

THE OLYMPIC STADIUM

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM



➤ “The Olympic Stadium will set the bar for all future Olympics,” said John Barrow, a senior principal at lead Olympic architects Populous, in a recent interview with *SportsPro*. “The 2012 Olympics will be the most sustainable Olympics ever.” A bold statement and a noble ambition, one which now partly rests in the hands of soccer club West Ham United, its owners David Sullivan and David Gold and its vice-chairman Karren Brady. London 2012 will be blessed with a generous array of cleverly conceived venues whose use will not yield a long-term burden. The future of the centrepiece, however, has been bitterly disputed since the original 25,000-seat downgrade was scrapped as financially unviable following the global economic crisis. In March, the Olympic Park Legacy Committee (OPLC) chose West Ham’s multi-purpose proposal over that of Premier League rivals Tottenham Hotspur, which would have resulted in the semi-demolition and rebuilding of the stadium and expulsion of athletics. Barring the success of court proceedings issued by Tottenham, the Hammers will take up residence in 2014,

bringing UK Athletics, Essex County Cricket Club and events manager Live Nation with them in a project backed by local authority Newham Council and construction giant Westfield. An olive branch has also been offered to League One club Leyton Orient – the closest soccer team to the Olympic Stadium whose opposition has been strongly expressed – in the form of a promise to make the 60,000 capacity venue available for their biggest fixtures. The fractious bidding process took on an almost ideological dimension. Backed by AEG, north London-based Spurs’ pitch was commercially impressive but derided by some of their own fans as a betrayal of their local community in Haringey, while their offer to fund a revamp of UK Athletics’ undesirable Crystal Palace home was dismissed as patronising. West Ham, on the other hand, have struggled to convince some observers that they can make the numbers on their offering add up, particularly in the light of their recent relegation to England’s second-tier Npower Championship. The realities of accommodating soccer, athletics and cricket within the same facility have only

been vaguely addressed, though the club has revealed it is in discussions with Populous over a potential UK£10m (US\$16.2 million) conversion to retractable seating. The pressure on West Ham to deliver is substantial, but the potential benefits for all parties are just as significant. For some time, UK Athletics has been in dire need of a stadium capable of hosting elite competitions and operating as a genuine commercial centre. If their cohabitation with West Ham is a success, it will not only buttress the long-term future of what remains a popular sport in Britain, but also provide a workable model for similar groundshares elsewhere – just as the practice is becoming discredited. West Ham’s pledge to buck a nationwide trend and make thousands of tickets for every home game available at highly affordable prices should also prove popular with young people and families, and give the stadium more of a community feel. The project remains something of a leap in the dark, but if it lands safely, the Olympic Stadium will fulfil London’s promise of a meaningful and sustainable legacy with something to spare.

ROLAND GARROS

PARIS, FRANCE



> The French Tennis Federation's (FFT) February 2011 decision to keep the French Open at Roland Garros was described by director general Gilbert Ysern as "probably the most important since its creation." The two-week long Grand Slam tennis tournament brings in 90 per cent of the organisation's overall revenue. Understandably, then, the comprehensive five to seven year redevelopment of the host venue, worth roughly US\$430 million, will be Ysern's primary preoccupation for some time to come.

Roland Garros is not the only Grand Slam venue set for an upgrade. Following years of change at Wimbledon, where the All England Club have installed a roof on Centre Court and dramatically revamped No.1 Court and No.2 Court, Australian Open hosts Melbourne Park are to significantly increase their overall capacity and fit a roof on the Margaret Court Arena. Unlike those, however, Roland Garros was subjected to a competitive bidding process in which it saw off the challenges of larger, more expensive new-build sites at Gonesse, Versailles and Marne-la-Vallée.

The upshot of this is that the FFT will be hoping to weave the history and prestige of the existing venue into a truly world-class proposition – one which meets the highest modern standards in terms of hospitality and facilities for spectators and the media. Ysern is clear about his ambitions for the project.

"The goal is not to have more, but to treat our people better than we do at the moment, be it the players, or the public, or the sponsors, or our guests in the hospitality areas," says Ysern. "Really, the purpose is to try and be the nicest event and the top quality event in the world rather than being biggest in terms of numbers of spectators, number of acres or whatever."

Deep red clay and spectacular on-court rallies make the French Open unique among Grand Slams, and the city of Paris' 99-year lease agreement with the FFT represents a major commitment to the tournament and its famous old home. This is mirrored in the scale of the FFT's investment.

Starting in 2012 the project will be funded almost entirely by France's tennis authorities with just five per cent of the overall budget

coming from public funds. A roof will be added to the Court Philippe Chatrier – the principal arena on the site – with its various stands systematically updated and its capacity expanded. Furthermore a 5,000-seater court will be built amongst the leafy gardens and greenhouses of the Serres d'Auteuil in order to replace the adjacent circular-shaped court number one, which is to be demolished and transformed into a wide-open space to meet the demands of the crowds expected to gather prior to newly planned night sessions. Lastly, a covered 14,500 capacity stadium with a retractable roof will be constructed from scratch at nearby Porte d'Auteuil, roughly 1km east of the tennis complex, alongside a new state-of-the-art media centre and luxurious panoramic restaurant.

"The facility in five, six, or seven years time will be nothing like that which exists today. We're going to make more room for the various people that make a success of the event, starting with the players, the media, sponsors and, very importantly, the general public," concludes Ysern.

NEW CORINTHIANS STADIUM

SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL



> The last time Brazil hosted the FIFA World Cup, in 1950, a shock defeat in the final game to Uruguay cost them the chance of a first world title and inflicted a deep wound on the national psyche. A lifetime later and it is hard to imagine that failure by the seleção to win what would be their sixth world title in 2014 could prompt such mournful introspection, but embarrassment off the field could easily check the stride of an increasingly prosperous and confident nation. With three years to go until kick-off, familiar organisational problems are hampering preparations for the event – which itself comes two years ahead of Brazil's first Olympic Games in Rio. Infrastructural upgrades, particularly to the country's airport network, are behind schedule, as are several stadium projects. Nowhere is the problem more acute than in São Paulo, the country's most populous city, home to 20 million of its people and a handful of its greatest soccer clubs. Its hopes of hosting the opening game looked to have been fatally

undermined when FIFA rejected São Paulo FC's 70,000-seater Estádio do Morumbi because of concerns over financial guarantees regarding its renovation. After a period of no little uncertainty, Corinthians have stepped into the breach. A tax incentive deal with the city council has allowed the club to raise the capacity of its proposed Itaquerá stadium from 48,500 to 65,000, in line with FIFA's demands. Despite this breakthrough, doubts remain over whether it can be delivered on time. Building work has yet to begin, and it has already been confirmed that the venue will not be ready in time for the dress rehearsal, the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup. The stakes are high for São Paulo, which will be eliminated from the list of host cities if the project founders – an outcome which would also do substantial damage to Brazil's reputation. Yet national pride is not the only issue in play here. Brazilian club soccer is on the rise: young prospects like Neymar are waiting longer to make the trip out to Europe, while superstars are making the return trip earlier and earlier

in their careers. Even if international interest in the Brasileirão grows gradually, Brazil is potentially among the biggest domestic markets for the game in the world. With the World Cup heralding the demise of some of the country's outdated concrete bowls, the Itaquerá leads a generation of new stadiums which should transform the earning potential of top Brazilian clubs. CDCA Arquitetos have designed a distinctive, modern venue with a retractable roof and ample facilities for hospitality and conferencing. It is a prospect far removed from Corinthians' current home, the historic but somewhat crude Estádio do Pacaembu. Already one of Brazil's highest earning clubs, Corinthians believe the new venue will earn them somewhere in the region of US\$62 million a year, quickly justifying their outlay on its construction. The success of developments like this one would bring domestic soccer in Brazil to commercial maturity, at the very moment a well-run World Cup might be showcasing a country ready for a new international role.



BARCLAYS CENTER

NEW YORK, USA

➤ “I honestly believe,” says New Jersey Nets minority owner Bruce Ratner, “that in America we do sometimes build an arena with some semblance of architectural taste, and architecturally it’s great.”

Few would disagree with such an appraisal of the forthcoming Barclays Center, future home of the Brooklyn Nets. Its designers at the award-winning SHoP architecture firm have presented what might be the most ambitious and aesthetically pleasing indoor arena ever constructed in the United States. Their assured touch, says Ratner, is apparent “in and out” of the venue. Chief executive of real estate developers Forest City Ratner Group, Ratner was central to the move to Brooklyn even before selling his majority stake in the team to Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov in 2010. The team’s relocation in the summer of 2012 will bring an end to a “nine-year project” to get to New York City. With no NBA titles since their arrival in 1976, the Nets are used to being one of the least heralded franchises in American sport. Now they are behind the most dramatic reshaping of its biggest

market in over 60 years.

“The other thing is the Brooklyn factor,” Ratner declares. “Brooklyn is like no other place on earth.” Much will be made of the return of a major league sports team to Brooklyn for the first time since the heartbreaking flight of the Dodgers to LA in 1957. The move is neatly timed. Brooklyn is New York’s largest borough; the majority of its increasingly affluent 2.6 million inhabitants work elsewhere in the city, and more and more of them are young professionals commuting to Manhattan. The Barclays Center and its surrounding Atlantic Yards development will be situated right at the heart of the Tri-State area, with arteries leading off in every direction.

“The public transportation is so intense at that spot,” says Ratner. “There are probably more transit lines that link underground there than any place in New York City. You can get to that arena from Long Island, which has two million people; from anywhere in the city, which has 8.5 million; and New Jersey and Westchester, which is our northern suburb, quite rapidly via public transportation. You’ve probably got 12

million people within 45 minutes.”

Prokhorov’s takeover has arguably made the Nets the most international team in the NBA, so it is perhaps fitting that they are the first franchise in US sport to sell the naming rights to their arena to an organisation based outside the country. London-based Barclays will be that headline sponsor, and partnerships with the likes of IMG, Lagardère Unlimited and Golden Boy Promotions will ensure the arena becomes more than just the home of a basketball team.

“There are no inside venues of any size except for Madison Square Garden in a city of 8.5 million people with an excellent transportation system,” Ratner says. “It’s a place where entertainment and things to do are incredible, but there are no large venues where you can have a major boxing match, other than Madison Square Garden. But Madison Square Garden has three teams there; it has hockey, it has basketball and it has women’s basketball, so you don’t have as many nights available. So there’s a tremendous need, which we’re finding now and we knew in the beginning, for another venue for both sports and for entertainment.”

LUSAIL ICONIC STADIUM

DOHA, QATAR



➤ Many eyebrows and no few objections were raised when Qatar was awarded the 2022 Fifa World Cup in December. Leaving aside the allegations of foul play that continue to haunt the bid, there remain serious concerns over the practicality of hosting such a large tournament in such a small – and hot – territory. Those responsible for the bid, however, believe they have a package of solutions – both elegant and aggressive – to meet a daunting set of challenges. Even allowing for the many modifications possible in the years ahead, it is a project which seems certain to be acutely influential.

The Lusail Iconic Stadium is both emblematic of this strategy and its most dramatic expression. Wembley Stadium designers Foster + Partners are behind the 86,250-seater venue, which will be built to the north of the capital, Doha, and is slated to host the final. When completed in 2019, it will be set in a body of water, with spectators crossing the ‘moat’ by any one of six bridges. A ring of arching columns will support a partially retractable roof.

Of more practical significance will

be the incorporation of photo-voltaic panels. The solar-powered air conditioning system, which will be standard issue across Qatar’s World Cup venues, will supposedly allow players and supporters to enjoy the conditions of late European spring while producing zero carbon emissions. The system has so far only been installed in the 500-seat ‘Showcase’ stadium at Khalifa Sports City, but organisers are confident that the technology will be ready. Solar panels will also shield parking and service areas, with the energy generated used to power the stadium when it is in use, as well as the surrounding buildings.

Qatar may have the world’s fastest growing population, but its size still bears comparison with that of Trinidad and Tobago – the smallest country ever to participate in a World Cup finals tournament. There will be no need, in short, for a collection of world class soccer stadiums in Qatar once the Fifa bandwagon has rolled on. With that in mind, the Lusail Iconic Stadium will be one of many venues to be reconfigured after the World Cup to a dramatically lower capacity – 20,000 – with the greater part of the facility

shipped elsewhere and used again.

Daniel Cordey is the market chief executive of Swiss modular stadium specialists Nüssli, who were consultants on both the Qatari and Russian World Cup bids. Nüssli have been involved in temporary seating projects for many years, but Cordey admits that the Qatar project will take the modular concept further than ever before. “What started in London for the first time,” he says, “with the basketball hall and the Olympic Stadium, where relocatable solutions or demountable solutions are being showcased, will continue and is probably seen most effectively in Qatar in 2022.”

The success of the Qatar bid and the trend towards more flexible solutions could also alter the priorities of governing bodies when it comes to organising major events.

“It’s certainly a good sign for small countries that they have a fair chance to participate and there are technical solutions around,” Cordey says. “Also it is becoming part of the programme, whether it is the IOC programme or for Fifa tenders, that there is the possibility to find such solutions.”

JUVENTUS ARENA

TURIN, ITALY



➤ If no club quite symbolises the relative malaise in Italian soccer like Juventus, then no building quite emphasised the dramatic ageing of Italy's top stadiums like the team's former home, the 69,000-capacity Stadio Delle Alpi. Built by the city of Turin for the 1990 Fifa World Cup, it was never embraced by the Juventus faithful: infamously, only 237 attended a Coppa Italia game against Sampdoria in 2002.

Few mourned its passing when the wrecking ball swung in February 2009. Though the same site was retained for its replacement – and many tonnes of concrete, glass, steel and aluminium recycled – in every other respect the two stadiums are barely comparable. Set to open in September and modestly billed by Juventus as “the stadium that changes football,” the purpose-built, privately owned new ground will be built to a reduced 41,000 capacity – perhaps surprising, given that Juve have a reported 11 million fans across Italy. With the running track and fences gone, spectators in the front row will be just 7.5 metres from the pitch, and those in the back just 49 metres away, something architects

Gino Zavanella and Hernando Suarez hope will create a more intimate, ‘English-style’ atmosphere. By contrast, ample space has been given over to stadium walkways and concourses, with detailing inside and outside the ground set to reflect the fact that this is very much Juventus’ home. Studio Rolla Architettura + Urbanistica have taken charge of a development scheme around the ground which is not only intended to transform the matchday experience for supporters, but also regenerate a moribund Turin suburb. 34,000 square metres of shops, 30,000 square metres of greenery, and 4,000 parking spaces will surround the stadium, which can be reached by any one of 16 suspension bridges. The stadium itself is costing up to €170 million to build.

Sportfive are currently in the market for naming rights to the ground, currently unofficially known as Juventus Arena, in a partnership expected to earn Juventus at least €75 million over 12 years. Theirs is the first such campaign in Italian soccer, but is not the only example of how the commercial delivery is being ruthlessly modernised. The Juventus Premium Club will provide a more

comprehensive corporate hospitality and premium seating offering that has ever existed in Italy before, but the club have not stopped there in their efforts to wring revenue streams from their new asset. Fans have been invited to purchase the chance to have their names engraved on one of a galaxy of stars in a display which will be a permanent feature at the base of the upper tier of seats.

There is little of this that has not already been attempted elsewhere, but it amounts to a revolution in what was so recently Europe's top soccer league. Most of the top clubs in Serie A make relatively meagre earnings from outmoded, municipally-owned stadiums. According to Deloitte, just eight per cent of Juventus' €205 million turnover in 2009/10 came from matchday revenue. With their €132.5 million income from television set to shrink dramatically under the new collective deal with Mediaset now in force in Serie A, they will be looking to the Juventus Arena to help make up the shortfall. More than that, however, many will hope the stadium can help bring Italian soccer into a modern era that its 1990s pre-eminence did so much to create.

LINCOLN FINANCIAL FIELD

PHILADELPHIA, USA



> A year ago, *SportsPro* named a little-known stadium in Taiwan the most important sporting venue in the world. The decision was met with confusion and even derision in some quarters, but Toyo Ito's Kaohsiung National Stadium, site of the 2009 World Games, was chosen for its innovative and radical use of solar panels. There was the latest indication that Kaohsiung can provide a model for the rest of sport to follow when the Philadelphia Eagles of the NFL became the first professional sports team to fully convert their home ground to on-site renewable energy.

Announced in November 2010, the development will see 80 wind turbines – spiral shaped to reduce noise – and 2,500 solar panels fitted to the exterior of the 70,000-seater stadium. These will produce around 15 per cent of the energy needed to power the stadium, with the remainder coming from a dual-fuel generator. The US\$30 million cost of the project is being met by Florida-based energy company Solar

Blue, who will in turn manage the facility over a period of 20 years for a set fee which will rise by three per cent each year.

The result may not be as appealing to look at as Toyo Ito's spectacular effort in Taiwan, but it will be effective. Solar Blue say that 8.6 megawatts of electricity will be generated at Lincoln Financial Field, 1.6 megawatts more than is required on game day, with excess power sold on to the local grid. It is estimated that the stadium would be capable of powering 26,000 homes, and that the resultant fall in greenhouse gas emissions will be equivalent to taking 41,000 cars off Philadelphia's roads. Of course, an NFL franchise must concern itself with another kind of green issue: the Eagles believe the conversion will save them US\$60 million in energy costs over the next two decades.

Set for completion in September – just ahead of the will-they-won't-they 2011 NFL season – the scheme has already drawn rich applause. NFL commissioner Roger Goodell described it as “groundbreaking”, and said: “The NFL is proud to support the

Eagles and Christina and Jeffrey Lurie as they set the right example for all of sports.” Philadelphia mayor Michael Nuttler added that the Eagles, “don't just wear green, they sincerely believe in the concept of responsible environmental stewardship.”

A Hollywood veteran and producer of the Oscar-winning 2010 documentary *Inside Job*, Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie is a confirmed environmentalist who has spent the better part of a decade burnishing the team's green credentials. This time, he and wife Christina, who operates the team's ‘Go Green’ initiative, may have delivered something which can fundamentally alter the perception of the role of a major sporting venue in a major city, with dramatic benefits to all parties.

“We believe,” said Christina Lurie, “the iconic stature and universal appeal of professional sports can become a powerful, visible, motivating example of how renewable energy sources can replace fossil fuels and create a cleaner, sustainable environment for people everywhere.”

OLYMPIC PARK

SOCHI, RUSSIA



> The crowning moment of Russia's sporting decade may come when the Fifa World Cup is lifted in Moscow in the summer of 2018, but arguably its most ambitious project will be completed four years earlier when the coastal city of Sochi hosts the 2014 Olympic Games. Working from a "blank canvas", Sochi 2014 organising committee president and chief executive Dmitry Chernyshenko and his team have been, "able to use the best technology and the best ideas to complete the most compact and efficient infrastructure," to create a world-class sporting hub on the Black Sea.

"Now we have a very exciting moment," Chernyshenko says, "as the drawings and sketches of the Olympic Park are becoming a reality – I remember the same in London a few years ago."

That process is developing at an extraordinary rate. Speaking at the end of May, Chernyshenko describes Sochi as "the biggest building site in the world" with over 50,000 construction workers pushing on into the closing stages. "We're well on track," says Chernyshenko. "Up to 70 per cent of not only competition venues but related infrastructure such as power stations, sewage systems and roads that will be done by the end of this year."

A total of 74 different test events should ensure that Sochi is well prepared for the biggest fortnight in winter sport, but Chernyshenko has long been looking beyond that date. "The legacy was the key aspect of our successful bidding campaign," he says, "because it would be unforgivable and even stupid to make such an enormous effort and spend such resources – and one resource is unrecoverable, which is time – just for two weeks of even the biggest celebration and sporting competition. Of course everything we do is about legacy."

On a national level, Chernyshenko is keen to stress the opportunities created by hosting the Games, not least as a lightning rod for social campaigns, stimulating a volunteer culture in Russia and "creating in Sochi a model city for those with disabilities" to prompt a wave of improvements in attitudes and facilities across the country. Still, it will be Sochi itself which should see the greatest benefits. Chernyshenko sees the bipartite Games site, typical for winter hosts, as ideal for showing off "a Mediterranean-style resort where the sea meets the high mountains and the highest mountain in Europe is just 150km away."

"Usually in the winter Games," he explains, "there are two clusters which are very

separated and you have to choose whether to stay in the mountains or in the indoor locations because it is really time consuming to go in and out. But here, you can literally go skiing in the mountains and then go and swim in the water – it's very, very close and very efficient, 30 minutes by rail."

The long-term viability of the Sochi development was further enhanced when it was confirmed as the future site of the Russian Grand Prix, ending a near 30-year campaign by Bernie Ecclestone to bring Formula One to the country. With Russian sponsorship interest in the series growing by the year and a US\$40 million annual race fee on offer, Sochi promises to be just as important to Formula One. The roads around the Olympic complex will be adapted to create a circuit which will debut in 2014 – or 2015, if preparations for the Games dictate – and remain on the calendar until at least 2020.

"When the Games is over," Chernyshenko says, "it will be the right time to launch Sochi as a destination. One of the most interesting things and the benefits for me and the organising committee is that Formula One will utilise the infrastructure, like the pit buildings, built for the Games. This is an interesting synergy between the two projects."



FARMERS FIELD

LOS ANGELES, USA

> At the time of writing, it remains unclear whether the NFL will resolve its ongoing labour dispute in time for the scheduled start of the 2011 season. What is certain, however, is that Los Angeles will complete its 17th year without a professional football team, a barren spell beset by quarrels between the proponents of ultimately inadequate stadium projects.

Slated for completion in 2015, Farmers Field is the latest attempt to create a home fit to house replacements for the long-departed Rams and Raiders. Backed by Casey Wasserman and AEG's Tim Leiweke, the 68,000 capacity venue – expandable to 78,000 for major events such as the Super Bowl – would be sited next to the Staples Center. Its construction would be dovetailed to a major schedule of improvements to the ageing Los Angeles Convention Center. With California's public finances stretched some way beyond their limit, the US\$1 billion project would be entirely privately funded, with as much as US\$600 million reportedly coming from the 30-year naming rights deal already agreed with Farmers Insurance.

The NFL has a chequered past in Los Angeles, but the continuing appeal of

placing a franchise in America's second-biggest media market is patently obvious. LA boasts one of the best teams in college football in the shape of the USC Trojans, while their rivals UCLA also boast a healthy following and manage a generous contribution of players to the professional game. Hollywood royalty routinely congregates at the Staples Center to pay homage to the Lakers, who have picked up 11 NBA championships since moving to LA in 1960. Their counterparts in the NHL and MLS have achieved nothing like that kind of success, but the LA Kings and LA Galaxy still shifted merchandising units worldwide after securing the signings of Wayne Gretzky and David Beckham respectively.

The benefits to Los Angeles of an NFL return are just as self-evident. Those behind Farmers Field estimate that it can deliver between 20,000 and 30,000 temporary and permanent jobs, as well as US\$1.9 billion in output and US\$378 million in direct expenditure in the city. They also claim that it could stimulate as much as US\$3 billion in additional investment in downtown development projects.

Most intriguing of all, however, is the

involvement of Farmers Insurance at such an early stage in the project. The sale of naming rights is an increasingly ubiquitous feature of all modern stadium development, even in markets such as Europe which have traditionally been hostile to the practice, but prospective partners are usually more circumspect. Across the country in New York, for example, no suitable partner has yet been found for the high-profile and corporate-friendly New Meadowlands stadium.

There are other factors in play which make the deal appear a shrewd one on all sides. Developers Majestic Realty Company have concocted a rival US\$800 million proposal, The Los Angeles Football Stadium in City of Industry, and the commitment of Farmers Insurance may give Wasserman and AEG the kind of commercial clout their rivals currently lack. In return, Farmers Insurance have the opportunity to attach their name to a popular civic campaign in Los Angeles – which will attract the interest of a national audience – years before the proposed stadium opens. It will be interesting to see how their role develops – a test case, perhaps, even given a unique set of circumstances.

TIANJIN EQUINE CULTURE CITY

TIANJIN, CHINA

There are few single venue projects in the world today quite as bold as Tianjin Equine Culture City (TECC). It is ambitious on a scale that converts handily into raw figures. The 3.3 million square metre development in northern China will cost US\$4 billion, with the initial US\$2 billion phase expected to be completed by 2015. An estimated 200 million to 300 million people are estimated to be capable of reaching the venue and its surrounding entertainment and leisure complex by high-speed train. It is hoped the complex will go some way towards exploiting the enormous potential of horse racing and equestrianism in what is now the world's second biggest economy.

TECC will be the product of a new joint venture, Hua Zhi Jie Horse Industries, which will be based in Tianjin. One half of the partnership is the Tianjin State Farm Agribusiness Group, a giant conglomerate with interests ranging from food production to turf farming to property development. The other is a name more familiar to those in horse racing: the International Equine Group is the investment arm of Meydan Group and TAK Design, developers of Dubai's mammoth Meydan Racecourse.

Where the creation of Meydan Racecourse

in the Arabian desert was an extraordinary example of man's capacity, given adequate resources, to transform his environment, TECC is a response to an entirely different set of challenges. The US\$4 billion project is intended to create a permanent revolution in Chinese sport. Alongside courses fit to stage world-class races, it will provide everything required to nourish a fully fledged equine sports industry. There will be facilities in place to train 8,000 riders, breed 1,000 top-class studs, produce high-quality horse feed, hold auctions and host education programmes where the public can learn about the animals and the sport.

With the exception of the world-famous Happy Valley racecourse in the former British colony of Hong Kong, horse racing is new to modern China. Banned by Mao Zedong in 1949, the sport only began to reappear as a spectacle in the late 1990s. It was fully legalised in 2008, at the same time as measures were taken to liberalise the state-controlled gambling markets. Only a handful of major racecourses have so far appeared, with the Orient Lucky City course at Wuhan chief among them. The kind of conspicuous consumption represented by projects as lavish as TECC would once also have been

suppressed by the Communist authorities, but as is evidenced by the increasing resemblance of China's major cities to those in the west and in other eastern powerhouses, that too is changing.

The progress of TECC, then, should provide a fascinating insight into how international practices are reconciled with the vagaries of Chinese culture under what remains a hugely domineering government. Certainly, the comments of Meydan chairman and chief executive Saeed Humaid Al Tayer at last November's signing ceremony were revealing.

"Meydan's success since its launch and its continued growth potential makes it an excellent model to replicate in a burgeoning economy such as China," he said. "It is a significant partnership and we are very bullish about the growth prospects presented there. We hope to lend our expertise and extensive experience in positioning horse racing, so that it not only promotes the sport, but supports its related industries and provides viable economic returns to the people of China, at the same time allowing horse racing to be seen as a prestigious sport, and a symbol for luxury, lifestyle and culture."