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Make room for a bottom-up Olympic legacy [1]

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Interesting proposal from a group called British Future [3], saying that we should build on the Olympic feelgood factor, and widen the Olympic legacy by having more minority/disabled sport on TV, a single national school sports day, and suchlike.

Hmmm. I would be perfectly content to see the nation taking to sport, cycling to work, insisting that their kids walk to school and run round at the weekend rather than slouch on the couch. But these proposals all sound a bit ? well, statist. I would really prefer not to live in a country where some minister could tell schools what day to arrange their sports day on, or could bully broadcasters into carrying programmes (however worthy) that they believed their viewers and listeners were not really interested in.

Better, surely, to have diversity among schools, who might want to do all sorts of different sports activity in their own way and at their own time, in ways that some central ministry could never imagine in a decade. Better too to have diversity of broadcasting, rather than the close central regulation we have at the moment which allows broadcasting 'watchdogs' ? that is, a state-appointed quango ? to dictate what they should carry. Better, indeed, that broadcasters should owe their living to carrying what their public actually wanted, rather than what ministers want for them (or what they say they want to surveys ? who is going to answer 'no' to the question 'should sporting minorities be better represented on TV?'.

The remarkable thing about the Queen's Diamond Jubilee is how little it was organised from the centre. There were more than 2,000 street parties, all of them organised by local people in response to the desires of local people to have them and to help with them. You would think the nation would be street-partied out after the Royal Wedding not so long ago, but no, they came onto the streets with bunting and deck chairs and had a good time. It didn't take any ministers or officials or think-tanks or pressure groups to dictate how we were going to get into the mood, we just did it.

Nor did it cost anything. Actually, for the £9.5billion that the Olympics cost, you could keep the Royal Family up and running for 294 years. And I think that in the last year or two, they have been responsible for at least as many Union Jacks on the streets as the Olympics.

I often figure that interest groups come up with good ideas that we all agree should be done, but somewhere along the way a price tag appears. Sure, we want to capitalise on the Olympic legacy, but maybe not at the expense of higher taxes to fund more central programmes. And worse, it gives the nannies an opportunity to come out and dictate how we should live our lives.

An Olympic legacy will amount to nothing if we try to manage it from the centre through state initiatives. it has to come from the hearts, minds and enthusiasm of local people. We need to set them free, though. When parents refuse to help out with school sports because they face the indignity of criminal record checks, when you want to hire a school gym or a village hall for some sport event and get hit with a demand for risk-assessments and a whopping insurance bill, you can hardly expect people to promote sport at the local level. Get out of our hair, and the legacy will create itself.

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