



#1 – On your marks

Nacer Zorgani: Hi, this is Nacer Zorgani, I work at Paris 2024 for the volunteer program. What is the volunteer program? What do the volunteers do? What is their role, their mission? To answer these questions, to talk about the program, to talk about the volunteer experience, meet me with those who have done, are doing and will do the Games. Welcome to the uniform of a volunteer.

If I tell you about Jesse Owens, Bob Beamon or Marie-José Pérec, Kévin Meyer, or Marie-Amélie Le Fur, I may be talking about names that have crossed generations and will continue to cross them. I may be talking to you about athletics and para-athletics. I am with Alain Blondel. Alain Blondel, you were European champion of the Decathlon 1994 in Helsinki. You have been an organizer of national and international athletics meetings and you have also been in your professional life, a computer specialist, an athlete's agent, an athlete's manager, a coach.

Alain Blondel: Yes, in fact I was also a consultant for Canal Plus for 10 years, and for 20 years on RTL. So I had this chance and this honor to see the Olympic Games, to live them from different angles. And now, joining Paris 2024 and the Organizing Committee as sport manager for athletics and para-athletics, it allows me to come full circle, to be an interior designer.

Nacer Zorgani: Exactly. The circle is complete. And you are going to talk to us about athletics and para-athletics. So roughly speaking, in a few words, what does this represent for the events of the Paris Games?

Alain Blondel: There are 44 athletics events, 167 medal ceremonies, so more than 210 ceremonies, so it means that it is a big volume during 2*15 days, we are talking about 17 sessions for athletics, 18 for para-athletics, so we are big consumers in fact for athletics and para-athletics.

Nacer Zorgani: It is colossal, and I imagine that to organize all that, you need volunteers.

Alain Blondel: Yes, we need a few, let's say one or two should be enough.

Nacer Zorgani: And since we're talking about volunteers, let's talk about the mission. Can you give me a bit of a typical day at the Stade de France, for example, for a volunteer?

Alain Blondel: Between the stadium and the marathon walking course, there would be almost 1,500 different examples, taking one for example on the warm-up field, there are volunteers who are responsible for managing the training equipment for the athletes, i.e. making hurdles available, or putting small equipment like studs, so that the athletes, when they arrive to prepare their competition - what they prepare for 4 years - is really in place.

Nacer Zorgani: And then you mentioned outside the stadium, the marathon for example. There are events that take place outside the stadium, so there are bound to be missions outside the stadium as well. An example?

Alain Blondel: Yes, there are missions because we have 2 events. We have 2 walking events with 3 different events with 2*2 20 km and a 35 km and 2 Olympic marathons, men and women, a Paralympic marathon. So there are more than 85 km to manage. There are volunteers who are on the starting areas, on the finishing areas and on the courses.

In general, we are talking about the marshals. These are essential missions because they are not the ones who secure the race, since the security is done in relation with the public authorities, but they are specialists in fact, who know the environment well, who know the place where they will be positioned and who are able to manage what is called the shearing, the passage of the public from one side to the other of the course, without there being a risk neither for the people who are going to cross, nor for them, nor for the athletes.

Nacer Zorgani: Something to get in condition. Something to project ourselves a little for those who are listening to us. Alain, since Seoul, because you have been to the Olympics and Paralympics, what has marked you the most in the volunteer experience? You who have been in contact with them.

Alain Blondel: For me, what marked me the most is what makes the difference. And when I organize, whatever the level of organization, what I notice is that it is the quality, the know-how of the volunteer that really makes the difference. There are missions, so you need to have a minimum of skills. But life skills are really something that allows you to get through all the events.

Nacer Zorgani: And I imagine that, in addition, these are people who devote their time, so that necessarily has an impact. Is there an anecdote that has really deeply marked you?

Alain Blondel: There is one that has marked me, I think it has marked many people. It was during the 2012 London Games, when all of a sudden, the volunteer who was carrying the basket to collect the athletes' belongings at the start of the 200m race. The one who found himself behind Usain Bolt's lane, and who was living his mission, he was present without being present, so he was waiting for Bolt to put all his stuff. All of a sudden he found himself having to get Usain Bolt's shirt. Usain went to him at the time of the final, and he said to him "hold this shirt it is for you". All the volunteers will not have this chance, but whatever the contact

that you can have with the life of the Olympic Games, they will be exceptional moments that you will probably never live again.

Nacer Zorgani: Last question, before a little word of commitment, you spoke to me about the importance of the role of volunteers in contact with the athletes. And about this capacity to smile. Why is that?

Alain Blondel: You have to know that athletes prepare for 4 years to go to the Olympic Games, sometimes even 6 to 8 years and that it is the event of their career, of their life and that there is a tension which is quite important whatever happens, whatever we do. And when you are confronted with this tension, you are always happy to have people, an environment that is as protective as possible and to see volunteers with smiles, people who are welcoming, who do not try to take the place that is not given to them, but who stay in their place, and who give this good mood. For athletes, this is irreplaceable. This good mood in general the athletes take it with them on the field and when we are on the track all of a sudden, it translates right away and these are small details that help to promote performance.

Nacer Zorgani: And certainly make the difference. Alain, one last word for those who are listening to us and who might want to apply, because the volunteer program opens its platform in March 2023.

Alain Blondel: Go there with as many smiles as possible, with your good mood and if you come with a good mood, it will go well no matter what.

Nacer Zorgani: Alain, thank you very much. We'll let you get back to your rich news of the Games.

Alain Blondel: Thank you Nacer, it is a pleasure. This is not the whole story, but we have to prepare the Games.

Nacer Zorgani: See you soon Alain Blondel!