

Duncan Webster is touched by his village's response to the London bombings while Stefanie Young applauds the Paris Olympic bid



PICTURE CREDIT

Crowds in Trafalgar Square celebrate London's Olympic victory, then mourn the bombing victims; but the French reaction to both was one of generosity and solidarity, expats say

Sporting and supportive in times of triumph and tragedy

IT WAS a very ordinary, unremarkable Wednesday morning at the fish counter in our local supermarket. The fishmonger and I have been joshing each other for the past two years about our respective country's sporting abilities – he still hasn't got over the Rugby World Cup – but in the true spirit of sport.

"Paris, *bien sur*" says he. "London, of course" I reply. Then a guy in the (ever-growing) queue pipes up with "Madrid", we all laugh.

Thursday, we watch the announcement. Paris is naturally *désolé*, London is, of course, a sea of joy.

Then the real news begins

to trickle in – we have no satellite dish so UK news can be slow. A bomb, or bombs, have exploded in London, people killed, others badly injured. We turn to the internet for details – we have close family and friends living or working in the capital – but we are, however the lucky ones. Our family and friends are safe; our thoughts must now turn to those who have lost dads, mums, children, friends.

Life must go on. We have French friends coming this evening for supper, back to the supermarket. The young man at the fish counter, a local rugby hero, has tears in his eyes as he tells me how

sad he, and the French people in general, are about the tragedy in London. Have we lost anyone? What can he say? "France shares your grief".

Just one individual perhaps? No way. Our supper guests that evening explain that they wondered if they should have cancelled, but "non", it was better for them to be with us.

I have often heard it say that the French are arrogant, unfriendly, aloof, anti-British, and other such rubbish. If anyone really believes that, then please come over to our small, unremarkable town and tell us and our French friends all about it!

AS A British citizen and a Londoner, born and bred, I couldn't be happier that my city of origin has been successful in the bid for the 2012 Olympics.

Needless to add, in the light of recent events, it is good that the city has this positive common goal upon which to concentrate and work towards, something that may be able to lift morale at a time when the city is suffering from so many losses.

As a Londoner living in Paris however, I was faced with a mixture of emotions on hearing the result on July 6. On the one hand I was

thrilled for my nation and home city, on the other, I felt the deep disappointment and shock of the French.

Like the French, or perhaps it is fairer to say the Parisians, I had felt sure that Paris would win the 2012 Olympic bid ever since the campaign had begun. I was beginning to become accustomed to the banners along the Champs Elysees, the multi-coloured lights reflected in the waters of the Seine at night, and most of all the huge PARIS2012 display decorating the Assemblée Nationale, which I saw and admired while driving home.

The famous building now shrouded in darkness seems to accentuate the loss felt by the city.

Just as it was a clear and reassuring guide for me, to show me I was nearly home, it was reassuring for the French, as a symbol of what could be. The famous Olympic colours may have disappeared but the lights of the city still remain and I think it is important that people remember the pride they felt and have always felt towards their city. A city which is unarguably, one of the most beautiful, not to mention the most visited, throughout the whole world.