
Reducing offensiveness of the event	
Bolstering	Stress event's good traits
Minimization	Act not serious
Differentiation	Act less offensive than XYZ
Transcendence	More important considerations
Attack Accuser	Reduce credibility of the accuser
Compensation	Reimburse victims
Corrective action	Plan to solve or prevent problem
Mortification	Apologize for act

Adapted from Benoit (1997).

2. Image recovery

Crises and disasters are not new to the tourism industry, with many destinations susceptible to natural disasters, horrible weather, terrorist threats, and failed events (Faulkner, 2001). Research on disaster recovery focuses on the role of destination marketing organizations (DMOs) in salvaging the image of the destination by managing misperceptions and attitudes of potential visitors (Walters & Mair, 2012). A key challenge to orchestrating a strong, corrective message is the media's coverage of the crisis event, as the negative publicity is often instantaneous and widespread (Chacko & Marcell, 2008). Public perceptions are often more damaging than reality, thus action must be swift in order to repair perception. Table 1 outlines Benoit's (1997) messaging options for image restoration following a crisis (p. 179).

Once a crisis has occurred, it is important to understand the nature of the crisis and how to communicate and sway the relevant audiences involved (Benoit, 1997). The ability to persuade an audience is key to image repair. Therefore, instructors could introduce the art of persuasion in messaging prior to having students discuss a crisis plan. Cialdini (2001) is a good introductory resource for students that do not have a strong background.

The negative imagery broadcast in international media has the potential to have a negative impact on both the image of the Gold Coast as a destination and also on the event image of the city with questions arising about the capacity and ability of the Gold Coast to host the upcoming 2018 Commonwealth Games. Thus, Lisa should consider issues such as how to manage relationships and communicate with media (Brown et al., 2004), and how to use positive images to persuade key audiences in order to recover from the negative imagery associated with the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships (Pike & Ryan, 2004). Bierman (2003) and Walters and Mair (2012) are useful resources for exercises on disaster recovery.

Activities for use in class:

- Following your analysis of the media and social media coverage of the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships, create a management and recovery marketing plan to correct misperceptions, generate more positive publicity, and enhance the image of the Gold Coast's ability to host the Commonwealth Games. Consider: (a) tactics you would use to enhance the positive perceptions of the Gold Coast that emerged from the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships, and (b) tactics to minimize the negative perceptions resulting from the test event.
- (ADVANCED) Develop a plan to strategically leverage the 2018 Commonwealth Games to enhance the image of the Gold Coast as a tourist destination in one core domestic and one core international market. Your plan should include:
 - a coordinated set of strategies and tactics to implement *between* the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships and the start of the 2018 Commonwealth Games;
 - a coordinated set of strategies and tactics to implement *during* the Commonwealth Games; and
 - a coordinated set of strategies and tactics to implement in the *post-Games period*.
- Depending on the class content, students could be asked to develop a media plan, an integrated marketing communications strategy, a social media plan, or even an advertising campaign. We recommend that the instructor focus the plan to best fit the course content and the knowledge base of the students in the course.

3. Stakeholder theory

The case can also be utilized to examine the relationships between stakeholders who are affected by the negative impacts of the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships. Thus, stakeholder theory, which considers those who are affected by the impact

of the activity (Covell, 2004) could be considered. Impacts of events may have different importance and repercussions on each of its stakeholders which may be sport, event, business or destination related (Hede, 2008). Stakeholder maps could be used to show the relative importance of stakeholders, and the relationships among various stakeholders (see Hede, 2008 as an example). The students could assess the salience of each stakeholder through focusing on power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Activities for class include:

1. Begin by identifying the people and groups with a stake in the success of: (a) the facility, (b) the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships, (c) the 2018 Commonwealth Games, and (d) Gold Coast tourism. Instructors could either have students create a list of stakeholders or alternatively, the instructor could provide a list of potential stakeholders. Stakeholders can include local residents and businesses, politicians, local athletes, tourism operators, sport clubs, event managers, Commonwealth Games athletes and delegations, International Federations, NSOs, volunteers, Tourism and Events Queensland, Gold Coast Tourism, and Gold Coast Tourism Operators.
2. Assign students to a role with a particular stakeholder group. Depending on the size of the class, each individual can represent a different stakeholder or you can assign multiple individual stakeholder roles for each stakeholder group. Provide students with time to write down their character's needs, perspectives, and potential benefits and detriments from hosting the Games on the Gold Coast.
3. Have students' role play a meeting to determine the 'best' solution for the swimming competition at the Commonwealth Games. Each can choose a position outlined by Lisa in the case (move the event to Chandler Aquatic Centre in Brisbane, construct a roof on the Gold Coast Aquatics Centre, or do nothing) or bring forth an alternative solution. For larger classes, it is useful to have multiple meetings occurring so that all participants can actively participate in the discussion.
 - a. Debrief.
 - i. Which stakeholder groups were aligned? Which were opposed? Why? (Pay particular attention to any conflict between sport and tourism sectors.)
 - ii. Did the different meetings come up with different or similar solutions? Explain.
 - iii. How would you go about building a coalition of stakeholders to effectively leverage the upcoming Commonwealth Games for tourism purposes? Who would be included? Who would be marginalized? What compromises would need to be negotiated and why?

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Image recovery from negative media coverage of a sport event: Destination, venue, and event considerations

A case study of the 2014 Gold Coast Pan Pacific Swimming Championships

Located on the southeast coast of Queensland, Australia, the Gold Coast is a tourism destination renowned for its picturesque beaches, tranquil rainforests, hinterland ranges, and sunshine. The city attracts over 12 million domestic and international visitors a year (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). While already recognized as a key tourism destination, the city is trying to bolster its image through hosting sport events. On 11th November 2011, the Gold Coast successfully won the right to host the 2018 Commonwealth Games, 43–27 ahead of Hambantota, Sri Lanka. To prepare for the event, the city will undergo significant infrastructural upgrades and improvements, and will host test events in the new and improved facilities. The Gold Coast tourism and event stakeholders will try to capitalize on the significant media exposure associated with the upcoming events to further build and cement the destination's image.

The actual Games will be held over 11 days from the 4th–15th of April 2018. Over the course of 11 days, roughly 6500 athletes from 71 Commonwealth nations and territories will compete in 17 different sports. It is estimated that 15,000 volunteers will be utilized to assist with the event, which is set to generate approximately \$2 billion in economic impact for the Gold Coast region (Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, 2014). Aquatics (swimming and diving), athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, cycling (mountain bike, road, and track), gymnastics (artistic and rhythmic), hockey, lawn bowls, netball, rugby sevens, shooting, squash, table tennis, triathlon, weightlifting, and wrestling will all feature during the Commonwealth Games (Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, 2014).

The tourism industry is the backbone of the Gold Coast, directly contributing \$4.6 billion to the local economy annually, and generating 30,000 direct jobs in the city (Gold Coast Tourism Corporation, 2012). Currently, the top three international markets for the Gold Coast are New Zealand, Japan, and China, respectively; with the United Kingdom, South East Asia, Europe, North America, and Gulf countries constituting the Gold Coast's other key markets (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2011). While the 2018 Commonwealth Games attracts athletes from only Commonwealth countries, the Gold Coast sees an opportunity to establish itself in the wider sport and event community through the increased international media attention surrounding the Games and the preceding test events. One such test event is the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Titles, which has stimulated the expedited renovation of the Gold Coast Aquatic Centre.

Acknowledging the impact that hosting an international sport event can have on tourism and the reputation of a destination, Gold Coast Tourism, in conjunction with Tourism and Events Queensland and other relevant stakeholders have developed a destination tourism strategy to maximize the potential growth of the Gold Coast region as a tourism destination. Hosting the Commonwealth Games builds on the pre-existing vision of the Gold Coast to become globally recognized as a leader in world-class leisure and business events for offering an exciting variety of entertainment and fun (Tourism and Events Queensland, 2012).

In order to reinforce its image as a premier leisure and business events destination, the Gold Coast must view all future events as opportunities to showcase the capabilities of the destination itself. Lisa Smith was put in charge of developing a strategy to maximize the projected image of the Gold Coast through hosting these upcoming sport events. Lisa decided she needed to first look at the existing sport profile of the Gold Coast to see what infrastructure and events form the current event profile of the city.

1. Gold Coast sport profile

In recent years, the Gold Coast has seen the admission of professional sporting teams to the national sporting leagues such as the Gold Coast Titans in the National Rugby League (NRL), and the Gold Coast Suns in the Australian Football League (AFL). In order to support the city's sport teams, key venues were built for both the local AFL and the NRL teams. Costing \$144 million, Metricon Stadium was constructed specifically for the Gold Coast Suns as part of the AFL's expansion into the Gold Coast region. The development of the facility was supported by both State (\$71.9m) and Federal Government (\$36m), who funded the multimillion-dollar project in conjunction with the Gold Coast City Council (\$23m), and the AFL (\$13.3m) (Metricon Stadium, 2014). The multipurpose facility currently seats 25,000 patrons, with plans to extend this to 40,000 in the near future. Robina Stadium, currently known as Cbus Super Stadium was constructed in time for the 2008 NRL season. Again, both the State and local government, with the Queensland Government funding the project after the land was purchased by the Gold Coast City Council, supported this development. With a total seating capacity of 27,400 (Cbus Super Stadium, 2014), the venue has played host to numerous NRL games, Tests and World Cup matches for rugby league, and Sevens World Series matches in the rugby union Sevens World Series, and was the home ground for the Gold Coast United FC during the team's short existence. Both facilities are earmarked for use for the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

While there are two Gold Coast based teams currently in national competitions, Lisa found that the Gold Coast has had a sordid history of hosting teams in national sporting leagues. For example, the Gold Coast United which played in the Hyundai A-League, and the Gold Coast Blaze that played in the National Basketball League (NBL) have recently collapsed for varied reasons, and up until recent years, there were a string of teams in both the NRL and NBL that were not sustainable. Further,

due to an abject lack of local spectator support at CBus Super Stadium, the Gold Coast has now lost the HSBC Sevens World Series event. Thus, it occurred to Lisa that the Gold Coast did not have a strong history of supporting local sport.

Although the history of sport teams on the Gold Coast has received mixed success, several sporting events have been consistently hosted by the Gold Coast for a number of years. The largest annual spectator sport event on the Gold Coast is the Gold Coast 600 car racing event. In 2012, the event drew crowds in excess of 180,000 people (Kane & Tapim, 2012). The largest annual sport participant event on the Gold Coast is the Gold Coast Airport Marathon, which often attracts around 30,000 participants (Gold Coast Airport Marathon, 2014a; Gold Coast Airport Marathon, 2014b). Neither event is reliant on a stadium or existing infrastructure, but take place on temporary tracks erected on Gold Coast roads. Further, both event tracks are held on the Gold Coast's beachfront streets for the purpose of showcasing key elements of the Gold Coast's tourism image. Likewise, the annual Roxy Pro and Quicksilver Pro which form part of the former ASP World Surfing Tour – now the World Surf League – are both hosted on the Gold Coast, again highlighting what the Gold Coast is known for – pristine beaches and surfing breaks.

Despite the success of these events, the Gold Coast has long desired to be acknowledged as a city capable of hosting high-profile sporting events. There is excitement among stakeholders on the Gold Coast who believe that the 2018 Commonwealth Games will provide the city with the exposure it needs to become known as a city capable of hosting sport events. This notion is supported by the Queensland Government, which has since partnered with the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation to provide support for the event.

2. Commonwealth Games

The Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation (GOLDOC) was established in January of 2012 with the purpose of planning, organizing and delivering the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in conjunction with the Australian Commonwealth Games Association (ACGA), and the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF). Upon the formation of this organizational committee, the vision, mission, and objectives of the Commonwealth Games were devised in order to successfully guide all stages of the planning process.

The GOLDOC's vision for the event is: "To stage a great Games in a great city leaving great memories and great benefits for all" (Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation, 2014, para 2). Further, the GOLDOC developed a detailed event mission: "To conduct an athlete focused Commonwealth Games with excellent competition in a fun and friendly environment with long lasting benefits for the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia and the Commonwealth" (Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation, 2014, para 3). Finally, the GOLDOC created several broad aims to guide the planning of the upcoming event:

- To attract the best athletes to compete in a technically excellent, world class, fun and friendly Commonwealth Games;
- To launch the Commonwealth Games into a new decade with an inspiring, memorable and landmark event;
- To help our partners make the most of the opportunities presented by the Commonwealth Games;
- To engage and harness the enthusiasm of our communities;
- To contribute to economic growth by working with our partners to promote Queensland tourism, trade and investment; and
- To present the Commonwealth Games in a creative way that will encourage comprehensive and positive exposure and support (Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation, 2013).

The vision, mission, and objectives developed by the GOLDOC closely align with the key visions and strategies that are currently guiding the city, presented within the Gold Coast 2020 (City of Gold Coast's Corporate Plan), further supported by the City Plan 2015. The Gold Coast 2020 vision is "Inspired by lifestyle. Driven by opportunity.", which encompasses three themes; place, prosperity and people (City of Gold Coast, 2014b, p. 5). In conjunction, the City Plan 2015 identified an additional six themes that play an essential role in the future growth and development of the Gold Coast; creating liveable places, making modern centres, strengthening and diversifying the economy, improving transport outcomes, living with nature, and a safe, well designed city (City of Gold Coast, 2014a).

As part of their bid for the 2018 Commonwealth Games, the Queensland Government has approved the construction of several new sporting venues, in addition to the significant refurbishment of seven existing facilities. With \$320 million to be invested into sport and community infrastructure in the lead up to the event, numerous venues have been earmarked for revitalization (Seeney, 2014). The Gold Coast Aquatic Centre, Broadwater Parklands, Coomera Sports and Leisure Centre, and Carrara Sports and Leisure Centre have been identified as venues critical to hosting the Games that require redevelopment, in addition to the construction of the Commonwealth Games Village, which is set to become the centre of the Gold Coast health and knowledge precinct (alongside Griffith University and the Gold Coast Hospital) upon conclusion of the Games.

Such significant expansion does not come without an equally significant price. The 2006 Commonwealth Games held in Melbourne required extensive upgrading and redevelopment to existing infrastructure, costing around \$1.03 billion (excluding the Games Village) (KPMG, 2006). Despite this, the direct Games expenditure, tourism, construction, and other related commercial activities contributed \$1.6 billion to the Gross State Product, with \$270 million of this attributed to the 100,000 tourists that visited Victoria during the Commonwealth Games (State Government of Victoria, 2014).

It will be the fifth time that Australia has hosted the event, but the first time it will be held in a regional city. Thus, this provides the Gold Coast with an unparalleled opportunity to showcase the city as a premier events destination, cementing

the city's image within the international events community. While a regional city itself, the Gold Coast is located only 1 h south of Queensland's capital city, Brisbane. Given the event receives significant state and national government funding, it was expected that the two cities could collaborate and potentially stage some of the events in Brisbane. Thus, in considering venues for the competition of each of the sports, it was suggested that some of the existing world-class sport venues in Brisbane could be utilized which would save on the construction or renovation of sport facilities on the Gold Coast. Some people questioned the need to spend state and/or national government money on building new infrastructure on the Gold Coast, when world class facilities already existed in Brisbane. One venue, which caused some controversy, was the swimming and diving facility. The government controversially committed to the redevelopment of the Gold Coast Aquatic Centre (formerly known as the Southport Pool) as the swimming and diving venue, when the Brisbane Aquatic Centre is located an hour away.

3. The Gold Coast Aquatic Centre

The redevelopment of the Gold Coast Aquatic Centre was earmarked as one of the most significant legacy projects for the Commonwealth Games. As the official swimming and diving venue for the 2018 Commonwealth Games, the facility underwent significant redevelopment in order to satisfy international competition requirements, while also delivering on the Gold Coast's objective to ensure the city has world-class facilities for major sporting events in the future. The redevelopment was brought forward to be completed before August 2014, so that it could host the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships. The \$41 million upgrade included a new 10-lane 50 m competition pool, elevated spectator viewing terrace, new changing rooms, gym and toilet facilities, community meeting rooms, event facilities, permanent seating for approximately 1200 people, and the refurbishment of the existing eight-lane 50 m pool and dive pool. Despite the significant changes made to the venue, the decision was made not to install a roof over the competition pool as it was considered too costly, estimated at an additional \$30 million (Balym & Stolz, 2014). The Gold Coast is renowned for its spectacular weather, with the subtropical climate offering close to 300 days of sunshine annually, leaving very few days of less than desirable weather (City of Gold Coast, 2014c). Thus, it was hoped that the outdoor facility would showcase the magnificent weather for which the Gold Coast is renowned, however, this raised some questions in the international swimming fraternity as international level competition is often held in indoor facilities.

The Brisbane Aquatic Centre located within the Sleeman Sports Complex in Chandler, was developed for the 1982 Commonwealth Games. This indoor venue includes an Olympic size pool with stadium seating that can cater for 4300, in addition to a world-class dive pool, and smaller 25-m leisure pool. Since the 1982 Commonwealth Games, the facility had hosted swimming and diving competition for a number of major sporting events including the 1994 World Masters Games and the 2001 Goodwill Games, and also regularly hosts the State and National level swim meets. Additionally, the Brisbane Aquatic Centre is home to numerous swimming and diving clubs, while offering the local community with a range of services including swimming and diving lessons. Thus, with a world class facility located within an hours drive, the decision to spend \$41 million redeveloping the Gold Coast Aquatic Centre was met with some criticism.

4. The Gold Coast Aquatic Centre test event: 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Titles

As is common with mega international sport events, test events are typically scheduled in new facilities in the lead up to events to ensure that the facilities are adequately prepared for international event level competition. Hosting the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Championships from August 21–25 provided the Gold Coast with the opportunity to showcase and test the redeveloped swimming facility.

The Pan Pacific Swimming Titles attract international level athletes primarily from Canada, Australia, America and Japan. The competition is broadcast to a worldwide audience and attracts some of the sports' top athletes including the Olympic Champion Michael Phelps. The event was met with much anticipation as those concerned with the redevelopment of the facility, and the marketing of the event and the destination were nervously awaiting the events occurrence.

5. The disaster that was the Pan Pacific Swimming Titles

While the Gold Coast community was excited about the unveiling of the new aquatic facility for the Pan Pacific Swimming Titles, the event was interrupted by a weekend of unseasonably cold, wet, and windy weather. The weather caused problems to athletes, spectators, and the subsequent cancellation of the last day of competition. The athletes experienced discomfort as they had to prepare and compete in the wet and windy conditions, which is in stark contrast to other international meets, which are typically held in indoor facilities. Athletes, including Michael Phelps were preparing for, competing in, and being awarded medals in less than favourable conditions. Phelps commented to local media that, "It's crazy with the sideways rain and it's a little chilly out there" (Balym & Stolz, 2014, para 6). Pictures of the athletes, and their comments and tweets were broadcast to an international audience.

The event experienced lower than expected attendance as spectators were not willing to confront the weather, while those who decided to brave the undesirable conditions experienced significant discomfort as they were left vulnerable to the elements at the outdoor venue. Ponchos were quickly made available for sale, however, this only provided limited protection

from the elements from which there was no place to shelter. Visual images of the spectators were also telecast around the world.

Additionally, the weather forced the cancellation of the final open water events due to water quality issues, in conjunction with the threat of sharks after the heavy downfalls. Increased pollution in the water meant that the original venue, Southport Marine Stadium in the Broadwater was unfit to host the event. Despite having a contingency plan with Lake Hugh Muntz at Mermaid Waters as the backup venue, it too suffered the same water quality issues returning borderline results, and consequently being ruled unsuitable. The open water events were moved to be held in conjunction with the Junior Pan Pacific Swimming Championships in Maui, Hawaii, on August 31 which meant that the affected athletes needed to reschedule their travel plans and training schedules.

The event raised concerns as to the suitability of the newly renovated aquatic centre as a venue for elite level competitions. In addition to the outdoor facility's impact on athletes and spectators in the wet and windy conditions, critics also raised concerns regarding the venues suitability during warmer months, in which attendees and participants would be exposed to the searing heat.

The unfortunate series of events that played out during the course of the Swimming Championships received international media exposure, highlighting the Gold Coast's apparent incompetence in regard to hosting major sporting events. Various headlines hit the news in the wake of the disastrous event including "Gold Coast's \$42m Aquatic Centre pool slammed by top swimmers and coaches for not having a roof" (Balym & Stolz, 2014) and "Pan Pacs organizers cancel open water events amid fear over water quality and sharks following deluge" (Greenwood, 2014). In addition to these embarrassing headlines were photographs of spectators and athletes alike left vulnerable to the elements at the outdoor venue. High-ranking swimming officials criticized the event, "It's certainly unprofessional. . . On the back of the last few days, to have to cancel the (open water) as well, it is embarrassing" (Greenwood, 2014, para 8).

The event, and by extension, the Gold Coast has received harsh criticism from the media and the international swimming and events community, with many questioning whether the Gold Coast is capable of hosting an elite level competition such as the Commonwealth Games. For example, in the comments section of a news page, local residents voiced their discontent with the organization of the event. One resident put it this way:

This has turned into a worldwide embarrassment for the Gold Coast. Worldwide news organisations have showed pictures of roofless spectator seating and athletes completely soaked. And Tom Tate's [Gold Coast Mayor] comments "suck it up" add more to the insults. When is everyone going to acknowledge that the Council is incapable of organising anything?? They are just a bunch of amateurs that have absolutely no experience in any type of business or planning. The damage has been done and at our expense. The Commonwealth Games is next. . . (Greenwood, 2014, comment 5)

Another resident voiced their concerns with the shortcomings of the Gold Coast Aquatic Centre that have come to light as a result of the recent event:

Who is responsible for deciding to build a multi-million dollar facility without a roof? What an absolute stuff up, typical of the quality of the decisions made by local bureaucrats. This needs to be fixed before the Commonwealth Games. Even if it's not raining it is still needed because spectators & competitors need shelter from blazing sun, strong winds & rain. I guess it's lucky this shortfall in construction was made obvious now & not when the Commonwealth Games are held. Time to fix it! (Greenwood, 2014, comment 3)

Another resident went as far as suggesting that the swimming event should be moved to the Brisbane Aquatic Centre and questioned the cost efficiency of renovating the aquatic centre on the Gold Coast:

Recently I visited Brisbane's Chandler Pool, roof and all, why oh why cannot we use the already established sports facilities in Brisbane to minimise taxpayer expenses and also to utilise existing brilliant facilities? Let us face it, the Gold Coast and Brisbane are joined at the hip, virtually one huge metropolis. A combination of all existing sporting facilities in the combined area would ensure a great sporting event and cost effective way to show the world our love of sport. Unfortunately, political egos will prevail and we all will be paying for the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games for many years to come. (Greenwood, 2014, comment 34)

While other residents echoed the idea of moving future swimming events to Brisbane's Chandler facility:

Move the Commonwealth Games to Chandler if there is no roof. Chandler was built for the Brisbane Games. The GC gets a second, third or worse standard of a venue. The toilets belong to a construction site and not even a covered area where you could have a warm drink. (Greenwood, 2014, comment 36)

Clearly the unfortunate series of events that occurred during the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships have had a significant impact on the Gold Coast's image as one of the world's great tourist and business events destination. Additionally, the event has irritated local residents who feel that their taxpayer dollars have been inefficiently used, and that their city is the laughing stock of the international sporting fraternity. It would seem as if future swimming events to be held on the Gold Coast are in jeopardy. At this point, there are three options: 1) leave the facility as is and risk adverse weather conditions

during the Commonwealth Games, 2) construct a roof at the Gold Coast Aquatic Centre, or 3) host future swimming events at the Brisbane Aquatic Centre.

The Pan Pacific Swimming Championships provided the Gold Coast with an opportunity to cement their image as a world-class leisure and business events destination ahead of the 2018 Commonwealth Games. However, it would seem that the Gold Coast has instead positioned itself as a city incapable of hosting major sporting events with unsuitable event facilities. With the forthcoming Commonwealth Games, it is essential that the Gold Coast re-establishes itself as a premier events city, capable of hosting a wide range of events to an exceptional level.

Consequently, image and crisis recovery strategies are of significant importance to the reputation of the Gold Coast as a premier events city, particularly in the lead up to the 2018 Commonwealth Games. Despite plans to review the facility after the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships, strategies must be put in place in order to reverse the damage of the Championships on the Gold Coast's reputation.

Lisa Smith sat at her desk and contemplated her next steps. It was clear that the Gold Coast's hosting of the 2014 Pan Pacific Swimming Titles was not the success that was desired. Lisa started pondering where to start as she thought through how to recover from the event. What impact has hosting this event had on the image of the Gold Coast and the perception of the Gold Coast's ability to host an international sport event? What ramifications will this have in the lead up to the Commonwealth Games? What changes should be made to the current facility? What should the Gold Coast include as part of its image recovery strategy?

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