

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

October 15, 2009 at 3:26pm

Chicagoans win their Olympic bid

by Mike Sweitzer-Beckman

I know that many Chicagoans felt bitter disappointment when Chicago was nixed from the 2016 Olympic bid. In the end, Rio de Janeiro out shone Tokyo, Madrid and Chicago and will become the first South American city to host the Summer Olympic Games. However, I think there are many Chicagoans who are quite relieved that their city will not play the host. They would not have welcomed the crushing impact on an already congested public transit system, the massive budget that Mayor Daley wanted taxpayers to shoulder, and the deportation of the least of our people in order to "clean up" the city for its few weeks in the international spotlight.

The Chicago Olympic Committee ran a poll shortly before Chicago lost the bid that said something like 3 out of 4 people from Chicago supported hosting the games. Other polls by news media showed it to be closer to 1 out of 2. I'm not a statistician, but I do know there were a lot of people from Chicago concerned about playing host to an event that would cost tax payers so much in a city that is typically too overburdened to provide quality literacy education to its children.

You can't forget about the political corruption that comes with a city like Chicago. As my grandparents, native South-Siders, always say during election season: "Remember to vote early and vote often." The longer Mayor Daley serves as mayor, the more ties he finds to corrupt officials that work for the City. And let's not forget that Rod Blagojevich, the disgraced governor who tried to sell Barack Obama's senate seat, hails from Chicago.

Speaking of Obama, I was surprised that he wanted to be so closely associated with the Chicago Olympic bid. He and Michelle Obama flew to Copenhagen to try to woo the International Olympic Committee, but were about as unsuccessful as Sarah Palin was in helping John McCain win the 2008 presidential election. The people who voted for Obama for president are anxiously waiting for him to take care of the economic crisis, build support for a healthcare plan and end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I can only imagine if

Chicago had won its Olympic bid, Obama would have had constant distractions: Are building projects for the Games meeting deadlines? Are the Games coming in under budget? Is the Chicago political machine making sweetheart deals for cronies?

All this would have distracted Obama from doing what he set out to do as president. He might have been the biggest advocate for bringing the Games to Chicago, but he might also be the biggest winner in the losing.

Don't get me wrong, I love the spirit of the games. I was as enamored as anyone else of Michael Phelps in 2008 and the original Dream Team in 1992. I love the stories of international Olympians rising up and shining in their sport, and the idea that a lot of cultural exchange and understanding takes place during the Games. I know that it'll always be on a superficial level because of how short the Games are, but I do believe it's better than nothing.

Plus, if the Games had been in Chicago, the bicycle events would have come to my backyard here in Dane County, Wisconsin. One of the proposed bike courses would have run about 3 miles from where I live. It would have brought to this area the economic boom that host cities dream of but never realize because of the constant pressure and greed that goes into the massive undertaking that hosting the Games are. A recent Merrill Lynch study shows that 10 of the last 11 host cities are still carrying financial debts from the Games. Montreal just finished paying off its 1976 Olympic Games debt a few years ago, some 30 years later. Who knows when 2004 host Athens will be done paying off its debt.

The poll I would like to see is not the approval rating of a city's residents in the hype leading up to the Olympics, but rather a poll on how city leaders and residents feel 10 years after the Games have left and moved on to other hosts.

There is something for the church -- and all in leadership positions -- to learn from this. Here you have one of the most charismatic political leaders of this generation -- Obama -- not getting what he wanted, when what he wanted was in defiance of some of the biggest supporters that got him elected in the first place. The winner ends up being the first South American country, and just the third host site south of the equator. Since a huge chunk of the world population lives south of the equator, hopefully this will bring an international lens to their cause. And finally, it's refreshing to see corruption and cronyism get shot down on an international stage. In this sense, Chicagoans won.

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