



**Dear Diary –**

**Juliette Blanquart's  
One-Year Journal  
about the Atmosphere  
in Paris around the  
2024 Olympic Games**

*by*

***Juliette Blanquart***

Get an intimate impression of how the city of Paris changed and reacted to the Olympic Games. This is an honest and emotional account of the work and excitement that went into hosting the 2024 Olympics, as seen from the point of view of a student of journalism who served as a volunteer at the actual event. Juliette has also written 6 further articles about the various sport disciplines. Thank you, Juliette for your contributions to CULTUREM throughout this year!

**Paris, throughout its Olympic and Paralympic year**

Dear diary,

My name is Juliette Blanquart. I am a French student in Media, Communication and Sports, currently living in Paris. I have had a passion for sport ever since I was a little girl. And now, for the past several months, I have been writing articles about sports for Cultureum.com with Dr. J.

Ever since Paris won the rights and the privilege to organize the 2024 Olympic Games, I have been dreaming of taking part in the organisation and the actual event. So, I'm starting this diary to tell you all about Paris, and to share with you my experience in the French capital during this last year before the start of the festivities.

***7 August 2023***

Today, I received a phone call from Dr. J., asking me what the atmosphere is like in Paris and in France, with less than a year to go before the Games. I haven't yet arrived to Paris, so it was difficult for me to give Dr. J a clear answer. So, I'm starting this diary to tell the story of the French capital throughout this last year of preparations for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

***8 August 2023***

Today, I received notification that the open water events that should have taken place in the Seine have been cancelled. As far as the Olympic Games are concerned, these were the first tests to be carried out on the quality of the water in the Seine. If the water continues to be too polluted, it will be impossible for the athletes to compete in the Seine. It would appear that the problem stems from the heavy rain that fell on the

French capital. This is thought to have caused the sewers to overflow and wastewater to be discharged into the Seine. However, authorities remain confident that the quality of the waters will be up to the required standards by the time the Olympic Games come around.

### **8 September 2023**

Today marks the start of the Rugby World Cup! This is the last major event to be held in France before the start of the Games. In fact, it's the last time the *Stade de France* will be used before the start of the Olympic competitions. Many people see this as a test in matters of security, organization and so on. In my opinion, it's important to bear in mind that these two competitions are being run by two different organisations, however.

### **13 September 2023**

Walking through the streets of Paris, I saw a lot of blue, white, and red flags. I was surprised. The last few times I've been in the capital, I didn't think I'd seen so many. Culturally, the French don't particularly display national flags in their windows in the city. Maybe this newfound patriotism has something to do with the current Rugby World Cup, I don't know. In any case, the flying of the tricolour flag is certainly a symbol of the enthusiasm surrounding the French team. Whether it's the rugby team or the Olympic team, it is not certain at the moment.

### **22 November 2023**

The Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, has declared that, "we are not going to be ready" as far as public transportation is concerned. She is not sure that the number of passengers and the frequency of transportation will be compatible. Quite a frightening assessment, given the deadline the French capital is preparing for. My impression to date: from my interactions with friends living in Paris, I would say that Parisians are very sceptical about how well the Parisian transportation system will function during the summer of 2024. Nevertheless, I hope that all the problems will be resolved by the summer so that the Olympics will be a success and will go down in history.

### **28 November 2023**

The price of transport tickets (bus and subway) will double during the Games, from 20 July to 8 August, rising from €2 to €4. *Ile-de-France Mobilités* has announced its decision to increase prices to compensate for the increased traffic. The region's transport organization will therefore be supposedly offering different options for all those present in Paris during the Games: a day pass at €16 and a weekly pass at €70.

### **7 December 2023**

In recent days, a controversy has erupted: the organizers of the Games want to install television cameras and judges on a new aluminium tower in Teahupo'o. The surfing events will be held in Tahiti (a French overseas department in the Pacific Ocean), on the Teahupo'o site. This spot is extremely popular with surfers. In fact, it's a strategic spot where wind and waves come together. However, this project of the Games'

Organizational Committee is highly controversial. There is already an existing tower to film surfing competitions, and protesters fear environmental damage, particularly to coral and marine life, should another tower be erected. However, according to Paris 2024, the old tower does not meet safety standards. It remains to be seen what compromises will be found to ensure that the surfing events, a new discipline at the Olympic Games, can take place and be documented properly!

***8 January 2024***

We're 200 days away from the Games! In Paris, I get the impression that people are dreading the Games. No one is really thinking about what an incredible sporting event it's going to be; they're rather anticipating the problems with transportation, prices in general going up, the difficulties of accessing the various venues in the city and the suburbs, etc. Personally, I can't wait for the summer to arrive so that we can finally experience this event that we've been waiting for since 2017.

***25 February 2024***

In recent weeks, many French sportsmen and women have said: 'We're not a country for sport'. French athletes who have been invited on television and in radio shows to talk about the Games, have increasingly criticised the lack of emphasis and availability of sports in French schools and the French Sports Federations' lack of support in this area. Many athletes have also expressed great dissatisfaction with the infrastructure and the facilities available to top-level, performance athletes. The swimmer, Florent Manaudou, and the judoka, Teddy Riner, have been particularly vocal on this subject.

***12 March 2024***

I have already put my name on the list of volunteers, but I'm super frustrated. I haven't yet been selected to take part in the Games! It would be such a dream come true for me, though! But, a few weeks ago, I also applied for a job at the Games, and today, I had a group interview at the Paris 2024 headquarters. It was incredible! The site is really beautiful. I felt the Olympic atmosphere at every moment. And... I have the impression that my interview went well. Fingers crossed!

***15 March 2024***

In recent weeks, the teams have started to be announced, one sport after the other. Many athletes have already been guaranteed a spot at the Games. Being included in the lists is an important step in the preparation of the athletes, but also in their individual careers. In many disciplines, the Games are the most prestigious competition. Being selected to represent your country is generally a great moment for athletes.

***26 March 2024***

After another one-on-one interview, I got the job I applied for! I'm so excited! The Games have been my dream for so long! Since 2017, when Paris was "awarded" the organization of the Games, I have made a lot of choices in the hopes of being in Paris in the summer of 2024. Initially, I was just hoping to be there, but when the opportunity

arose to volunteer or work for the Olympic Games in Paris, I did not hesitate and just went for it. Now, I'm going to have the opportunity to play a part in making the Games a success! I'm sure it will be a great experience, both professionally and personally.

**5 April 2024**

The Games are approaching... The inauguration of the Saint-Denis aquatic centre, built for the Games, took place today. The centre will host the diving, synchronized swimming, and water polo events. The swimming events will be held at the Défense Arena, as the new aquatic centre does not meet the minimum capacity requirements imposed by the IOC. French President Emmanuel Macron attended the event. Fun fact: Alexis Jandard, a diver who qualified with the French team for the Games, slipped on the diving board. Nothing serious, but the video made the rounds on social networks.

**9 June 2024**

The results of the European elections in France are in. The *Rassemblement National* party came out on top, and Emmanuel Macron announced the dissolution of the National Assembly. There is a real risk that the country could be set ablaze... We don't know what to expect at all. Anything could happen! Let's hope it doesn't affect the major event that's coming up: the Olympic and Paralympic Games!

**14 June 2024**

Today marks the start of Euro 2024. This competition marks the first day of a long series of sporting events to follow, with the men's *Tour de France*, which starts in Italy on 29 June and finishes five days before the official start of the Olympic Games. It should be noted that the final run, or better said, the final bike ride to the finish line of the Tour de France, which is traditionally held in Paris on the Champs-Élysées, has now been moved to Nice onto the *Promenade des Anglais*, since the French capital is too busy with the Games and is therefore more difficult to access.

**16 June 2024**

To sum up the country's political situation, France is splitting in two. On the one hand, there are those who say, "Let the *Rassemblement National* govern for a few years! We have never yet tried to work with them and they have not yet had the chance to be in power." On the other hand, there are those who say, "The *Rassemblement National* is dangerous. We have to block it at all costs." Demonstrations have been taking place regularly in recent days. Many people are mobilizing in anticipation of the results of the votes on 30 June and 7 July. In the bars, everyone is talking about this. It has been a historic week. The mood in France is far from upbeat, and in a month's time we'll be hosting the Games.

**7 July 2024**

The results are in. In the National Assembly, the alliance of the left has won 182 seats, the centrist alliance has 168 seats and the far-right party has 143 seats. It is now up to Emmanuel Macron to appoint a Prime Minister, after Gabriel Attal resigned. However,



he will remain in office for current affairs, pending the decision of the President of the Republic.

**8 July 2024**

First day at work! I went back to the Paris 2024 headquarters for my 'onboarding' (you'll see that at Paris 2024, we use a lot of English words...). The day was firstly an opportunity for me to learn more about my role in transporting accredited persons, and then to meet my future colleagues. By the way, I didn't tell you: I'm being deployed to the Eiffel-Champ de Mars venue. So, that's where I'll be working for the next two months.

**9 July 2024**

First day on venue. Everyone is wearing a helmet, a fluorescent reflective jacket, and safety shoes. These are safety measures that we all have to respect while we wait for the final installations to be completed. My team and I coming to grips with the venue and the procedures so that we can be ready in a few days' time when the first athletes arrive for their training sessions. Today, we also visited the competition venues. THE venues? Well, yes... At Eiffel-Champ de Mars, there are two competition venues at the same site: the Stade Eiffel for beach volleyball and the Arena Champ de Mars for judo and then wrestling.

**14 July 2024**

National Day in France. The traditional military parade took place in Paris. This year, the event took place on Avenue Foch. The traditional finish line for the parade is on Place de la Concorde, but this was occupied by the Olympic venue's temporary installations dedicated to urban sports: BMX, skateboarding, 3x3 basketball and breakdance. And, as every year, a fireworks display was staged. Working on the Eiffel-Champ de Mars venue, I was lucky enough to be able to watch this magnificent spectacle from the stands of the Eiffel Stadium. The festivities promised to be great, and they were. Everything was absolutely splendid!

**15 July 2024**

What a pleasure to come here every morning and work facing the Eiffel Tower! On venue, everyone is bustling. Including the final hardware installations, the looks and signage are starting to be put up everywhere. This venue, which was initially public and very busy, is gradually becoming a real competition venue for the Paris 2024 Games. It's incredible to watch!

**20 July 2024**

Today, we saw the arrival of the first athletes. It was an opportunity to test ourselves and the equipment. Except for a few minutes' delay, everything went smoothly. For the arrival of the pair of Czech beach volleyball players, the first athletes to arrive at the Eiffel-Champ de Mars site, most of the volunteers and members of the Paris 2024 organization who were there, lined up in a guard of honour. Cheers and applause

accompanied the athletes. The demonstrations reflected everyone's eagerness to FINALLY be at the Paris Games!

**26 July 2024**

Tonight is the opening ceremony. You cannot imagine how much I'm looking forward to it... Ever since the Games were awarded to Paris on 13 September 2017 in Lima, I've been dreaming of this moment. There's been a lot of criticism of the Games in France, and some people are even hoping it fails. But I remain positive: these Games are going to be a success!

I worked on venue this morning. We had to anticipate the final preparations for the start of the competitions tomorrow. The site closed at 2pm. As the venue is close to the Seine, it had to be closed for safety and aesthetic reasons. Well, I think safety goes without saying, but what about aesthetics? Yes, it seems that light shows are planned, so the venue has to be switched off so that the planned events can be properly seen.

**27 July 2024**

I still haven't recovered from the emotions of the previous day. I cried with joy and pride for most of the opening ceremony. It was so beautiful! Each of the tableaux was designed to represent a full image of France, of its history and culture, of sports and their values, and of the Olympic spirit and its history. Each performance, each show was a nod of respect to great people, or great moments in history. This ceremony celebrated freedom, equality and fraternity (the French motto had to be honoured), but it also promoted diversity and respect.

It was a thrill to watch the show, knowing that I was going to be part of making it happen! But there's no time to dream, the competitions start today, so our operations will intensify from now on. So, wish me luck! And... *Allez Les Bleus* (well, maybe not for you... but everyone can be chauvinistic (or overly patriotic) when it comes to cheering on their country 😊 )!

**28 July 2024**

As part of the day's operations, I had a fabulous encounter. While they waited for their transport to arrive, I chatted to two men. They were wearing clothes from their country: patterned skirts! I recognized that they were from "the islands." They explained to me that they were from Fiji. As a big sports fan, and more specifically a rugby fan, I didn't forget to tease them about their defeat the previous day against the French rugby sevens team. For the first time, the Fijian team did not win the Olympic tournament. We had a lot of laughs and talked about the beauty of their country. As we were leaving, one of the two men introduced me to his compatriot, the Fiji Islands Minister for Sports. That's when I realized that the Games are just an international communion centred around sports, and that you can meet people from all over the world, of all ages and professions.

**30 July 2024**

You're going to laugh... today I met a volunteer taxi driver for Paris 2024. His name was Albert Camus. Doesn't that ring a bell? Albert Camus is a French writer who wrote

some very famous novels, such as L'étranger (The Stranger). If you like French literature, this is a must-read, and I certainly recommend it.

**31 July 2024**

A memorable day for French sports and, more specifically, French swimming. Léon Marchand became double Olympic champion in one evening! Gold medal and Olympic record in the 200 metres breaststroke and the 200 metres butterfly. In case you haven't seen the races, know this: they were impressive! The Frenchman was so eagerly awaited by all the French fans that it wasn't just the pool at the Arena Paris La Défense that roared to cheer on their champion, but all of the other venues as well. The competitions had to stop for a few minutes at the Grand Palais and the Arena Paris Sud because of the cheering. Fans in the stands were shouting "Léon, Léon...".

**3 August 2024**

After yesterday, it was time to recover from all of my emotions. So far, 2 August has been the most fruitful day for the French team. But today, we have the event of the judo team. As far as my work is concerned, today is one of the busiest days so far. A lot of great athletes and personalities are expected, so we have to be on time to get everyone to the venue promptly. It's a big challenge, but we've risen to it! As far as sports are concerned, the challenge is just as enormous. We have to beat the Japanese in the final round of the Olympic Games for the second time in a row. In an incandescent Arena, the fights followed one another. But they were long, and we all had to wait for the golden score each time! But, at the end of the suspense, the French team took gold! *Bravo les Bleus!*

**4 August 2024**

This evening, I met the CEO of Brisbane 2032. She's a very nice person. All the volunteers who were there and I were able to talk to her about Paris 2024 and about the Olympics in eight years' time.

You should know that many of the people working on the next summer and winter Olympics came to Paris to see how everything was organized. From one Games to the next, we pass on to each other what has worked and what has gone wrong.

**5 August 2024**

Time flies. This weekend saw the start of the track and field events, which means that new athletes have been or will be able to compete for the ultimate prize, but also that we are already entering the second and final week of competition. Only a few days to go until the closing ceremony. We really must continue to enjoy all the emotions and all the moments.

**7 August 2024**

The fatigue is starting to show. We don't sleep much; we have a lot of fun, and we work just as much. When we're not working, we're going home to watch the Games, and when we're not watching the Games, we're working. Quite a programme! But, it's really worth it! What a pleasure to experience the Games from the inside.

**8 August 2024**

Today's a day off for me! I'm going to the Champions Park with a friend. The Champions Park is a creation of Paris 2024. It's a place where you can feel the fervour of the Games: entertainment is organized, the athletes come to present their medal(s), and the competitions are shown on a giant screen. In short, there's plenty to enjoy... and it didn't fail! What an atmosphere! Even in temperatures of over 30 degrees, everyone was in full swing, ready to enjoy everything and not miss a single minute of the Games.

**10 August 2024**

As you may know, Paris 2024 offered another new feature: the Marathon for All. People like you and I were able to run on the same route as the professional athletes. So, following in the footsteps of the male athletes and before the start of the female athletes, 20,024 anonymous athletes set off on the Olympic course at night. Some ran the 10 kilometres, others the whole 42.195 kilometres.

On my way to see the Olympic cauldron in the Jardin des Tuileries in the heart of Paris, I came across the *Marathon pour Tous* course at several points. The atmosphere was incredible. One of the most beautiful moments of my Games... it brought tears to my eyes. This event is what the Games are all about: sporting effort, surpassing yourself, emotion, tears, self-sacrifice, and pride.

**11 August 2024**

Tonight, we close the Games. I'm lucky enough to be involved in the operations at the *Stade de France*, so I'm deployed outside the stadium to welcome the athletes as they arrive. Seeing them all dressed up, some injured, some with their medals, but all in good spirits, you can see and feel what the Games will leave in each of them: a unique moment suspended in time. What a pleasure! It's a truly happy moment, but I feel a pang in my heart... this magnificent Olympic adventure comes to an end for them this evening, but also for us, all the volunteers, all the service providers, and all the members of the Paris 2024 organization. I can't wait for the Paralympic Games, so that we can continue to experience all of these emotions!

I hope you enjoyed this article! It was the last of in this series. My experience at the Olympic Games was probably the best and most memorable one I have had so far. And I am delighted to have been able to share it with you. Thank you all for reading these articles and for listening to them as podcast episodes!

To Dr. J., thank you for encouraging me and for allowing me to write this series of articles, which has enabled me to share my passion with you and the readers and listeners. I have learned so much from this journalistic opportunity, from our exchanges, and from your advice. I wish you and Cultureum.com all the best.

Juliette Blanquart