

#LONDON 2012:

THE OLYMPIC GAMES GO SOCIAL

by ROSE DE FREMERY

The London 2012 Olympics are upon us. From July 27th to August 12th, over ten thousand athletes from an estimated two hundred and four countries will compete in sports such as swimming, weightlifting, golf, volleyball and tennis. These Summer Games are hotly anticipated to make history as the most heavily documented sporting event ever. Athletes, media and fans will be checking in, posting status updates, and tweeting photos from London en masse. Fans across the globe will have a front row seat to the historic sporting event in a way that wasn't possible just a few short years ago.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is making full use of social media to share as much of the Olympic experience as possible with those fans. The IOC has rolled out an Olympic Hub, expressly for these Games, listing about one thousand athletes to follow over the course of the event. If you look up an athlete on the Olympic Hub, you'll see a profile page displaying their total number of followers, links to their Facebook and Twitter pages, and a stream of their recent posts.

Of the athletes registered on the Olympic Hub, recent NBA champion LeBron James stands apart with an impressive 16 million followers. But other well-known Olympians like Michael Phelps have robust showings of 5.1 million Facebook Likes and 159,000 Twitter followers. Most significantly, the Hub is anticipated to create opportunities for athletes of lesser-known sports to interact with fans during and after the Games. Also to that end, the IOC plans to host real-time chats with athletes live from the Olympic Village. A dash of gamification has been added to the Hub as well: if you link your Facebook account to your profile

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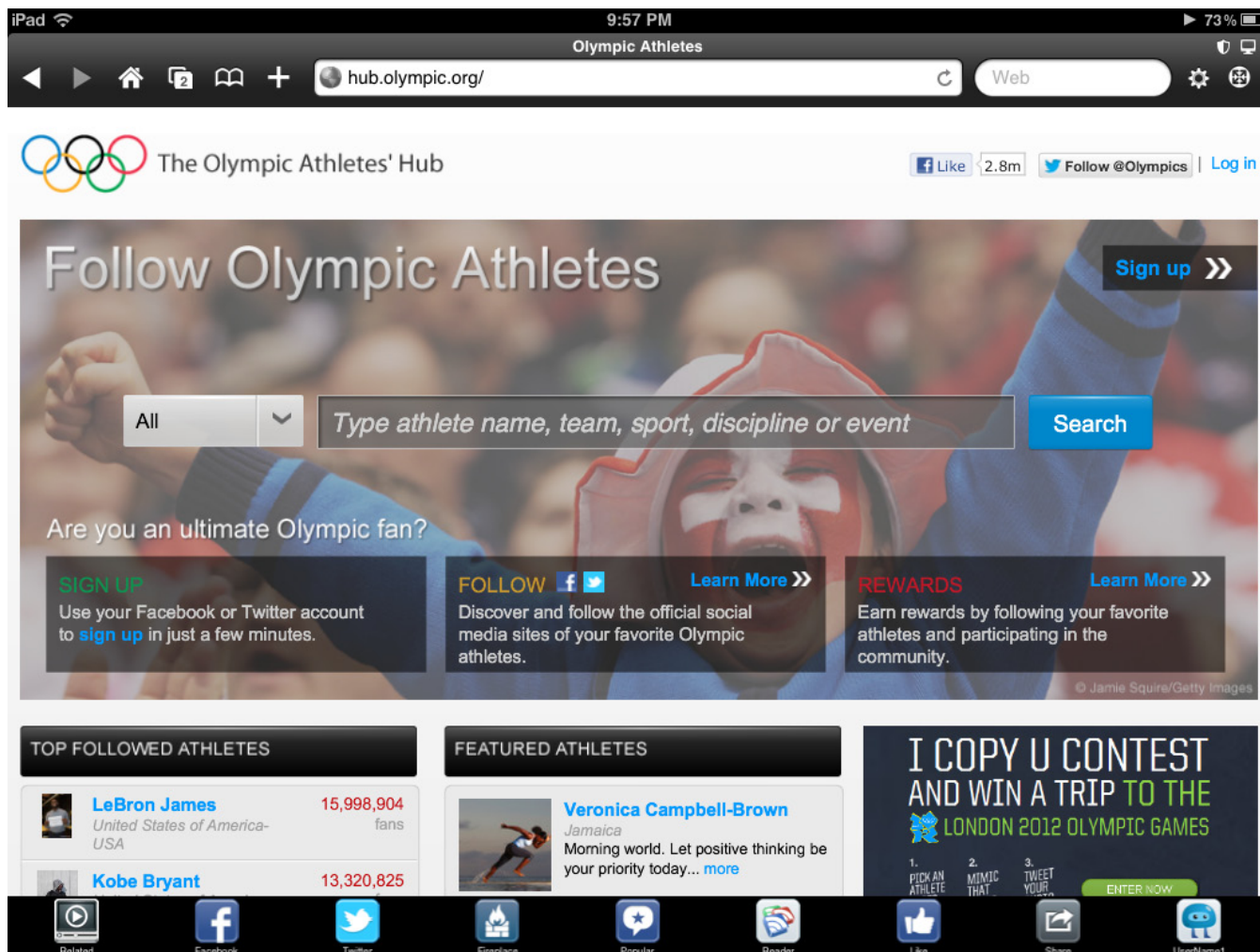


on the Olympic Hub and follow a few athletes, you'll win a few surprise medals and exclusive rewards.

If you look up the official Olympics Facebook page, which already has over 2.8 million fans, you'll find a thoughtfully curated chronicle of the Olympic journey to date. One particularly endearing photo on the timeline shows the Olympic flame tucked safely in its seat on a flight to London. Facebook has also launched its own Olympic hub, which serves as a main portal to the other Olympic pages on Facebook. National teams representing countries from the Maldives to Qatar are listed there, making it easy for you to find your country's team. Pages for individual Olympic sports such as archery and taekwondo are shown as well.

The Olympic Twitter page, claiming over 856,000 followers so far, promoted a series of campaigns leading up to the London 2012 Games. One such campaign, Show Your Best, invited Olympic aficionados to share video clips demonstrating their inner Olympian qualities for a chance to win a free trip to The Games. Visitors to the site were encouraged to vote for their favorite video. In another campaign, I Copy U, fans were asked to tweet photos of themselves mimicking the poses of Olympic stars like Usain Bolt, Michael Phelps and Nadia Comaneci for a chance to attend the Olympics, adding hashtags like #ICopyBolt and #ICopyPhelps along with #SendMe2London.

The IOC also teamed up with Foursquare to offer a special badge



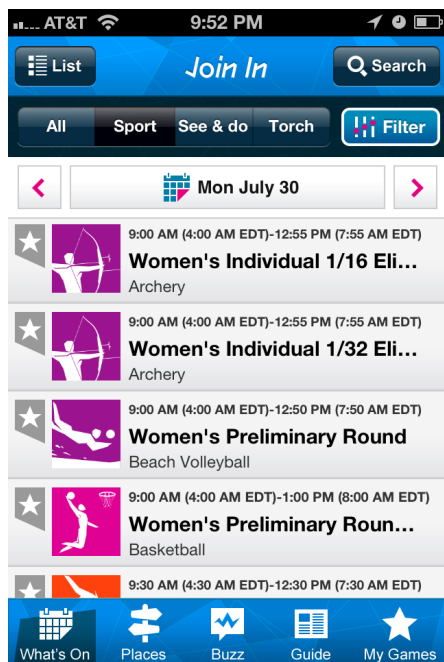
for Olympic Day on June 23rd. Anyone following the Olympics on Foursquare who checked into a sports facility or athletic site twice by June 23rd received a special badge congratulating them for staying active and inviting them to enter a contest for a trip to London. When I checked into my gym for my regular workout that day, up popped the badge with a little Olympic wreath and heart rate motif.

The IOC has also released a special app, available for iOS and Android devices, called London 2012 Join In. Designed to help people attending the Olympics get the most out of their time in the British capital, London 2012 Join In showcases a wealth of cultural and sporting event information that can be filtered by event type, time of day, and distance from your current location. For those simply seeking as much up-to-the minute data on medal tallies and Olympic event results as they can handle, the London 2012 Results app promises to provide that side of the Olympic experience. American fans can even download a Team USA app to help them stay up to date on how the U.S. is faring in London.

If you want to browse gorgeous snapshots of scenes from the Olympic Games, you can follow the official Olympics account on

Instagram. NBC, which will be broadcasting The Games within the United States and online at NBCOlympics.com, also has a presence on Instagram. Photos posted to the NBC Olympics Instagram account in the weeks running up to the Olympics showed American athletes trying out for the U.S. National Team. NBC will also be offering two apps come July. One, titled NBC Olympics App, will provide up-to-the-minute information on event results and medal counts, among other things. The other app, NBC Olympics Live Extra, will stream live coverage of the

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Games for those who have access to the CNBC or MSNBC channels.

Shazam, a popular UK-based app for music recognition, is getting in on the action as well. Thanks to a partnership with NBC and its sister networks, Shazam will be featured at several points during the Olympics broadcast, likely at commercial time. Adding a different dimension to the London 2012 Games, ARworks has created a special Olympic channel for its Junaio augmented reality browser app. If you use Junaio to scan your environment, you'll see icons for cities that have hosted the Olympic games. Upon tapping an icon for a specific city, you'll be presented with a window with more information on the Olympics that were held there. Even more virtual Easter eggs are expected to be available to people using Junaio from within London.

Olympic content will be abundant on the Internet at the time of the London 2012 Games, so Storify has already published guidelines on how best to curate the tweets, stories and photos you come across for easy reference later on. You can tailor your own Storify page to a specific subject area, design it to focus on updates from a particular athlete, or assemble a scrapbook of unforgettable Olympic photos. Whatever you collect in Storify can in turn be posted back out to other social media sites such as Pinterest, Google Plus, and LinkedIn.

Of course, it is what the athletes themselves have to say on social media channels that will garner some of our most intense interest this summer. During the Vancouver Winter Games in 2010, it wasn't altogether clear what they were allowed to share online. For a time, American alpine ski racer Lindsey Vonn was under the impression that there was a blackout period, much



as there is in pro sports leagues like the NFL, during which she could not post to Twitter. After getting clarification from Olympic officials that she could indeed post if it was solely about her own personal experiences, Vonn jubilantly announced her return.

The IOC has issued an updated set of guidelines in order to prevent similar misunderstandings from cropping up this time around. While the IOC states that it encourages the use of social media during the Games, there are certain boundaries that athletes are expected to observe. As in Vancouver, athletes can only present their experiences in first-person format and they must also refrain from commenting on the performances of their fellow Olympians so as not to trump the exclusive reporting access given to official media partners. Likewise, athletes are advised to abstain from promoting any unauthorized brands, whether intentionally or unintentionally, lest the brand reputation of Olympic sponsors be negatively affected. Athletes are also prohibited from posting audio or video clips without permission. It's not fully understood, however, what sort of disciplinary action Olympians might face should something they post be considered in violation of these new guidelines.

Despite these restrictions, we can look forward to a very immediate, intimate and personal view of the London 2012 Games courtesy of the Olympic athletes and others who have gathered to witness a seminal moment in international sports history. Although the Olympics hail from antiquity and are steeped in tradition to this day, it is safe to say that this year's Games will shatter all previous social media records set for a sporting event. From the Opening Ceremony onward, the Olympics will have center stage in the social world.

Rose de Fremery writes on a variety of topics related to social media including sports, music, politics, travel, and startup culture. You can find her on Twitter @RosedeFremery.