**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

Hi, I'm Tanni Grey-Thompson and I was on the board of the London Legacy Development Corporation for 10 years. Been in Singapore leading up to the final announcement, sitting next to Seb and I couldn't pick up my glass of water because my hands were shaking and he just said to me, "Keep silent." Such a collective team spirit. I've never experienced anything like that in my career. I genuinely thought my job would be to go, what about the Paralympics? Never once had to do it, not once.

**Anything But Footy:**

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson is in a pretty unique position in that she was part of London's original bid for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, was then part of the team who delivered the Games in 2012, and then served for a decade on the board of the London Legacy Development Corporation. Nobody else has had such a long-term connection with Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Originally appointed in late 2012, Tanni stepped down after serving for 10 years, but is joining us on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park podcast to look back at a remarkable journey from a brownfield site and a vision to what is now the UK's most exciting urban park.

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

I was involved in the bid for 2012 for the Olympics and Paralympics and lots of different discussions about where it was going to be. And we went out to Stratford and it was like dah-dah. I remember just sitting there going, okay, I need a bit of imagination here. And it was right at the early stages and there were a couple of concept drawings and not much more than that. And I remember just thinking, this is... You kind of know it's big to build a park, but this was like, this is just way bigger because we were straight into brownfield site, we don't know what's there and you suddenly just like this is the serious end. And that's before we got into any details. So I just remember just thinking, I'm not sure anyone's going to have enough imagination to think about what it could look like when we finally get there.

**Anything But Footy:**

Did you, in your heart of hearts, think that London would one day be, for the third time, a host city of an Olympic Games and hosting the Paralympic Games?

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

Yeah, I mean I think it was made really clear with previous bids through Birmingham and Manchester, and I was involved with both, was that it had to be London. I think the IOC had made it pretty clear it had to be London. So this was kind of our moment. And looking back with when Manchester went against Sydney, yeah, it was disappointing but it wouldn't have been the right time for the country or for British sport to host the 2000 Games. Because if you look, the bid process was '93, the Barcelona Games have been great for the Olympians, then Atlanta was a nightmare. One gold medal from Redgrave and Pinsent. So 2000, it would not have delivered what it did 12 years later.

So I think it gave everyone the chance to reset, rethink and think about what it had to be. But it's also easy to forget that so much of the way through everyone kept saying, it's Paris' turn, don't bother. Literally there is no point. And Barbara Cassani, who came in originally, and some amazing women, Tessa Jowell, putting the teams together just went round and convinced people almost one by one this was the right thing to do. And it did feel like it was London's time and it felt like that right through to Games delivery.

**Anything But Footy:**

Talk us through what happened when you were in Singapore, we'll come to the winning moment next. But what could still be done when you landed in Singapore? Could that bid still have been won and lost at that point?

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

It absolutely could have been lost at that point because it was about just meeting lots of people. Tony Blair's Prime Minister and Cherie met huge number of IOC members orchestrated down to what they were to meet different people and the timing, we all had tasks to do in terms of meeting people, convincing, talking to them. And it was the stage. It could have been lost at that moment because I think the reality of it had been us against Madrid. The Paris vote probably would've gone to Madrid. Where us against Paris, the Madrid votes came to us. So trying to work out the numbers. And then sitting there, I remember sitting in a room with Steve Redgrave and Debbie Jevans, and she was incredible, she worked on bid and delivery, sitting in a room with each city getting knocked out, eating chips. And there was that moment when, oh wow, this is us against them.

And I think Paris had already had a celebration party. They were so convinced that they'd won. So it was an amazing day, quite stressful knowing that this is this moment in time. Because if we hadn't have done it then I'm not sure politically there would've been the will to do it in another way. And a huge amount does go down to Barbara Cassani and Tessa Jowell obviously, who was just brilliant at just very nicely explaining to people this is what we were going to do and wasn't it a good idea. So it did feel like if it hadn't have happened then I'm not sure it would have happened.

**Anything But Footy:**

Because Paris, as we know, have had to wait 12 years because the Games has to go around the globe of course. And they've had to wait their turn and we're in a very different situation now, aren't we in the world, politics, economy, everything else that goes with it. It was perhaps a once in a lifetime opportunity.

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

It was because if you look at what happened 2008 with the stock market crash, the implications that then had for Rio. Now I don't think Rio particularly wanted a Paralympic Games even right until the last minute. There was a risk it might not happen. Let alone when you start adding on geopolitics as well as financial and everything else, I think it would've been too difficult. And when you're trying to bid seven years out from a Games and what it's going to cost to put a spade in the ground and what steel's going to cost, it's really difficult. Anyone who complains a bit about the budget has got to understand the size and scale of what this was happening. A massive infrastructure project. And then even when it came to the village and housing and how they thought the money was going to come in from that and how it happened, some of this stuff is you can't predict it.

So I think for me, one of the really fascinating things have been involved in terms of when we'd won and making the Games happen was that conversation around legacy. A really important legacy is what happened, what's there now is the communities, new housing, schooling, apprenticeships. Doing really cool stuff with apprenticeships in terms of getting women involved in the building industry. And again, something that's a bit forgotten about during LOCOG, the procurement process. Actually going to companies that had little diversity saying at least measure your diversity. If you want money from Games organizers, you have to step up. So there's lots of things that have happened because of the Games that become real easy to forget in time.

**Anything But Footy:**

Take us back to the moment then when the President of the IOC was walking on the stage an envelope and all the photographers, they were all in front of the French delegation, is that right?

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

Yeah, there was one guy in front of us and a couple of people milling around. Most people were in front of Paris. And this is the point I said to Seb, "Oh okay, do they know?" And he's like, "They don't know. Nobody knows." And I was thought, okay. And it felt like forever. And there'd been lots of speeches and presentations and stuff happening and when Jacque Rock said, "And the winning city is." And it was like, la, and everyone went ballistic. It was an amazing feeling just hugging people and just everyone jumping up and down. And I remember the next day there was a picture in one of the national newspapers and it was us, the team winning, and I've got my hand clenched and Seb's up on his feet and Matt Pinsent's about three foot in the air and I had to come back that night.

I remember my dad ranging me saying, "Oh this picture." And he rang the register in the newspaper and said, "Oh, picture on your front page, my daughter's in it. Could I have a copy?" Whoever my dad spoke to went, "Are you sure?" It was like, "Well my daughter's Tanni Grey-Thompson and I'm Peter Gray," and they sent him a properly printed out picture. I've got it on my wall in my office. I mean fair play to them for doing it. And then probably thought it was some slightly mad old man. But every time I look at that picture, it's everything that came with it to get to that point. And then after people, "Oh yeah, we knew were going to win." I think that bit is that we didn't know. It was just coming together of a whole bunch of people who probably traditionally wouldn't have sat in a room together.

**Anything But Footy:**

Take us inside the party you had that night then, what happened?

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

So I kind of missed the main party because I had to come back that night, although... So three of us had to come back that night. It was myself, Matt Pinsent and the chief operating officer. And I had to say this was pretty cool. So I got to the airport before the other guys and I got to the check-in desk and they were just bouncing about it. And I got to the front to check in and they said, "Thank you so much for winning the Games.: It was like, yeah, quite a lot of other people involved, there really were. And they were just like, "Thank you so much. Thank you. We want to say thank you. Would you be okay to fly back first class?" Yeah, no, that would be lovely, thank you. And Matt arrived just a bit after me and he was like, he said, "Have you got a first class ticket?"

I went, "Yeah." And they then said to him, "We're really sorry, we haven't got any space in first." And Matt was saying to me, he's like, "We are quite different sizes." And he was like, "You're too small to fit in a business class seat, first class seat. Give me the first class seat." It was like, you must be joking. And actually my feet didn't touch the floor, but that was an amazing moment. And I kind of at the time was just like, oh wow, I can't believe I've got to miss it. That's really hard. But then landing in London that morning, getting a phone call from a friend saying, "Have you seen the news?" And literally, I was in baggage control, just switched on my phone. And she was like, "Get out of London." And I was like, "What's happening?" She like, "There's bombings in London."

And I remember sitting in the airport just going, oh wow. Because another part of our strap line was the eyes of the world were upon us, and that was just the stark reality of what had happened the day before and then this day and then as it all unraveled through the news of that day, what happened, and the bomb on the bus outside the BMA. And there was a conference at the BMA and they had loads of doctors, obviously, who went out onto the street and were trying to save lives. And I don't think that enormity was lost on anybody, again, in terms of what we going to do because we've got to make this really good. And I think everyone I worked with, at different points, that was always at the back of minds. This is the yin and yang of sport. You've got a story of Martine Wright, double leg amputee through that, who then got to compete in 2012. I don't think I've ever had so much emotion in a space of 24 hours from this massive high to this down to we've got to get this right.

**Anything But Footy:**

So you had seven years to deliver the Games. What was your role during that time? And I ask you that question because I heard you in a documentary saying that you thought that your attendance at these various meetings, that five minutes towards the end your role would be, and what about the Paralympics? But you didn't find that at all? It was very much a planning process that involved both Games.

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

The planning process was incredible because it was both Games and that message came very clearly from Seb, as the chair, and Paul Deighton as the chief exec. I genuinely thought my job would be to go and what about the Paralympics? Never once had to do it, not once. And that was amazing. So I had an ambassadorial role. I sat on some committees, did lots and lots of different things, sat in planning, consent meetings. And it was a lot of fun, it was. I do remember the logo reveal and I remember not many people really liked it. And I remember going into the office the next day and talking to a senior exec and saying, "Oh wow, that was quite hard." Because the interview, there were loads of journos, they're saying, "What did you think of it?" And I went, "Oh well, it's really interesting." Please don't interview me about that.

And I remember the senior exec saying, "It's good." I went, "What do you mean it's good? Everybody hates it." And he's like, "Yeah, our recognition is massive. Everybody knows what the logo is." He said, "Maybe preferred people to like it," but he said, "By the time we get to the Games people will love it." And he was absolutely right. It's huge number of badges and lugged and stuff. So that was one of those moments that was great.

**Anything But Footy:**

What was it like when you were going into work and the planning was happening and the venues were being built and the village was being built? How exciting a time was that seeing that infrastructure, that change on the landscape in what is now Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park?

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

It was amazing from seeing buildings being dismantled, some of the ecological stuff in terms of earth cleaning and the thought process and cleaning the rivers. I remember seeing some of the canals and just like, oh wow. And now you can hire little peddler boats on there. And the complexity of the process was fascinating to watch. And as each bit went up, and we used to be in the headquarters building, on a good day, you could kind of see vaguely where it was. But there was one day where there was quite a lot of the building was happening, and going on a site visit on a bus and it was cold and it was wet and muddy and Seb was there and he was like, "Do you want to get off the bus?" And I was like, "Not really. I'm fine, I'll just stay on the bus and look."

He's like, "Oh, do you want to get out?"

"No, I don't want."

He's like, "Tanni, get off the bus."

And a wheelchair user and mud is not great. But then realizing when I got off the bus that's where I was sitting. The track was starting to be pegged out and so you could see the cones around the bend. And it was like, oh wow, I'm sitting on the hundred-meter finish line. And I remember Seb going, "See, told you."

And like, "Yeah, okay. Yeah, you're right. I should have got off the bus." And that was just like, wow.

And then I remember the first time I went in to the stadium when it was virtually completed, there was a moment where Allison Curbishley, ex GB runner, we were on the track together and going, "Do you want to have a walk around?"

"Yeah, go on."

And she's like, "Do you want..." It's like, yeah, I'm not going to push very quickly round. But both of us went and every track feels different and you can feel it when you stand on it or you push on it and it's like, oh this is nice. So it was great to be working on the Games. It would've been amazing to compete there, but then knowing what was going to happen afterwards was also really exciting. I think some people thought that the Paralympics finish and the next day people would start moving into the village. That's not how it works. But knowing what was coming was great. And then after that I joined the board. So being part of that process was fascinating.

**Anything But Footy:**

When you look back at your work as part of the London Legacy Development Corporation Board, how proud are you then of what's been achieved at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park?

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is incredible. The transport links in there would not have happened without the Games, the redevelopment. There is so much that just would not have happened. Bits might have, but not to the extent. And I think everyone stepped in and stepped up and looked at, okay, what do we need to do now? And it's been hard and you're balancing the different boroughs and planning and people's view of legacy, who do or don't know anything about it. But I think when you look at the venues, how they're used, the housing, the community work, it's incredible.

And I was talking to someone this week who hadn't been to the park since the Games and she just said she couldn't believe it because the last time she was there they had fences. And it was always the plan that it wouldn't be something that's just dumped on that part of London, that it would kind of blend in. Every time I go back, there is something that's a bit different, whether it's the planting or there is stuff that's different and how people use it and experience it. So it's incredible. A huge, huge amount of work that's happened to get there. But I think everyone should be proud. It is a true legacy of the 2012 Games.

**Anything But Footy:**

Legacy's a big word, isn't it? I mean it doesn't just mean grassroots participation or school playing fields. When you look at the fact there's universities on the site, there's innovation hubs on the site. It's more than just that piece about getting more school children playing sport, for example.

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

Legacy so much more. And it's actually hard to even list all the stuff that's happening there because there is so much. BBC orchestra, the universities, Saddlers Wells. There is just so much stuff. And even the early years of being on the board when we were talking about some of these things, it felt like, oh wow, that's huge. And then it's happened. Because I think people see the opportunity, because there's space in a way that there's not in other parts of London to do things. So it's amazing and I get to go back for different things. Some sports events, sometimes just going for a coffee and it's really lovely to remember what it was like at Games time. But it's a true legacy, stuff is being used. That's the bottom line of it. It's not some white elephant stuck in the east end of London. It's a place that it's a community and it's a home for people and that is what legacy should be. It should be everything, not just participation.

**Anything But Footy:**

Final question then. Two favourites. Favorite memory from Games time and favorite place to go back to on the park now.

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

Favourite memory from Games time is coming out of the stadium on the Thursday night that Johnny Peacock won the hundred meters. And talking to a family of a young disabled girl whose mum just said the Games had just changed stuff for her. And that was amazing and just, you kind of think everything was worth it because people had a great time.

Favorite place. I love going and sitting at the bottom of the orbit. I like to think the idea for having the slide on it was mine because in a slightly throwaway comment, at some point I'd said we should turn it into a slide. I'm not sure anyone remembers that. I love sitting at the bottom and watching people get off. I love it. Watching the excitement of people going up and then people coming down. And on a lovely summer day, having a coffee from the cafe and just sitting there watching. Between that and the fountains and everything, just it being a place that people want to go to that is just the best spot in the world to be sitting in.

**Anything But Footy:**

Final message then to people who've maybe not been back to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park since Games time or even during Games time, what would you say to them?

**Tanni Grey-Thompson:**

If you're at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park during Games time, you won't recognize it and that is amazing. If you haven't been there, go. I mean, it's easy to get to. There's loads of stuff around. It's a really lovely place to celebrate all that we should be really proud of about being British. We can build things, we can deliver things, we can make things happen. And that's something that everyone involved should be really proud of.

**Anything But Footy:**

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson reflecting on her two decades of involvement at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. This is the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park podcast. To find out more about what is happening, please follow or check out the website, queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk.