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Wishful Reporting

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This is the second installation in our series on media coverage of the Olympics around the world, this time from England.

By Pierre Fuller

My tea nearly dropped to the table here in Leicester, England, when I saw The Independent headline. "Beijing 2008 Olympics: Tiananmen orchestra fails to drown out clamour of protests," it read, conjuring up images of Richard Gere and a chorus of Tibetan monks chanting a hundred violinists off a Tiananmen stage. So, it'd finally come, the wellspring of protest of the regime had burst, I thought. I started to read. An orchestra of 2,008 musicians was flown in from all over the world, I learned, while "foreign and local groups... have been told to give plenty of notice" for permission to protest. Little news there. I read on. More on the orchestra, and then a paragraph on the fact that "China’s critics are keen to use the Olympics” to put issues in the spotlight. Fair enough, but there were stories on that years back when Beijing won the contest to host.

A paragraph followed ending with the fact that Beijing had a “fear it could be embarrassed by protest groups out to make a point.” But there can’t possibly be a segment of the readership who hasn’t read about that at this stage in the game. I’d begun to wonder what the point of the story was. Then there was a mention of the slight loosening of protest restrictions... “last week.” That takes the “new” out of “news.” The only mention of protest left in the story was the fact that “despite ongoing pressure over human rights and pollution” – without a single example of who, in what form, and where in the entire article – “the normal business of the Games is continuing to gather steam.”

So if the official orchestra steamed ahead after all, where’s the “failure” in the headline? The “clamour?” Even the “protests?” Certainly the ambush of police killing 16 in Kashgar on Monday was one. Maybe The Independent could have waited for an event like that to “drown out” the two-thousand piece orchestra. Or maybe it’s just a case of wishing protests into existence. Since when is that reporting?

Tags: The 2008 Beijing Olympics