

# Britain Gets Set To Stage Universiade '91

### World Student Games Prepares for Sheffield Showpiece

by Piers Newbery  
photos by Glyn Kirk

*Universiade '91 - also known as The World Student Games - will be held in Sheffield in 1991. It will be the biggest sporting event ever staged in Britain with over 6,000 participants from 130 countries. Eleven sports will be represented - athletics, swimming, diving, gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, fencing, tennis, football, water polo and field hockey.*

"Nowt like it in my day" agreed the old man gazing into the complex concrete array rising rapidly from below. He was one of the many dog walkers, shoppers and BMX-ers that stop and stare from the pedestrian walkway over Ponds Forge in Sheffield - Britain's fourth largest city. Situated close to the railway station and the city centre it is the most conspicuous sign of Sheffield's intense preparations for the World Student Games in 1991 - or to give them their official title Universiade '91.

The Ponds Forge complex will include Olympic, Leisure and Diving Pools and a Sports Hall and represents just a part of the £110 million now being invested in new sporting facilities throughout the city as Sheffield lays claim to become Britain's sporting capital.

Perched high on the hill above Ponds Forge like a forboding medieval fortress sits another essential part of Sheffield's 1991 commitment. Built in the sixties to rave architectural reviews, the Hyde Park Flats became disliked and neglected by their residents. Now lying mostly empty, the flats are being refurbished and transformed into the central games village.



In addition to providing a range of facilities, the village will house the 6,000 competitors and officials for the 15-day duration of the games.

The biennial World Student Games or Universiade as it's officially called has been growing steadily over its 30 year history. This reflects the increased importance of student sport worldwide in recent years. Many countries, USA being a

prime example, rely on the college system to provide them with their future sporting elite.

In 1989, however, Universiade had a bit of a hiccup as Sao Paulo, suffering from immense financial and organisational problems withdrew from holding the Games at short notice. The West German industrial city of Duisburg stepped in with only five months to go and did a great job of hosting the games albeit with a restricted sporting menu.

Sheffield and the Universiade 1991 organisers - Universiade GB Ltd (UGBL) see that it is vitally important to make the 1991 games the largest and most successful ever, both for the prestige for the city



of Sheffield and for the continued well being of world student sport. "In truth, the 1989 games were a bit of an anticlimax" admitted Peter Burns, chief executive of UGBL. "The onus is fully on Sheffield to keep going the building process of the Universiade."

Burns headed a substantial delegation to Duisburg, "This was to learn about the particular problems of putting on such a large event and to increase the profile of Sheffield in peoples

minds" he explained "my main feelings from Duisburg were how worthwhile the games really are. I found the freshness and commitment of all the competitors most stimulating. It is most important that inefficiencies and log jams in organisational do not deflate the essential spirit of the games.

Duisburg's handling of the games at such short notice was impressive and it humbles me

to think that we have another two years to get it exactly right."

The Sheffield event will be unique in that it will be the first Universiade to be organised and run on the commercial lines made famous by the Los Angeles Olympics. Burns sees students as being a crucial attraction to sponsors: "The international and growing graduate shortage means there has never been so many businesses interested in student talent. The Universiade will give both local and multinational companies a golden opportunity for mass exposure to the skilled youth market."

Universiade '91 has had a dramatic impact on Sheffield's

university and polytechnic - with over 68,000 students applying for 6,000 places this year as everyone wants to be part of the Games.

As important as the sporting side is the festival that comes with the Universiade "In some ways it is more important!" claims an enthusiastic Festival director, Ferelith Lean. She cannot wait to get going on what will be England's "biggest and best" festival that year. "1991 should only be a start" she elaborated, "We hope that the festival will continue annually and be a legacy long after the games have gone. My most immediate task will be to find out what Sheffield will find appealing since 50 per cent of the audience will be local. If the people of Sheffield do not become involved then I will have failed. Personally I can't think of anything better after a tense day of sport than to relax with some live festival entertainment, can you?"

Caribbean carnivals, Asian film festivals, disabled arts events, bridge clubs and Inland Waterways are amongst the groups that are hoping to improve their lot in association with the Games.

From making sure that the Chinese gymnasts know where the training facilities are to wiping the sweat off the basketball court, the volunteer will be an integral member of the Sheffield Universiade. The Universiade's recruitment drive has been described as the third greatest this century after World



Wars I and II. "Volunteers are important because they represent tangible evidence of the host city's desire to do all it can do to make the event a success" explained Simon Hampton, senior project manager for volunteer recruitment "Our main aim is to involve all sections of the community."

Hampton estimates that there could be as many as 7,000 volunteers needed to work in the 30 event centres "We will obtain volunteers by preparing a high profile recruitment campaign to commence in the latter part of 1990. Much of the campaign will be directed at college, schools and community groups. As a specific example, we will need over 110 people speaking a total of 34 languages. This will require targeting of universities and language schools for linguists.

"Each role will be carefully defined by us and the volunteer will be given any additional training that is required. All volunteers will have their performance appraised and

therefore gain feed back from what we hope will be a rare and invaluable experience of a lifetime for them."

It is the general policy of the International University Sports Federation (FISU) who are the international custodians of the Games to give the Universiade to cities that genuinely appreciate them. Sheffield is no exception, the games are seen by many as a catalyst for people working to improve the city, as part of a massive urban regeneration scheme. In environmental terms it provides the perfect opportunity to redevelop areas such as the Don Valley where the new athletics stadium is being constructed, Britain's largest new stadium since Wembley was built.

With the games coming to Sheffield, the people of Britain will be able to feel the power and scale of collegiate sport and see students and student sport throughout the world all benefit from Universiade '91 - will you be there?



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