

On your marks, get set... go and make a cup of tea

The torch has been lit and the countdown to the Olympics is almost over but DICK LUMSDEN remains underwhelmed

SOMETIME round about 7pm on Friday August 3, in the temporarily re-named North Greenwich Arena, by the banks of the River Thames in London, a man, almost certainly Chinese, whom none of us have ever heard of, will win a gold medal for bouncing.

For him, it is the culmination of a finely honed training schedule, stretching back over several years, designed to reach its peak at that very moment on a big stretchy trampoline. For the rest of us, it is a sideshow event in the 2012 Summer Olympics which will neither make the pages of the national press, nor feature in any of the live TV coverage.

Which is probably just as well, since we are already facing the prospect of a media tsunami washing over us in a torrent of newsprint, TV, radio and internet coverage.

But how many of us really care?

In my lifetime there have already been 14 other Olympic jamborees. London will be the 15th. By rights, I should be quivering with excitement now with just over 70 days to go because I love sport. All sport, including bouncing if that is all that is available.

But I just haven't been able to get into the spirit so far, and I am beginning to doubt that I ever will.

Seven years ago I was working in the centre of London, and I was there in Trafalgar Square when it was announced that London had been awarded the 2012 Games. The excitement that day was fantastic.

Looking back, I think it had more to do with the fact that the decision was made in a city on the other side of the world – because, to me, that is where the Olympics belong... the other side of the world.

All of my memories of the Olympics involve staying up late, or waking up early. The thought of our sports stars competing bravely in either baking heat, or high altitude, while we staved off sleep to give them moral support, is part and parcel of the Games to me.

Having them on our doorstep doesn't seem right. The reality is far removed from the fantasy. For seven years we have lived through the endless arguments over the spiralling cost of the Games, the bitching over what will happen to the stadia when they finish, and



FLAME BUT NO SPARK: The Olympic flame has been lit in Greece, the birthplace of the ancient games but will Dick Lumsden's enthusiasm be similarly kindled?

Photograph: ANTHONY DEVLIN/PA

course, the Games may as well be on the other side of the world. Those "lucky" enough to get a ticket in the ballot will find the costs mounting up rapidly as they head for London to enjoy whatever sport they were randomly allocated. Travel and accommodation (if they can find it) will make them feel they were heading for another continent.

In a recent poll by YouGov among adults in the USA, France, Germany and the UK – when adults were asked what words best described the Olympics – Britons were alone in putting "money" right up there near the top. Our cynicism is not without foundation as there have been many more column inches devoted to the arguments over cash and sponsorship as there have been to the team's preparation.

Given the cost of the tickets and the problems in reaching the venues, it is reasonable to assume that – as with virtually every other product on sale – the

So I decided to do my own research among those people between 50 and 85 that make up our own consumer panel. To keep it fair, I only polled those living within a reasonable distance from London. The results, if scaled up across the population, make interesting reading. Only 11% have actually bought tickets for any of the events, and 87% have no intention of going into London to savour the atmosphere of the City during the three weeks they are on. One in four said they had no interest in the games at all, and only 30% said they would be watching TV with any degree of interest as the coverage is broadcast. That is bad news for all of the corporate sponsors and advertisers who may well be hoping in vain to grab the attention of the 50 plus spenders.

The most influential consumer group in the country would appear to be distinctly underwhelmed by the Olympics. I commute past the Olympic Park

think that, in years to come when I am watching the recorded highlights of some Chinese man winning his third successive gold medal for bouncing, I missed out on the chance of being part of history if nothing else.

So last week I was one of the millions who crashed the 2012 ticketing website when they released the remaining (and previously uninteresting) football tickets, successfully bagging a pair to see a match at Wembley. To those who don't like football, the prospect of watching the Korean Republic play Gabon may be no better than watching the Chinese beat us at bouncing, but to me, it is my last hope of generating some mild Olympic excitement.

■ Dick Lumsden is managing director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to older consumers. If you have any views on this article, or are over 50 and would like to take part occasionally in some gentle