



**JOMEC Journal**  
Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

## **Eddie Butler's Olympic Diary**

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## Eddie Butler's Olympic diary

*As a rugby match commentator, journalist and broadcaster, Eddie Butler is the voice of many memorable sporting moments.*

*After captaining the Wales Rugby Union team between 1980-1984 and winning 16 caps, he joined the BBC in Cardiff in 1984 as press and publicity officer for Radio Wales until 1988. He then became rugby correspondent of the Sunday Correspondent until 1990, moving to The Observer in 1991.*

*In that same year he was invited back to BBC Wales to do broadcasting work for BBC Network (London) and continues to make programmes today.*

*The BBC capitalised on his commentary work for major international rugby games, dispatching him to Athens in 2004 and Beijing in 2008 to cover archery as part of their broadcasting team for both Olympic Games.*

*For London 2012 Eddie again made up part of the BBC Olympics coverage team, commentating again on archery, but also producing wide-ranging broadcast packages and newspaper articles, as well as the final Review of the Games TV programme, which he researched, scripted and voiced.*

*This article is a day-by-day account of his journalism work during this exciting time.*



**Eddie Butler at Cardiff  
University in 2010**

## **Tuesday July 24, 2012**

Travel to London by train: Abergavenny-Paddington. Find to my surprise a BBC car waiting for me, the one and only time I will have the luxury of a driver.

Paddington to Waterloo in style and check into the Union Jack, a hotel next door to the station, that usually caters for serving personnel of the armed forces. A bit less stylish, but home for the next 10 days. Head to Lord's to validate accreditation, a plasticated card on a lanyard, without which life at the Olympics is impossible.

Bump into members of the Dyfed-Powys police who have been rushed into Olympic duty because of the G4S meltdown. They are chirpy but have little to do.

Have a look at the archery venue and head east, still in posh car, to the International Broadcast Centre (IBC) at Stratford, within the Olympic Park. The Olympic lanes are not yet open and we are soon stuck in traffic. Fears of transport chaos still abound.

At the BBC section of the vast IBC, where all the rights-holding broadcasters of the world have their offices, am given a list of features to write, stand-by 'fillers', I suspect. Will start on them tomorrow.

Back to Waterloo on the tube. Easy journey.

## **Wednesday July 25, 2012**

Report for duty at the IBC and settle down to write the one-minute mini features on heroes of former Games.

This includes: Kerri Strugg (US gymnast, injured in competition), Jesse Owens, Peter Norman (Aussie sprinter who won silver between Tommy Smith and John Carlos in 1968, 200 metres... the Black Power salute), Lawrence Lemieux (Canadian sailor who stopped

to rescue a competitor in distress), John Akhwari (1968 Tanzanian marathon runner who finished despite injury), Eric the Eel Mussambani (Equatorial Guinea swimmer), Derek Redmond (finished 400 metres held up by his dad), Zola Budd and Mary Decker (1984 duel).

Each is 100-120 words, but the process of compressing words and telling the story is time-consuming. Am finishing when the producer of the BBC3 show asks me to script a 'closer' for that night, based on 'London, nearly there...'

### **Thursday July 26, 2012**

At IBC. Finish off the mini features with USA-USSR basketball 1972, Shun Fujimoto (Japanese gymnast) and a longer piece on the Munich massacre of 1972. It's the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and there's a bit of a scramble to have something ready.

Also tinker with the script of 'The Dangerous Idea', a longer item on the science of eugenics and Darwinism and the survival of the fittest, and can they explain the dominance of black sprinters, the descendants of slaves?

Before the Games, I had also scripted pieces on Tom Daley, Usain Bolt, Michael Phelps and Paula Radcliffe, perhaps for other people to read. Matthew Pinsent, for instance, will do the Bolt piece for the opening show on Friday night.

I lay down the voice on the minis, the Dangerous Idea and the other three pieces, still thinking that most will stay on the shelf...

### **Friday July 27, 2012**

Waterloo-St John's Wood on the Jubilee Line. Smooth. The trains flow.

The archery ranking round at Lord's. Sixty-four archers per gender line up on the Nursery Ground and shoot 72 arrows in order to sort themselves into a seeding list. In the Olympic rounds there will be straight 15-arrow knock-out, seed 1 playing seed 64, seed 2 against 63 etc.

The ranking rounds go on for hours and it all sort of looks after itself, although I am there with Liz Mynott, my co-commentator for the next week, an archery authority and the most important person in my life right now.

That night I go to Blackheath – my wife is working at the equestrian events at nearby Greenwich Park – and we watch the opening ceremony on the big screen on the Heath. Some 10,000 people are there.

### **Saturday July 28, 2012**

The start of competition proper. Lord's is packed. I have been archery commentator at the last two Games, in Athens and Beijing, but what I know could be written on the head of an arrow.

Thanks to Red Button television, we have to provide commentary on every arrow shot over the next seven days. It is the men's team event and is won in rousing fashion when Michele Frangilli of Italy lands a maximum 10 with the last arrow to beat the USA.

I finish the commentary and write a quick piece for the *Observer*. Not too long because the British team were beaten in the first round by Ukraine.

### **Sunday July 29, 2012**

The women's team event. Out go the British team in the first round, perfectly in synch with the mood of these opening days... Britain are not exactly excelling.

Korea beat China by a single point in the final. Rousing stuff but the *Guardian* require even less. Archery is not grabbing the headlines.

### **Monday July 30, 2012**

Larry Godfrey surges through two rounds in rapid order to the last 16, but in general this is a long day of whittling down the field in the individual competitions.

It rains and the technicians rush out to cover everything on the exposed top tier of the pavilion at Lord's.

Everything, that is, bar the commentators.

### **Tuesday 31 July, 2012**

Have to do a live piece for *Breakfast* television from Lord's, previewing the day ahead and trying to raise hopes of some British success.

Alison Williamson goes out in the first round, Naomi Folkard in the second. In the lunchbreak I have to do 'Country of the Day' for the *Guardian*, and find myself in the MCC committee room doing some quick research on... Bhutan.

Another long day at the bows and arrows.

### **Wednesday August 1, 2012**

Alan Wills goes out in the first round, Simon Terry in the second. Amy Oliver knocks out the reigning world number 1, Deepika Kumari of India, but goes out in the second round.

The red button grinds on and the networks come over live to Lord's with less and less enthusiasm.

### **Thursday August 2, 2012**

The end is in sight. The women's individual will quickly head for the medals today.

Alongside us in the television positions are two Mexicans, whose day job back home is commentating on bullfighting. Here, they are ecstatic about the progress of Aida Roman and Mariana Avitia and are giving archery the full Mexican treatment. Brilliant.

Aida eventually wins silver and Mariana bronze. The girls take phone calls from the President and are jumping for joy. The commentators too are celebrating Mexico's first ever archery medals.

Meanwhile, in the press conference, the gold medalist, Ki Bo Bae of Korea is weeping and apologising to her country for winning with an 8.

### **Friday August 3, 2012**

Last day of competition and great excitement first up as Larry Godfrey takes on Khairul Anuar Mohamad of Malaysia. They step out of the pavilion at 0900 and ten minutes later Larry is back inside, beaten.

It goes to the last arrow but it is the end of a disappointing week for British archery. Loss of funding worries all the archers who gather in the Tavern to discuss the way ahead.

Oh Jin Hyek of Korea wins gold and confirms he is the boyfriend of Ki Bo Bae.

I go from the end of the archery – it's all over at Lord's – to the IBC to write and voice a package on Katherine Grainger, gold medalist at last in the double sculls, for Gabby Logan's highlights show.

### **Saturday August 4, 2012**

Check out of the Union Jack and head east to Newbury Park. It is beyond Stratford, so deep into East London that it feels like Copenhagen should be the next stop on the Central Line. I do not hasten back to the IBC but eventually turn up.

This is the start of a new life, of sitting in the air-conditioned windowless box. I love it there. No, I mean it – the Olympics is all around, on screens, live feeds from just about every venue. There is a kettle.

### **Sunday August 5, 2012**

Katherine Grainger comes into the BBC office and comes over to me. We have never met. 'You're the bastard that made me cry', she says. 'I was holding it all together really well, until I saw your piece. I am totally chuffed.

I do a package on the pommel horse and Louis Smith for the highlights show.

### **Monday August 6, 2012**

I sit in my new home and do pieces on Phillips Idowu, the missing triple jumper; Dai Greene and David Hemery, 400 metre hurdlers; and Beth Tweddle, bronze medalist and pathfinder in the gymnastics.

I am told to relax but start thinking about the *Review*, our wrap-up of the Games to be shown at a time and in chunks yet to be confirmed.

### **Tuesday August 7, 2012**

I am still relaxing when I find three producers and three VT editors sort of hovering around me. They want words for the *Review*. Without them nothing can start.

Three parts, amounting to one hour and to go out before the closing ceremony, have been commissioned. I start scribbling and manage to give each – Team GB, the World, the London Experience – an opening paragraph each. Something to be going on with.

I do a little something extra on Tom Daley and on the farewells at the velodrome to Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton.

### **Wednesday August 8, 2012**

The *Review* is now consuming me. I feel no urge to go out and see anything 'live. I live in my box trying to absorb all that is going on.

As well as the *Review*, I am asked to write some in-vision links for Sue Barker, who will be presenting the DVD box-set of the Games. I wonder what tense to use. Tenses are always tricky, but the good thing about television is that you can usually avoid them. Talking in phrases...

### **Thursday August 9, 2012**

The *Review*. Team GB keep on winning medals. I ask the World if they'd mind losing a couple of minutes and giving them to Team GB. They look relieved.

I have written about the great duel between China and the USA at the top of the medals table and accessing the material is causing them grief. I run away and go to Getty Images, the home of stills photography. We have done a piece on their favourite shots of the Games and I just pop in to say thanks. They are v. v. busy.

### **Friday August 10, 2012**

I am sort of winding down. The three edit suites doing the *Review* are going the other way, cranking up the pace, fighting the clock, fraying the nerves.

I do a little piece on archery for the BBC website and keep an eye on the medal table. The rowing and cycling are over but the medals still come in. Dressage is suddenly a national sport.

### **Saturday August 11, 2012**

We replace the guide track for the three parts of the *Review* with the finished voice, with an option to make changes right up to transmission on Sunday.

I sneak off to go back to Copenhagen (Newbury Park) to watch Usain Bolt & Co in the 4 x 100 relay and Mo Farah in the 5000 metres at 1930. I lie down in my room and the next thing I know it is Sunday morning.

### **Sunday August 12, 2012**

We add the modern pentathlon to the Team GB section and the edit suites burn away. One by one they declare themselves satisfied, finished, done.

The senior editors and producers come in to review the *Review*. In the past they have asked for a few tweaks here and there, but this time not a word is said. Everyone watches and there is an eerie silence.

I go out and buy beers, stick them in a brown bag and sneak past reception. We watch the transmission in one of the edit suites. We clink plastic bottles at the end and feel the first pang... that after this there will be a large hole in our lives.

**This article was first published in *JOMEC Journal***

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ISSN: ISSN 2049-2340

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