Illegal betting, often backed by organised crime, is the most serious threat faced by sport. That was the message from Risto Nieminen, World Lottery Association (WLA) President, speaking at the SportAccord Convention yesterday. “This is much more dangerous than doping for the future of sport,” he said. “It undermines the ‘fair play’ platform for all sports. Behind it you have organised crime which is really trying to get hold of sport.” “This is not over-reacting.” To counter the threat, SportAccord has partnered with the WLA and the European Lotteries industry association to launch the Global Sports Betting Integrity Education Programme. The aim is raise awareness among athletes and officials about the dangers of match-fixing and other illegal betting scams. It would help international federations comply with recommendations adopted by the IOC in 2010, and with the Common Standards on Sports Integrity in Relation to Sports Betting released by SportAccord last year.

Trio for justice: Hein Verbruggen, flanked by Lotteries chief Nieminen (right) and Stickler.

“The Sports Betting Integrity Education Programme is about minimising risk and reducing reputation damage,” said Hein Verbruggen, President of SportAccord. “We are confronted with a global phenomenon.” Friedrich Strüder, President of European Lotteries, added his own warning. “Sport is really in danger,” he said. “The problem is much bigger than most of us believed. The danger is global. It is not in the hands of the state any more. It must be treated as a global issue.”

If you had a good week at the SportAccord Convention, then thank our co-host London & Partners. The organisation has been re-branded and brought under the direct control of the office of Mayor Boris Johnson and given a remit to make London the preferred choice for business, tourism and study. “Now, the new international promotional agency is perfectly set with the direct backing of the Mayor’s office,” said Iain Edmondson, Head of Major Events (pictured with colleagues). “We will be aiming to maximise the impact of the Olympic Games in London, to build on them, and we have a remit to attract major events long into the future.” He added: “The SportAccord Convention has been well received and I have no doubt that it will lead to more business for London.”

2014 Winter Olympics host Sochi announced plans for a series of cultural activities in London during next year’s Summer Games, at the SportAccord Convention yesterday. The Russian organisers aim to introduce Londoners and Games visitors to their city by staging sport and cultural performances at the Marble Arch landmark. To be called Sochi World, the event will centre on an ice-rink, to be used for shows and masterclasses by Russian figure-skating stars. The sporting dimension will be complemented with cultural events drawn from the many different Russian regions. There will also be a hospitality pavilion and interactive visitor experience.

REVEALED - SOCHI’S PLANS FOR LONDON

LONDON DESTINATION POWERHOUSE LAUNCHED
CALI CALLING FOR CLEAN SPORT

The perception of Colombia as the centre of the drug trade is a diminishing presence in the global consciousness. And sport is rejuvenating the image of the South American country says Pascual Guerrero, CEO of Cali World Games 2013.

IWGA AGREES GAMES CHANGES

IOC President Jacques Rogge will open the World Games in Cali in 2013, it was revealed at the International World Games Association (IWGA) World Games. It will be the first time a South American country has hosted the event.

Juan Manuel Santos, President of Colombia, said the event will be: “The most important multidisciplinary sport event of the year in Colombia and the world.”

Ron Froelich, President of IWGA, is excited by the prospect that the IWGA World Games will be stepping into new territory.

“I am sure Cali will stage the best World Games ever. We have seen how much expertise and passion the women and men in Cali are preparing for the event,” he said.

Cali 2013’s slogan – Fair play to the planet – is indicative of the city’s alignment to the international sporting community’s penchant for preserving environmental sustainability. And Froelich says: “It sets an example of how to live in harmony with the environment.”

Guerrero is confident that the city is well positioned to host such a prestigious event: “It’s a very big challenge, but one we will deliver.”

Security is also of high-importance for the Colombian-run event to be a success. The issue is one that has demonstrably changed thanks to the actions taken by President Alvaro Uribe and our new President Juan Manuel Santos.

“We have passed from being one of the most unsafe countries in Latin America to being one of the most visited. We can say today that Colombia is a peaceful country.”

LONDON 2012 ‘IS GOING TO BE BRILLIANT’

London 2012 will be the best Olympics yet, says the current World and European Heptathlon champion Jessica Ennis. Asked how it will compare to the previous Athens and Beijing Olympic Games, the British Heptathlete said: “It will be bigger and better – it’s just going to be brilliant.”

And London will not be the only beneficiary of the games’ unique spirit, Ennis explained yesterday at the SportAccord Convention.

“There’s already a great buzz around, and it’s not just in London – it’s around the whole country. Everyone can be a part of it.

“It creates a really nice environment, and it brings everyone together,” she explained, highlighting the galvanising effect the Olympics have on communities world-wide.

ATHLETICS TO PUSH INTO TELEVISION

The International Association of Athletics Federation’s (IAAF) partnership with IEC in Sports will provide a dynamic approach to propel the athletics industry into the television markets.

Lamine Diack, IAAF President said the partnership will: “Bring a breath of fresh air, expertise and passion to the vital job of selling the media rights to the IAAF’s top competitions in the key markets of Europe and Africa.”
LAUREUS LEADS IN HELPING TO BUILD FUTURE LEADERS

"We're now targeting the highest level, the European and world championships," says Simon Morton, head of major events for high-performance agency UK Sport. "We want to attract fewer but bigger events, stepping up from the current programme of working with a core set of events.

The organisation is approaching the end of its 2007-12 planning cycle and looking to change the strategic emphasis in 2013-18. "We're now in the busiest year of the present cycle, with a programme that includes the world championships for badminton, triathlon – both test events for the 2012 Olympics – and modern pentathlon," Morton says. "We expect that by the time of the Games we will have worked with about 40 of the 46 Olympic/Paralympic sports."

Looking beyond the Games, Morton reveals that UK Sport is bidding to host a total of five world or European championships between 2015 and 2017, and is offering venues in Glasgow, Strathclyde and the south of England, including London. "We want to exploit the 2012 infrastructure in a bid to establish the UK as the leading host for the biggest events," comments Morton.

Being able to show continuing reuse of the 2012 legacy in facilities and trained manpower is one of four measures of success that UK Sport plans to apply to the 2013-18 programme. The others relate to athlete performance, public engagement and economic benefits.

"There's a well established link between hosting and improved results from home athletes," comments Morton. "How well we have engaged will be indicated by things like spectator numbers, TV audiences and the subsequent emergence of development programmes."

UK Sport is redoubling its efforts to produce hard information on economic benefits. "We estimate that for every pound we have invested over the last few years about £5 has come back to the local host economy from visitor, athlete and other spending," says Morton. "In the present cycle gross benefits is expected to reach about £100 million on a total investment of £21 million."

POPULOUS CHARTS COURSE FROM LONDON TO NANJING

"SportAccord 2011 is of key importance in the run-up to the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics," says John Barrow, senior partner at Populous, this week's official architectural sponsor.

"Our architectural design, planning and event expertise has contributed to the success of many of London's sporting assets," he continues. "Now we're looking forward to playing our part in a truly memorable Olympic year and a milestone Decade of Sport to follow."

Highlights of the Populous portfolio include the London 2012 stadium, Wembley's new Centre Court, and the 2010 FIFA World Cup Fan Festivals in South Africa, and Wembleton's Centre Court. "Our latest project is the masterplan for the Nanjing 2014 Youth Olympic Games," says Barrow. "We're bringing together all our design skills and experience to create a new piece of city that will draw people together for a wonderful experience."
Wales aims to capitalise on Ryder success

Following its successful staging of the Ryder Cup last year, Wales has set its sights on becoming a major events player and is ready to invest for the privilege.

"We emerged from a tough spending review last November with an annual budget of £5 million for the next three years," says Arthur Emyr, former rugby international and head of major events for the Welsh Assembly Government. "We think that this, combined with the assets we bring to the staging of events, puts us in a very healthy competitive position in the UK and internationally."

Soccer, athletics and cricket are among the sports on Emyr's target list. "We're well placed to host events like the Champions League Final, the world half-marathon championships, and more big cricket matches to capitalise on our success with the 2009 Ashes test," he says.

Cardiff's Millennium Stadium has hosted matches between European national sides in the past and is seen as a perfect setting for the continent's top club competition. "The half-marathon distance fits very nicely inside a city like Cardiff, where the course can be designed to pass all the landmarks in one loop," says Emyr. "And we want to see more big cricket matches at Cardiff's Sophia Gardens. The 2009 test broke with a century of tradition, but it was a fabulous event and the doubters were won over."

With around three million inhabitants, Wales is a small nation. But Emyr sees that as a strength: "It means we can mobilise decision makers very quickly. Other pluses include the country's people, infrastructure and environment. "As a people, we're welcoming and informal, but with a very efficient operational approach," says Emyr. "Our recent events have worked very well, while also having a distinct Welsh character. Visitors who experienced them will attest to that."

Crown jewel of the sporting infrastructure is the city-centre Millennium Stadium, the second largest arena in the world to have a fully retractable roof.

Among Welsh natural assets are three national parks.

Wales will play host to a number of national teams in the run-up London 2012. There will be pre-Games training camps for the Paralympic teams of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, the Olympic team of Trinidad and Tobago, and Cycling GB.
PEACE & SPORT TOGETHER

“Peace and sport can work together to change lives for the better,” says Kenyan athletics legend and prominent Peace and Sport ‘Champion for Peace’ Wilson Kipketer.

Since 2007 Peace and Sport, an apolitical organisation, has been working to build sustainable peace in communities rendered socially vulnerable by poverty and recent conflict.

Aware of the crucial role sport can play in building peace, Peace and Sport encourages political entities to use sporting infrastructure as a vehicle to emancipate and empower their citizens.

“Sport has a unique capacity to unite people, going beyond ethnical, religious or social differences,” says H.S.H Prince Albert II of Monaco, High Patron of Peace and Sport.

“I am convinced that sport can be at the long-term service of peace.”

Through Peace and Sport’s various initiatives, including the International Forum, awards and locally-based projects from Israel-Palestine to Haiti, the Peace and Sport project is an evolving success.

Last night at the SportAccord Convention Peace and Sport announced that seven new International Federations had joined the movement: International Cycling Union (UCI), International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (UIAA), International Triathlon Union (ITU), Federation International Amateur de Sambo (FIAS), International Sepaktakraw Federation (ISTAF), Federation Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG) and International Archery Federation (FITA).

RECOGNISED FEDERATIONS LOOK FOR WORLDWIDE ACCEPTANCE

The body that represents sports aiming for entry to the Olympics is to approach national Olympic committees (NOCs) that currently refuse their membership – with encouragement from International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Jacques Rogge.

The Association of IOC-Recognised International Sports Federations (ARISF) represents 32 sports that have been recognised by the Olympic movement but which are not part of the Olympic programme.

The 32 international federations that represent these sports each have national federations and in many countries these national federations can become members of their respective NOCs.

However, a small number – including Britain – do not permit such membership.

“We feel that’s unfair and not a good strategy because [a national Olympic committee] isolates itself from new sports that are developing,” said ARISF President Dr Jan Frosmo during a break in the organisation’s annual meeting yesterday.

Of the 50 top NOCs, as defined by the medal-winners’ table at the Beijing games, most allowed IOC-recognized sports to join.

The number that refuse was small and declining, said Frosmo. However, Britain was going in the opposite direction, as around 10 years ago it scrapped associate membership that facilitated the emergence of new sports on the NOC. ARISF now planned to approach countries such as Britain, armed with a letter from IOC President Jacques Rogge encouraging NOCs to actively embrace ARISF members.

GROWING ENTHUSIASM FOR NETBALL

The global profile of netball is growing. And so is the enthusiasm for the sport, according to Urvashi Naidoo, CEO of the International Federation of Netball Associations (IFNA).

IFNA continues to build the profile of the sport. Recent significant developments include the adoption of Mission Foods as the lead sponsor for this year’s World Championships.

The lucrative deal, worth $450,000, is the largest for a female-only sports event in Singapore. It also recognises the growing strength of netball in the Asia Pacific region.

“We are really excited about the upcoming World Championships, and the sponsorship agreement allows us to produce a fantastic event,” explained Naidoo at the SportAccord Convention.

“But also we will see a ‘trickle-down effect’ of the funding to the grass-roots level of the sport which will encourage the development of our great sport.”

On July 3-10 the Singapore Indoor Stadium will host the Netball World Championships for the second time since its inauguration in 1963.

The top sixteen netball nations in the world will come together in Singapore to compete for the gold medal, currently held by Australia, victorious at the 2007 Championships in New Zealand.

NEW SERVICE ON STREAM

Eurovision’s new pay-to-view streaming service provides a platform for sports federations, rights owners and event organisers to deliver live online coverage of premium sports events to broadcasters across the globe.

“This is where sports and broadcasting meet,” Sara Alonso, Eurovision Sports Services Manager, said at the SportAccord Convention.

The Eurovision network carries over 20,000 hours of multilateral sports programming every year. Its extensive coverage of sporting events from the FIFA World Cup to the Tour de France renders it a medium in-touch with the modern world’s appetite for sports entertainment.
I had the peculiar distinction of having invented a hitherto unknown form of the game of cricket. You will have heard of Twenty20: this was Fifty20.

Three hours of cricket in 50 degrees centigrade, followed by 20 pints of cold beer.

The Old Emersonians Cricket Club (named after Emerson, head barman of our local alehouse in Dubai) brought together a score of veteran cricket enthusiasts from a dozen countries. We played on any patch of ground whose owners would have us (not that many, in truth).

No doubt the International Cricket Council, headquartered in Dubai, would have frowned upon the irregular nature of the Fifty20 game. The British Medical Association would have disapproved on health and safety grounds.

It was a game unlikely to be found in the pages of cricketing “Bible” Wisden, but possibly in the annals of the Journal of Mental Illness Manifest.

It is safe to say that this was one game invented by the English that will not be embraced by others around the world, or even around the corner.

Unlike most of the great sports like cricket, rugby and, above all, soccer that are such a passion around the world and which bear the legend “Made in England,”

It remains a mystery why the denizens of our island should have been responsible for inventing the classic games that inform the lives of so many. Also, the origins are lost in the mists of time.

In the case of cricket, the odd ancient linguistic reference has led some to claim that the game was a French invention. The evidence is against it. It is not a game played today in France and a 40-minute lunch break would never be acceptable in the land of gastronomic.

Lord Mancroft said: “Cricket is a game which the English, not being a spiritual people, have invented in order to give themselves some conception of eternity.”

Proof positive, perhaps.

The modern Olympic Games is a far cry from the original. But the modern sports fan would probably not be that interested in a lot of oiled and naked Greek athletes doing a spot of running, wrestling and discus throwing (and not a woman allowed in the stadium).

So it is with the great sports invented in England. We have a habit of inventing them and then allowing others to turn them into something grand. If the invention of the wheel had occurred in England, there is a chance that it would have been triangular and required others to perfect it.

Only recently the Twenty20 form of the game emerged from this land, only to be whisked off to India, where it has been taken to a stratospheric form.

And the medieval lads who long ago kicked a stuffed sheep’s bladder around in the original form of soccer would have gazed in wonder at the majestic form of today’s game as found in Latin America.

We are an island nation, with a sometimes insular disposition, given to creating sporting diversions for ourselves. We are then disposed to let others around the world realise the potential of our inventions.

Gosh, I think we may have invented globalisation as well.
From the copper roofs of the historic Chateau Frontenac to its many parks and reputation as the most sustainable city in Canada, Québec City looks green and lives green. It’s also the venue for the SportAccord Convention next year, when delegates will have a chance to visit and work in a conference centre that prides itself on its record of green initiatives.

“The Québec City Convention Centre has been committed to sustainable development and responsible environmental conduct since its opening in 1996,” says chief executive Michel Bouchard. “Over the years we have implemented energy-efficiency measures, a residual waste management system, sound water utilisation and various environmental protection processes.”

Bouchard and his team enjoy the support of a green-thinking local government. “We’re government-funded and are lucky to have a progressive and forward-thinking state backing us in our green initiatives,” he says. “For example, our recycling and waste-disposal efforts would be wasted if the city didn’t offer proper facilities.”

The convention centre’s green infrastructure is matched by an eco-friendly attitude to the events that it hosts. “To start with, we guarantee our customers a level of sustainability that is rare in our industry,” Bouchard explains. “Then, if they want to go further, they can take part in our eco-friendly event programme, which includes assistance in the form of advice from a qualified adviser. We plan soon to raise awareness among visitors by broadcasting live during their events the results of participating clients’ efforts.”

The centre features a host of measures designed to reduce energy consumption, eliminate the use of environment-damaging materials and maximise the well-being of users. Energy management is computerised, allowing central control of lighting, air-conditioning, heating, ventilation and air quality in each room. Polluting fuels are avoided as far as possible, lighting is energy-efficient and lighting fixtures mercury-free. Water consumption is electronically optimised, and the air in meeting rooms exchanged between six and ten times an hour.

Recycling is second nature, with standard procedures built into the way the centre operates. There is a collection system for waste and residual materials, including organics, and all-purpose fixed and mobile recycling “islands” can be found throughout the facility.

Green matters were close to the top of the agenda when Bouchard sat down to talk terms for next year’s SportAccord Convention. “There were high expectations in relation to sustainability,” says Bouchard. “I think Québec City Convention Centre was able to live up to them.”
Before our trip to see the famous temples of Angkor in northwest Cambodia, we had visited with Wat Chun Ranhad, the Secretary General of the Cambodian NOC, based in the capital of Phnom Penh. He advised us to look closely at the bas-relief sculptures found on the walls of the Angkor Wat temple. Here you can see combat scenes that are living proof why the Khmer (which means Cambodian) claim to be the forefathers of the popular fighting style associated with Southeast Asia. It is here where you find out what sport means to Cambodia, and why it is still so controversial.

“Everyone in Cambodia identifies with the traditional style of Khmer boxing,” he says. “It represents the soul of the old Khmer empire and is the sport of our ancestors. This is something that has deep significance to the Cambodian people and makes us proud of our history and our position in this region. This is especially important in light of the hardships our country has endured in recent history.”

Fighting has been a part of Southeast Asia since ancient times, and the evidence from the temple walls shows that Khmer style fighting existed as far back as the 9th century. At that time, the kingdom of Angkor dominated and controlled most of Southeast Asia (Cambodians claim this is due to their superior fighting style), and the Khmer influenced much of Thai and Lao culture. This leads Cambodians to believe all Southeast Asian forms of kickboxing started with the early Khmer people, pre-dating Muay Thai, or Thai Boxing, which is Thailand’s wildly popular version of fighting.

During the brutal reign of the Khmer Rouge in the late 1970s, traditional Khmer boxing was banned and began to slide into oblivion. Many boxers were executed or forced into the work camps. But the martial arts scene in Cambodia has experienced a comeback and is returning to its former status.

In 1995, Cambodia proposed to officially rename Muay Thai to something closer representing “Southeast Asian Boxing”. But Thailand would not compromise, claiming that their sport is uniquely Thai and only Thailand was responsible for making its kickboxing an international sport. At the 2005 Southeast Asian Games, Cambodia did not enter the Muay Thai event in protest of the name used to refer to the sport. This debate continues to rage on, and the Cambodians stand firm and proud of their sporting past. For the Cambodian people, the answers lie in the walls of Angkor’s ancient temples.

John Siner is the owner of “Why Sport Matters”, a media company which focuses on the unique impact sport has on society and culture around the world. Along with video testimonials during the sessions and on SportAccord TV, each day here in the Daily newspaper John also gives us a personal account from some of his global travels. More information is found on his website www.whysportmatters.com.
BIG COUNTDOWN TO THE SPORTACCORD WORLD MIND GAMES

In almost exactly 8 months, the inaugural SportAccord World Mind Games will take off in Beijing. 8 December 2011 will see the colourful Opening Ceremony.

Five mind sports will be on the programme: Chess, Bridge, Draughts, Go and Chinese Chess. "We want to offer these international federations a platform to promote their sports," says Hein Verbruggen, President of SportAccord.

"The sports will be presented in a very attractive way. In Chess, for example, we will have blitz, rapid and blind competitions. And each of the sports will have a pair or a team element," José Damiani, President of the International Mind Sports Association, said. "The elite of these five mind sports will come to Beijing. In Bridge and Chess we expect the reigning Chinese Women World Champions to be present." He added that they are giving their full support to the SportAccord World Mind Games.

Two weeks ago, the first Technical Meeting took place. SportAccord and representatives of the five participating sports met with the Chinese organisers to bring further progress to the event preparations. The TD was appointed and the numbers of the participating athletes as well as the venue was fixed. Around 160 athletes, men and women, will compete for the medals. The Beijing International Conference Centre was selected as competition venue. "This venue is perfect for staging such an event. It is right next to the athletes’ hotel," says Verbruggen.

"And in the next weeks, we expect further important steps to be made. For example, the LOC will reveal the logo of the Games within the next weeks and the mascot is currently being developed."

CLIMBING NEW HEIGHTS

The International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) is reaching for new heights after signing its first global partnership agreement with artificial climbing wall manufacturer Top 30 ES.

The move is part of the IFSC’s plan to increase its presence and visibility in the sporting world. "Competition Climbing is continuing to see growth on most continents, and we are making great progress with the development of our organisational structure and planning. Reaching this agreement with Top 30 is a testament to that progress," said IFSC President Marco Scolaris. "Top 30 has long been a great supporter of Sport Climbing," he added. "We are confident that with Top 30 we will continue to see more development of our sport around the globe." The company recently co-ordinated the IFSC World Cup in Amman, Jordan. Top 30 CEO Alberto Marcos warmly welcomed the agreement with the sport’s governing body; "Top 30 has long been involved as a supplier but in recent years we have realised that this sport has huge potential. We want to be involved, and we are delighted to be supporting the IFSC in its next phase of growth," he said.

"We will work hard with the IFSC and the sport's national federations, technical officials and athletes to make sure we continue to make the sport attractive to its participants and spectators."

EUROSPORT REVEALS NEW BRAND IDENTITY

The Eurosport Group unveiled a new brand identity at the SportAccord Convention, which evokes the sensation of live sporting action. After an 18-month branding review the European multimedia company has launched new on-air graphics, new musical identity and a "soft" evolution of its logo.

Laurent-Eric Le Lay, CEO Eurosport and Group Chairman, said: "We believed the time was right to modernise and energise our brand to reflect our position as the leading provider of live sports in Europe.

"Live sports generate powerful emotions for sports and sports fans, and we wanted to create an environment centred around these emotions, putting the fan at the heart of the action."

JAPANESE SPORT SAYS THANKS FOR MONEY

Representatives of Japanese sport yesterday thanked delegates to the SportAccord Convention for their contributions to funds helping their nation recover from March’s devastating earthquake and tsunami.

A collecting box has been in place beside the registration desk and the money collected will be used to purchase clothing and equipment for the Japanese sport community.

"We have experienced that fact at a Cambodian refugee camp in 1980. Please continue to support Japanese sports federations to save athletes and children in north-eastern Japan."
7 QUESTIONS OF SPORT WITH RÉGIS LABEAUME, MAYOR OF QUEBEC

■ What is your favourite sport? Volleyball.
■ Why is this your favourite sport? Because I started to play volleyball when I was young and I still love it. I’ve stopped playing since I became Mayor but all my friends are still playing, and I miss it!
■ What is your earliest sporting memory? When Paul Anderson scored the winning goal in overtime in the ’72 ice hockey series when Canada played against Russia. It was showing when I was at high school, so they stopped school and brought a TV in for us all to watch the game.
■ What is your greatest sporting moment? I remember when in the province of Quebec we had two hockey teams – Montreal and Quebec – and there was a big rivalry. I remember a playoff when we beat Montreal, and that was just so sweet.
■ Who is your sporting hero? Maurice Richard – he was the best hockey player ever, but also a role model for sports.
■ Why does sport matter? Well, it’s important for so many people. It’s a really special way of bringing humanity together.
■ What is your greatest hope for sport in the future? Clean sports. Because how can we set an example to the youth of today unless it is clean? If it is not clean it is very dangerous.

OLYMPIA, LONDON 2012... AND WENLOCK?

It’s destination London for sports fans next year as preparations for the Olympic Games enter their final stages. But fans with an appreciation of the history of the Modern Games may make a pilgrimage to Wenlock.

The small market town of Much Wenlock in Shropshire, England, occupies a special place in the Olympics story and it is hoping that it will reap spin-off benefits from London 2012.

Thanks to local doctor and philanthropist William Penny Brookes, the Wenlock Olympian Games were founded in 1850 for the “moral, physical and intellectual improvement” of local people.

Brookes’ initiative attracted the interest of Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who visited the town, where a special meeting of the Wenlock Olympian Games was arranged in his honour.

Well, the rest is (Modern Games) history, as they say, but the Wenlock Olympian Games continues to this day.

The role played by Wenlock was recognised in the symbolic planting of oak trees between the town and the Stratford site of London 2012.

And local people are hoping that the attention that the Olympic Games will attract will spin off to Wenlock, according to Jim Johnston of Advantage West Midlands, a government agency charged with attracting inward investment.

“It will focus on the expertise of West Midlands companies, some of whom have been involved in London 2012,” he said.

“And I think it will attract a lot of people who are interested in the history of the Olympic movement.”

If you want to know “Why Sport Matters,” look no further than Much Wenlock.
ECONOMY’S MISFORTUNE IS BIG SPORT’S OPPORTUNITY

Yesterday’s SportAccord Convention conference sessions looked at the impact of the recession on our industry and our relationship with entertainment.

Recession may be bad for the economy but it’s still not hurting the top end of British professional soccer, the SportAccord Convention conference heard yesterday.

Talking about how sport has responded to the continuing global crisis, London-based financier and football deal-maker Keith Harris said: “Economic downturn creates unemployment, and for many people unemployment means having the leisure to watch football. So Premiership attendances are as high as ever, and so are subscriptions to Sky Sports satellite TV.”

Joining Harris on the panel was Sir Digby Jones, former government trade minister and director of the Confederation of British Industry. He said that while revenues for corporate entering up, the national associations were pushing players to turn out more often than was good for them.

He cited the English cricket XI, which won the Ashes in style, only to fail badly in the World Cup after five gruelling months of touring. “The downturn has made the national associations hungry for more revenues, so they’re sweating the players. It’s short-sighted – they might make more to begin with, but then the players wear out, get injured, particularly in contact sports like rugby, and underperform.

The players also came in for their share of Jones’ strictures. Commenting on the inflated finances of the leading soccer clubs, he said: “The players have to understand that they don’t walk on water, that they are part of a business and that they need to pitch their wage demands accordingly.”

A cluster of new events will make their debut at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, after being approved by the International Olympic Committee this week.

Among those excited by the development is Sarah Lewis, Secretary-General of the International Ski Federation (FIS) and Association of International Olympic Winter Sports Federation delegate to the SportAccord Convention.

Supovitz, Senior Vice-president of the US National Football League, revealed the startling statistic that nine of the 10 most-watched programmes in US TV history had been the annual Superbowl match.

He added that there was a new trend in stadia where fans were bringing their iPads to watch instant television replays of what they had just seen on the pitch.

“Ultimately, people will be able to get replays or different camera angles on demand.”

Peter Kenyon, Managing Partner, CAA Sports and former Chief Executive at two of the UK’s biggest soccer teams, Manchester United and Chelsea, noted that sport had a “unique ability to create loyalty in its fan base” and that ultimately “that loyalty translates into [fans] spending more money with you”.

The final word went to Supovitz, who argued that modern audiences’ love of reality television was reflected in sporting broadcasts, whether those were shown on television or other platforms. “Sport is the ultimate reality show. Its end is unknown, it’s unscripted and people come back day after day to see what the cast are doing.”

Sport and entertainment are rapidly converging. And while major sports currently have the advantage in making use of broadcasting, it can provide great opportunities for smaller sports to grow their audiences.

That was one of the messages from the SportAccord Convention conference session on ‘Why sport matters to the entertainment industry’ yesterday.

Smaller sports might have to produce new formats and be more innovative to break into the market, but if they could do so, it was potentially the way to attract much larger numbers, said Mark Read, CEO of WPP Digital.

Boel Ferguson, Vice-President and General Manager of the Disney Channel in the UK and Ireland, said: “Sport matters to us because it matters to our audience. It’s as basic as that.” Disney had recently launched its “boy-focused, girl inclusive” XD channel. Boys had told Disney there was no channel catering for them and they’ve also told us how important sports are to them”. Sport helped build youngsters’ self-esteem and shape their identities.

Speakers made the point several times that ‘Sport IS entertainment’. Frank XD channel. Boys had told Disney there was no channel catering for them and they’ve also told us how important sports are to them”. Sport helped build youngsters’ self-esteem and shape their identities.

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GREAT CHANCE TO LET SMALLER SPORT GROW

SportAccord Convention conference session speakers made the point several times that ‘Sport IS entertainment’. Frank XD channel. Boys had told Disney there was no channel catering for them and they’ve also told us how important sports are to them”. Sport helped build youngster

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