

Going for Gold? Perspectives from Preparing for Rio 2016

The builder: “I’m happy with where we are.”

Geovane Ribeiro is a construction worker. Currently, he is the site manager for tower two of the athletes’ village in Barra da Tijuca. The athlete’s village is the place where the competitors will live during the 2016 Olympic Games. For over five months, he and his team have worked on tower two and they anticipate completing the facility ahead of schedule.

Though Geovane has worked on construction projects for most of this adult life, he believes this current project is his most important.

Geovane says, “This is the most important project I’ve worked on because the buildings will house the world’s best athletes, so this is very important for Brazil.” Geovane emphasizes this to his workers. He tells the workers they should appreciate the value of what they are doing. He says, “when the building is done, it will be on television all the time.”



From the roof of tower two Geovane looks at the other construction projects near his. So far, an aquatic center, a gymnasium, a velodrome, a martial arts arena, tennis courts, a golf course and luxury apartments have been built. He is impressed with the progress so far. When preparing for the 2014 World Cup, the countries’ construction crews fell behind and struggled. He believes preparations for Rio 2016 have gone much smoother. “With a year to go, I’m happy with where we are. We’re meeting our goals.”

The resident threatened with eviction: “The stress has made me sick”

Jane Nascimento de Oliveira lives in Vila Autódromo. It is one of the safest, drug-free *favelas* (low-income areas) in Rio de Janeiro.

In the past year, however, she has seen many of her neighbors’ homes bulldozed. She has also joined in a bloody fight against Olympic developers and been served with an eviction notice. Interestingly, she owns her land and has the documentation to prove it. Still, the city wants her out so that they can continue to construct the Olympic Park.



So far, more than 800 families (90%) of the population of Vila Autódromo have left. As land around Vila Autódromo is purchased for Olympic games development, the remaining residents feel increased pressure. Jane recalls the violence that occurred in June. Police used tear gas, rubber bullets and batons to try and remove them. They resisted. Additionally, her telephone line is down and her electricity and water services are unpredictable. Jane believes the government is trying to make it impossible for her to live. So far, she has been offered 400,000 Brazilian Reals (approximately \$120,000) to move.

Jane feels the Games are not for her sort of people. “I feel totally excluded. The Olympics has brought the destruction of my home. The stress has made me sick. How would you feel if your home was disturbed by the interests of money in this way?”



Going for Gold? Perspectives from Preparing for Rio 2016

**The environmental activist:
“If I die for this cause, it will be worth it.”**

Marcello Mello believes deforestation to construct a golf course for the 2016 Olympic games, is “an environmental crime.”

Currently, the construction of the new golf course threatens the Atlantic Forest and its habitat. Marcello is a biologist and an activist



in Rio’s Occupy Golf movement. He believes that Olympic developers are

destroying the Atlantic Forest. The Atlantic Forest is part of Brazil’s national heritage.

Officially, the government denies the threat to the Marapendi reserve. The Reserve is home to rare butterflies, jacaranda pines and other species not found anywhere else in the world. The government claims the land will benefit from the planting of 625,000 native seedlings and the expansion of the salt marsh vegetation. Marcello and his fellow activists insist that the government’s claims are untrue. “They’ve already cleared the natural dunes and there is only 40-meters of what was once 200-meters of the *restinga* (coastal tropical forest) ecosystem left here.”

Regardless of the danger, Marcello is persistent. Brazil, more than any other country, imposes harsh penalties on activists. In fact, more environmental campaigners are killed in Brazil than in any other country. Marcello says, “I know there is a risk to this work. It is dangerous to campaign for the environment in Brazil. But, I love nature and somebody has to do this job. If I die for this cause, it will be worth it.”

The Paralympian: “We don’t want people to pity us. We want respect”

Roseane (Rosinha) Ferreira dos Santos is considered “the Godmother of Brazilian para athletics.” Despite this recognition, she is having trouble persuading the national paralympic committee that she is worthy of a place on the team. The Paralympics are held after the conclusion of the Olympic games.

Rosinha is an amputee. She grew up in a poor family in Pernambuco. Before she started competing in athletics she worked as a housemaid. She recalls being depressed and, as a result, she isolated herself. Several years later she visited a

paralympic training camp. “It opened my eyes. The people there had much worse disabilities than me, but they were happy. I felt ashamed.”

Shortly after, Rosinha threw herself into shot put.

She broke two world records and won two gold medals at the Paralympic Games in Athens. Even while battling throat cancer, Rosinha remains at the top of her sport. Last year she set a new personal best for shot put.

Still, her place on the national team is not guaranteed. “I was so upset, I’ve cried so much over this,” Rosinha said. After overcoming so many obstacles, they still won’t say if they will select me.” Whether or not Rosinha makes it, she hopes the Games will help to change attitudes in Brazil. “There is little respect here for the disabled.

Overseas, people go out of their way to help. Here, they are more likely to feel you will slow them down. We don’t want people to pity us. We want respect.”

