June 29 2012: busy shoppers at Westfield Stratford City pause to admire views of the Olympic Park.

Award-winning photographer Simon Roberts will be taking exclusive images for FT Weekend Magazine throughout the Olympics. Previously the official Election Artist during the 2010 general election, he has now been accredited by the IOC to take an alternative look at the Games. Overleaf, Simon introduces this unique project.

IT ALL STARTS HERE

SIMON ROBERTS’ OLYMPICS
On Wednesday July 6, 2005, the day London won the bid to stage the 2012 Olympics, I was in Moscow. I watched the scenes of jubilation on a grainy television screen and the next day I flew back to the UK after a year living in Russia. I only learnt about the 7/7 terrorist attacks as we sat on the tarmac at Heathrow, unable to disembark.

The significance of that momentous week has scarcely diminished. Here we are now, at the outset of the Games, confronted by many of the same cultural and political preoccupations. Since returning home, I’ve been working on photographic explorations of contemporary Britain. Now, having been granted access to photograph the Olympics by the International Olympic Committee, I’m aiming to produce a series of photographs that are not focused solely on the sporting spectacle itself. To me, the drama is not just Usain Bolt crossing the finishing line but the alternative, often overlooked, stories: photographs of how we congregate, how such a complex logistical exercise is staged, the assertion of national identities and the backdrop of the changing British landscape. Probably no other event since the end of the war has affected so many lives in London.

I have tried to enter into the spirit of the Games myself. I have spent the past six months in training (well, I’ve joined a gym for the first time in years) and decamped from my Brighton home to live in student digs in the capital in order to be fully immersed in the Olympic experience. Like so many, I’m looking forward to watching the world’s best athletes (including Wiggo) compete on home turf. The countdown that began seven years ago is now over – in fact, it’s likely that, as you read this, the first gold medal of the Games will have been awarded (at the women’s 10m air rifle final) and sporting history will already be in the making.

---

February 17 2012: security boats carry out checks along a tranquil River Lea as building work continues on the Olympic stadium.

July 19 2012: members of the army brought in to help protect the Games take a tour of the Olympic Park.

To see more images, go to ft.com/simonroberts

Next week: Simon Roberts presents photos from week one of the Games.

simonroberts.com
BRING ME MY BOW
Exclusive Olympics photographs
by Simon Roberts
SPECTATOR SPORT

It’s London, but not as we know it. The Olympics, as seen in these exclusive images by Simon Roberts, renew the entire city. Introduction by Simon Kuper
Central London

July 26 • Spectators await to photograph the Olympic Torch procession as it travelled south over the Millennium Bridge. The torch was carried on this leg by Ade Adepitan, wheelchair basketball Paralympian.

Athletes’ Village, Stratford

July 26 • Team GB’s accommodation block, which has prime views over the Olympic Park. In the foreground is an outdoor food area for athletes that includes Coca-Cola drinks dispensers. The Coca-Cola Company sponsored the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam and has supported every Olympic Games since.

The Serpentine, Hyde Park

July 26 • Members of the public go boating and swim in the Serpentine lake in the shadow of the Olympics spectator stand. The men’s and women’s triathlon and marathon swimming events will be held here.

Athletes’ Village, Stratford

July 26 • A single bed, with Olympic bed cover and towels, in a shared room. After the teams leave the village the fittings from the Games will be removed and the apartments will be fitted with kitchens, to create 2,818 new homes, for both buyers and tenants, in what will be known as East Village.

Olympic Stadium, Stratford

July 27 • Danny Boyle’s depiction of the Industrial Revolution during the “Isles of Wonder” segment of the Olympic opening ceremony. The four-hour event ended with a fireworks display.
I live in Paris, and on July 6 2005, the day the host of these Olympics was chosen, I stood in the crowd outside the Hôtel de Ville expecting to see my new hometown get the nod. Instead, London won, and the assembled Parisians sighed briefly before disappearing into the 2011 department store for a spot of retail therapy. I was briefly disappointed too. But now I am thankful that London was named host. These Games are deepening and enriching my understanding of a city that I thought I knew. I lived in London for 15 years, but I'm now seeing it as if for the first time.

On the day of the opening ceremony I happened to have a meeting in Marylebone, 300m from my old shared flat above a now defunct off-licence. I ran to Baker Street Tube, as I've done a thousand times before. Then I got on a media bus to the ceremony, passing Southwark Bridge and the FT building where I used to work in the 1990s. It was like a dream: you move through a familiar landscape that has been transformed, in this case for the Olympics. Danny Boyle’s “Isles of Wonder” opening ceremony helped turn the Games into a reflection on London and Britain. The next day, after four hours' sleep, I got up and rushed around: from the cycling on the Mall to the beach volleyball just next door, then to the football at Wembley, and even to play about the Berlin Olympics of 1936 at Sadler’s Wells theatre. It’s been crazy, invigorating, exhausting and unforgettable.

Sometimes that’s thanks to the athletes. When the hitherto unknown Yorkshire cyclist Lizzie Armitstead wandered into the press conference with the first British medal of the Games (a silver), and began politely explaining to the waiting nation why she was a vegetarian (she doesn’t like eating corpses), you felt joy at seeing a nice person become a national heroine in an instant. But what I like best about these Games is the voyage of discovery through London.

Simon Roberts’ pictures capture that voyage. The usual version of sport we get in the newspapers is the action photo: a long-lens picture of the athlete crossing the tape, or beaming with his medal. The action photo is designed to elicit an instant “Wow!”, although it doesn’t always, because over the decades it has become a cliché. Roberts does something different: he uses the Olympics to photograph London and England.

There have been a million photographs of Big Ben. Most are cheap postcards. Photographing any London landmark in a fresh way is almost impossible, but that is what Roberts achieves here. Shooting from the stands at the beach volleyball or Horse Guards Parade, he treats the athletes as mere foreground. Because Big Ben appears off-centre in the background, almost as if it had happened to wander into the shot, we can see it anew. Seeing London during these Games, we rediscover the beauty of a place that we know too well to see.
Box Hill, Surrey
July 29 • Athletes in the women’s cycling road race pass cheering crowds as they ascend the hill. British cyclist Lizzie Armitstead went on to win silver, the first medal of the Games for Team GB.
North Greenwich Arena (left) July 30 • The family of Team GB gymnast Kristian Thomas celebrate as the men’s artistic gymnastics team secure the bronze medal, their first medal for 100 years.

Olympic Broadcasting Services (right) July 28 • All the sports TV coverage for the Olympics is done on behalf of the IOC by OBS, using increasingly sophisticated equipment to cover the sports from every conceivable angle. The OBS staff seen here are covering events at the Aquatics Centre.

Aquatics Centre, Stratford (left) July 28 • Swimmers warm up in the Olympic pool before the evening session of races, which saw Ryan Lochte take gold in the men’s 400m individual medley. Fellow American Michael Phelps finished fourth and 16-year-old Ye Shiwen of China broke the world record in the women’s 400m individual medley.

Greenwich Park (right) July 30 • Spectators watch from above, with Canary Wharf in the backdrop, as riders in the equestrian individual eventing tackle the cross-country course.

Next week

Simon Roberts presents photos from week two of the Games.

To see all of Simon’s images from the Games, go to ft.com/simonroberts
Don’t want it to end? Exclusive images by Simon Roberts capture the 30th Olympiad in action.

RIGHT ON TRACK
As the world’s fastest men sprint for the medals, Matthew Engel spares a thought for the hopefuls.

The final was over the moment the semi-finals had run. Gatlin, Bolt and Blake were the victors. One of them would win the Olympic title in the final of the situation, running within himself. No new, breaking accidents. He knew. And we knew he knew.

Eight men ran out of the field. Three-thousand fans looked at the first race: then Asafa Powell, third Jamaican and former world record holder,.pdf

The season opener at the Olympic Games -- the triple jump, the heptpt, the discus, the 200 and 400 meter hurdles, the 200m -- was somewhat of a letdown. Nothing could be simpler than the 100m. Nothing could have been more inane. Hard to imagine there is a element of suspense against each other to see who will win.---strength and speed does not come across in a true sense.

The island has fewer than three million people, but the tradition of sprinting is one long, dating back to the days of Sir Henry and those of the British Empire. And there is no doubt the British Empire won.

The final was over the moment the semi-finals had run. Gatlin, Bolt and Blake were the victors. One of them would win the Olympic title in the final of the situation, running within himself. No new, breaking accidents. He knew. And we knew he knew.

Eight men ran out of the field. Three-thousand fans looked at the first race: then Asafa Powell, third Jamaican and former world record holder,.pdf

The season opener at the Olympic Games -- the triple jump, the heptpt, the discus, the 200 and 400 meter hurdles, the 200m -- was somewhat of a letdown. Nothing could be simpler than the 100m. Nothing could have been more inane. Hard to imagine there is a element of suspense against each other to see who will win.---strength and speed does not come across in a true sense.

The island has fewer than three million people, but the tradition of sprinting is one long, dating back to the days of Sir Henry and those of the British Empire. And there is no doubt the British Empire won.

Con its victory at the Olympic Games -- the triple jump, the heptpt, the discus, the 200 and 400 meter hurdles, the 200m -- was somewhat of a letdown. Nothing could be simpler than the 100m. Nothing could have been more inane. Hard to imagine there is a element of suspense against each other to see who will win.---strength and speed does not come across in a true sense.

The island has fewer than three million people, but the tradition of sprinting is one long, dating back to the days of Sir Henry and those of the British Empire. And there is no doubt the British Empire won.
Flag Team Staging Area (left) August 8 Kirigami looking up ahead for a medal ceremony during the swimming finals at the Aquatics Centre. The flag bearers for the ceremonies are drawn from the British armed forces.

The Serpentine, Hyde Park (right) August 8 - The women’s 10km canoe sprint race of the Paralympics at the Serpentine. The race is the only event to take place outside of the Olympic Park. The race is a race against time and is open to the public.
Eton Dorney, Eton Dorney
August 11Mothers in the men’s lightweight four
make their way to the start line for the semi-final. The British four, in the yellow boat, came third in the race, taking them through to the final. One day later, where they finished fifth.

Westfield, Eton Dorney
August 11Crowds watch on a big screen at one of the corporate hospitality venues as they listened to the edge of the Olympic Park. The shopping centre is the site of the Olympic Park with more than 80 per cent of spectators passing through an entrance to the various venues.

Olympic Stadium, Eton Dorney
August 11Eton Dorney buckled to the men’s seven semifinal. The British team had done well, but their performance was always going to be more significant than his. It was as if they had been given the first dose of thisnop in the Olympics.
THE UNFORGETTABLE GAMES

In the final instalment of his exclusive images from the Olympics, Simon Roberts chooses some of his favourites
Mo Farah's moment

August 11, Olympic Park, Stratford
Mo Farah celebrates with the crowd after winning the 10,000m, following his win in the 5,000m earlier that day.

Daley's dives (left)

August 11, Aquatics Centre, Stratford
Tom Daley of Team GB competes in the men's 10m platform diving. He went on to win a bronze medal in the event.

Effort and exhaustion

August 11, The Mall, central London
At the end of the men's 50km race walk, Chisung Park (Republic of Korea) is helped by London 2012 staff. Park finished 13th, one place ahead of Ivan Tregolov (Kazakhstan), seen to the left of the picture. The race was won by Russia's Sergey Kirdyapkin in 3:35:59.
Pride of Team GB (right)
August 5. Olympic blockbuster: Jessica Ennis, poster girl for the London Olympics, set a personal best in the heptathlon sprints on the opening day of athletics, taking her to pole position in the competition. Ennis went on to win gold.

Simon Roberts is releasing a limited-edition print from his series of Olympic photographs. For more information, go to www.simonroberts.com. For a slideshow of more of Simon’s favourite images from the Games, plus his three previous instalments, go to www.ft.com/simonrobertsolympics