

What do the Olympic Games and the National Census have in common?? On the face of it, not much really, apart from the fact that they were the two events which dominated the airwaves and social media commentary this week. Yet I wondered about some similarities and some common threads, as I reflected on them.

The Olympic Games should, in everything, be first and foremost an opportunity to showcase all that is wonderful about humanity – strength, courage, inspiring stories, wonderful competition and fierce rivalry – all within the framework of sportsmanship and strong human relationships and camaraderie. And we have seen some of that, it is true.

The amazing story of The Refugee Olympic Team must surely inspire us. Yusra Mardini, one of the team, is a 17-year-old Syrian swimmer, who crossed from Turkey into Greece in an inflatable boat (swimming after its motor had stopped) before crossing Europe by train through mainland Greece, the Balkans, Hungary and Austria to eventually reach Germany where she now lives and trains. When she won her heat of the women's 100 metre butterfly event on Tuesday the cheer was almost as loud as any all week, even though her time was some 13 seconds slower than the eventual winner of the race. As she was reported to have said "I am a winner before I get here, simply because I am alive."

Throughout the games, however, the shadow of controversy has never been far away. Other than the stories of athletes, officials, and fans being terrorised by acts of crime which are rife in Rio, the main focus has been on drugs, especially when athletes have been very vocal about having to compete against other athletes who are competing in these games, despite having served suspensions in the past for doping offences.

Our national census, in a similar way, has many positive aspects to it. As well as being a historical event of significance to us as Christians (Jesus, after all, was born in Bethlehem as a result of a census called by the Governor of the day!) such a collection and collation of data about us and our country is vital for planning and preparing for our future – it is an immensely important and significant event, which should not alarm us at all. However, just like the shadow hanging over the Olympics, people have been reluctant to complete the census for reasons of fear of a lack of personal privacy. This was not helped in any way by the reported "cyber attack" on the ABS website on the night of the census. It made me wonder about the nature of people who would be so intent on causing disruption and mayhem, rather than choosing to abide by the accepted norms of our society.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Bernard, and all the Saints walk with you this week...

*Sam*