Reporting the Olympics in London

CAN FREELANCES get a look-in on reporting the Olympics? Our March speaker, Maxine Newlands, is convenor of the sports journalism course at the University of East London, in an Olympic Borough and senior lecturer on the “reporting the Olympics” module on that course. It being LFB, it turned out we had another expert in the audience, freelance athletics correspondent and branch member Matthew Brown.

Branch secretary Tom Davies told how we approached organisers LOCOD over a year ago, and were told it was far too early. More recently, we were sent a 24-page “speakers’ bureau” form, and told that we’d have to change the name of our event since “London Olympics” is copyrighted (in fact trademarked).

And 14 March would not be possible, that evening being the official starting of the Olympics countdown clock in Trafalgar Square. This response was signed by someone whose job title is “Trailblazer volunteer”.

Maxine said that at the heart of the Olympics is the scheme whereby top sponsors pay the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for a ten-year deal under which they get a “clean space” — only one soft drink company will showcase its product within that zone; only one electricity supplier; and so on. The same spirit pervades the rights to media coverage. US broadcaster NBC is by far the biggest payer, and therefore the biggest media player in the Olympics.

Matthew Brown said that for previous Games he’d always been turned down for accreditation via the British Olympic Association (BOA). One channel through which freelances might be able to get in is the Olympic Broadcast Service, which includes Maxine’s students, who will get hourly pay — just 1.6 per cent above minimum wage.

There’s an independent news centre for non-accredited journalists in the shape of the “Twitter hash-tag” #media2012 — see www.media2012.notlong.com — the brainchild of Professor Andy Miah, and which will be covering the Cultural Olympiad and legacy issues.

An Olympic News Service will produce newsletters for competitors, mostly on a shoestring, with a few paid positions available, only for journalists with a track record of reporting a specific sport. Matthew also advised that the BOA may get some more accreditation places in from IOC in next few months:

“...ask to go on their waiting list, as Matthew currently is.

It seems that the numerous out-rages around the Olympics — legacy projects that turn out to leave no legacy, bans on street traders, Olympic-only VIP traffic lanes, exclusion zones reminiscent of the G20 (the US “security people” for the Olympics have been in London for the past two years) — present the best opportunities for freelances. If you can’t get to cover the Games themselves, “do some sniffing around”.

Tom Davies flagged up the case of Frank Morris, an electrician apparently blacklisted from working at Olympic Media Centre for his union activities, and the subject of a demo there a couple of weeks ago: see www.hazards.org/blacklistblog

Alternatively, the Olympic legacy company seems to have some PR vacancies.

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Read more: www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1104oly.html

International Press Cards’ new format

THE FORMAT of the International Press Cards issued by the NUJ as an affiliate of the International Federation of Journalists has at long last been updated, to a plastic credit-card-type, much less open to abuse. This will, we hope, mean that its bearers will be taken more seriously around the world.

Some NUJ members have experienced long waits while some IT glitches associated with the system for issuing the new-style cards were ironed out. But we are pleased to report that at the time of writing these issues have been solved and if you’ve been waiting for an International Press Card it is already in the post.

The changes have also raised the price to £46. See www.londonfreelance.org/IPC to apply.

NUJ members demonstrated outside the Department for Culture, Media and Sport immediately the Minister, Jeremy Hunt, announced on 3 March that he was minded to allow the Murdoch clan to buy the 61 per cent of Sky that it does not already own, in return for spinning off Sky News with the existing ties to it unless they opted out be-

“opt-out” nature of the deal, by which authors were considered par-
ties to it unless they opted out be-

Before 28 January 2010. Both of these issues were raised in submissions to the court by the US Department of Justice, giving Chin a very strong hint.

Bruce Birchall

The Freelance is informed that Bruce Birchall, long-standing member of London Freelance Branch and campaigner for the rights of people with disabilities, died in March after a year in hospital. If any member has more information, please get in touch.

GS election

The NUJ is holding elections for a new General Secretary to lead the Union for the next five years. If you are a full member of the NUJ, your ballot papers for the General Secretary election should arrive by post some time not long after April 26, and once you’ve voted, you need to post your ballot to arrive before 24 May. Vote early!