

THREE RESPONSES TO THE IOC'S AWARD OF THE 2008 OLYMPICS TO BEIJING

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The IOC and Beijing: Perfect Bedfellows ***Douglas Booth, University of Otago***

It was so utterly predictable. After awarding the 2008 summer games to Beijing, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) engaged in an orgy of self-congratulation, declaring that the olympics* would advance human rights in China.

Beijing was never going to lose the vote for the 2008 games. (It won on the second ballot with more than twice the number of votes recorded by second-placed Toronto—56 to 22.) The front runner for the 2000 event, Beijing unexpectedly lost to Sydney by just two votes. (John Coates, a key strategist on the Sydney bid team, later admitted that on the eve of the decision for 2000 he offered US\$35,000 each to two IOC members in Africa, Charles Mukora and Francis Nyangweso.) But, critically important to their city's future hosting prospects, the Chinese did not bleat after Sydney's victory. Stiff upper lips not only won the respect of many IOC members, they also made it easier for the 2008 Beijing committee to recruit former senior officials of SOCOG (Sydney Organising Committee of the Olympic Games) to prepare the subsequent winning bid. Among those who helped polish the 2008 Chinese bid were Sandy Hollway, Milton Cockburn, John Bowan, Phil Tully, Peter Ottesen and Graham Richardson.

Claims made after the IOC decision were as predictable as Beijing's victory. Chinese leaders, IOC officials, former olympians, and political hacks with long expired use-by dates argued that hosting the games would bring positive change in China and accelerate openness and democracy. Tutored by marketing spivs from a Western public relations company, Wang Wei, a senior member of the Beijing bid group, declared that a Chinese games will 'enhance all social sectors - education, medical care and human rights'. Yuan Weimin, China's minister for sport, echoed Wei. Preparations for the olympics, he said, 'will bring along advances in culture, health, education, sport and, not least of all, corresponding progress in human rights causes'. Nodding in agreement with his new found Chinese friends, François Carrard, the executive director of the IOC, predicted that 'in the coming seven years, openness, progress and development in many areas will be such that the [political] situation [in China] will be improved', Retired olympians gushed with enthusiasm. Triple gold-medallist Shane Gould believes that the olympic movement can play an important role in the development of human rights.

Henry Kissinger, the former US secretary of state and one of the most immoral men of the twentieth century, who has recently discovered a new limelight in the olympic movement, thinks that the games will give China 'a high incentive for moderate conduct both internationally and domestically in the years ahead.'

But how, precisely, will hosting an olympic games advance human rights in China? According to the theory, winning the hosting rights is either a reward for conforming to certain international norms or an incentive to conform. In both cases the host country not only agrees to open itself to international scrutiny but also to modify or correct those systems, practices and policies found wanting.

Proponents cite Seoul as perfect evidence. A right-wing dictatorship ruled Korea in 1981 when the IOC selected Seoul to host the 1988 olympics and shortly after the event the country held democratic elections. For many, including IOC member Un Yong Kim, the olympics were the catalyst for 'the rapid democratisation of the Republic of Korea'.

Others remain sceptical. British academic Christopher Hill says it is simply 'impossible to quantify the effect of holding the Olympics on Korea's political system'. But even if Seoul does support the theory of a sporting pageant advancing human rights, China isn't South Korea, a point made by a senior international affairs scholar at the Communist Party Institute in Beijing who dismisses such comparisons. Korea, he reminds us, 'was already changing when Seoul won the bid to host the Olympics'.

Certainly the Chinese have shown little interest thus far in complying with the theory that the olympics will advance human rights. In 1989, with the vote to host the 2000 olympic games just four years away and lobbying in full progress, the position of chairman of the Beijing bid committee apparently didn't weigh too heavily on Chen Xitong's mind. As mayor of Beijing, Xitong sent troops into Tiananmen Square to brutally crush China's student democracy movement. Nor did the Chinese bother to amend those policies that attracted severe criticism in the West prior to the 2001 vote. Repression in Tibet, suppression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement and mass executions continue apace. Amnesty International reported that between April and July 2001, Chinese authorities executed 1,791 citizens. Before being executed some were paraded and ritually humiliated in sports stadiums.

Now that Beijing is the official host, will the Chinese amend their human rights' policies? Only time will tell. But comparisons engender little hope. A threatened boycott of the 1936 olympic games in Berlin did not convince the Nazis to amend their anti-Semitic policies; Australian federal and state governments did not stop stealing Aboriginal children from their parents during the 1956 olympics in Melbourne; nor did the Australian federal government cease imprisoning asylum seekers during the Sydney games.

Lastly, readers should note the IOC's duplicity in promoting the view that the olympics will advance human rights in the host country. Never in the history of the modern games have the IOC or any group of participants - athletes, referees, spectators, volunteers and journalists - judged an olympic

festival by the policies or politics of the host. Rather they apply very immediate and personal criteria to evaluate the games: can they find their way around, will transport deliver them to venues on time, can they get their favourite foods, is the water safe to drink, are the locals friendly and helpful, is the city clean, will they experience the right amount - not too much, not too little - foreign culture, will the referees and competitors play by the rules, will the atmosphere be fun?

American athletes giving the black power salute on the victory podium during the 1968 olympics disturbed former IOC president Avery Brundage more than a massacre of at least 49 students by Mexican troops just prior to games. (The students were protesting against the high cost of staging the event in Mexico City.) Four years later in Munich, a deafening applause erupted when Brundage boomed that 'the games must go on' during the memorial service for slain Israeli athletes. IOC members never officially commented on the expulsion of 'dissidents' from Moscow during the 1980s games; nor did they concern themselves with the eviction of 15,000 poor blacks from two of the oldest public housing projects in the US to make way for olympic accommodation in Atlanta.

Beijing is not a worthy olympic host. Nor will it be a credible host until the Chinese government accepts the free expression of political and religious views and stops abusing citizens who oppose the authoritarian rule of the Communist Party. Despite its own propaganda, the IOC has never let moral considerations interfere with its baser political interests. 'Beijing may have political problems', conceded IOC vice-president Dick Pound, but, he added, 'in an IOC context Beijing is a good city'. Indeed. The IOC and China are perfect bedfellows: they're both morally and politically bankrupt.

* The olympics do not warrant the veneration of a capital letter. The ancient games were held at Olympia, hence the use of the upper case as a recognised geographical name. Any resemblance that the modern sports pageant may have to the ancient version or to the place called Olympia is remote and allusive - hence the lower case 'o'. Nor does the philosophy of olympism have a greater claim to a capital letter than liberalism, humanitarianism, authoritarianism, utopianism or fascism.

A Moment for Reflection
Bruce Kidd, University of Toronto

We should have read the signals more carefully, but as every athlete knows, it's difficult to give it your best shot if you don't think you have a chance to win. For those working on the Toronto Olympic bid, it came as a shock to lose to Beijing by such a wide margin. Clearly a strong majority of the International Olympic Committee was persuaded that it was time to go to China. I wish our Chinese colleagues the best in their plans and preparations for the 2008 Games.

I was involved in the Toronto bid from the beginning as the volunteer chair of the legacy and community enhancement committee, so I leave it to others to assess the bid. In this brief commentary, I would like to encourage students of bids and the bidding process to examine three particularly innovative features and one vulnerability of the Toronto bid for their implications for the Olympic Movement.

In the first place, active and recently retired athletes were directly involved in the planning and decision-making for virtually every aspect of the bid—the proposed venues, the Olympic village, the transportation plan, the legacy plan, and so on—and served as major spokespersons for the bid internationally. Such leadership by athletes, an outgrowth of several decades of activism by Canadian athletes, clearly demonstrated the substantive contribution athletes can make to the decisions shaping Olympic sport, and the rightness of their place at the board table.

Secondly, by the time of its final presentation to the IOC in Moscow, the Toronto bid was in a position to guarantee prices for construction, accommodation and services for the Games, thus controlling the severe inflation that has plagued Olympic tourism and sponsorship previously.

Thirdly, in addition to a strong plan for the natural environment, the Toronto bid presented a plan for the social environment, through an extensive social impact consultation and an ambitious plan for social equity. The idea was to ensure that staging the Games would strengthen—and not undermine—social equity in the city, including the provisions for housing, employment and training, social services and human and civil rights. Given the social disruption caused by many previous Games and mega-events, a social equity plan should be required of all future bids.

Despite these and other attractive features, the Toronto bid was not without its contextual contradictions, the most severe of which was the systematic destruction of public opportunities for sport, physical education and recreation at all levels—from the community school to Olympic preparations—by the same governments supporting the bid, during the very period the bid was being prepared. In fact, like many other aspects of the bid, the facility and legacy plan could be read as an indictment of the social deficit created by the neo-conservative federal, provincial and municipal governments of recent years. This certainly hurt Toronto's chances. Just a few weeks before the Moscow voting, former IOC president J.A. Samaranch asked one Canadian lobbyist 'why the IOC would put the Games in a country that cannot make its mind up about sports?'

If the Olympic Games is truly to be a showcase for the realization of Olympic values, the IOC should make it be known that it will only award the Games to countries that show an exemplary record in the provision of physical activity for all its citizens.

There were other lessons from other bids. If the IOC addressed the best features and the most serious shortcomings of the 2008 bids into the rules for the bidding process for 2012, it would strengthen the progressive directions of the Olympic Movement.

**Should Beijing have been awarded the 2008 Olympic Games?
Kristine Toohey, University of Technology, Sydney**

If Otto van Bismarck had known about the modern Olympic Games at the time he made his famous statement: 'the less people know about how sausages and laws are made, the better they will sleep at night', he might have inserted 'and the Olympic Games'. To me that is one of the most fascinating aspects of the Olympic Games - we all seem to have an opinion about them, no matter how well or how uninformed we are about them, their charter, their organisation and the people who work for them, either at the IOC or in an OCOG (I did the latter). Is it because: the Games claim to have a moralistic philosophy; they are such a world-wide phenomena: they are so expensive to run; we get to see some competitors display athletic courage in the face of adversity; we hope that they will fulfil their ideals of peace and universalism; they have been shown to have corrupt elements; or how our values and the realities of sport seem to collide at times?

The awarding of the Games to Beijing is a case in point. China, as a political entity, resembles the Olympic Games, in that its regime and policies create polarised opinions. Well before the 2008 Games Host City was chosen the question was posed: 'should they be awarded to a country with a questionable human rights record, where poverty is still in evidence and infrastructure is lacking in some of its poorer areas?' On a smaller scale could we not have asked the same question here, in Australia, before our Games? Actually, some in the press and public arenas did. Many had also asked the same question of China back in 1993, before the vote in Monaco for the 2000 Host City. And Sydney only won that vote 45 to 43 in the final round. Beijing had been ahead in the votes in the three previous rounds.

However, basking in the aftermath of the Sydney Games success, the overwhelming opinion of the Australian media and politicians was that 'our' Games had demonstrated to the world that we were a country that was innovative, clever, technologically sophisticated and successfully multicultural. Phillip Knightly, writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted: 'staging the Games was an opportunity to . . . show the world the face of new Australia – a modern, prosperous, independent, confident and, above all multicultural country looking to its future. Australia, consciously or not, seized this chance'. The Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, in similar vein, wrote in the *Australian* newspaper on 25 October 2000; 'I do not think there is another country that can look to the future with such optimism, or that faces such an array of opportunities. . . . We should recommit ourselves to ensuring that the Australian spirit on display during the Olympics is not only maintained during our second centenary of Federation, but is extended so that we can also achieve our full potential as a nation'. The nation's press and politicians, even those who had earlier been critical of the Games, sustained and glorified in this self-belief. In the post Games euphoria these self-congratulatory sentiments overrode other, opposing notions that we were not well on the way to reconciliation.

The above emphasises the fact that the Games are political. Individuals, nations and other power entities use them for prestige and validation by applying them and the victories of athletes who compete in them as metaphors for greater achievements. Yet, it seems that we don't want political regimes whose policies are different to ours to have the opportunity to claim a similar legitimacy. The 'Nazi' Olympics are still seen as the ultimate Olympic propaganda vehicle, but essentially, although far less abhorrently, the 1984 'McDonald's' Games had the same outcomes for corporate messages.

The selection of the host city for any Games is a political decision. Rod McGeoch's book *The Bid: how Australia won the 2000 Games* details some of the maneuverings, lobbying and, at times, less than transparent dealings that were undertaken by the Sydney Olympic Bid Limited to secure the Games. The IOC/Salt Lake City bribery scandal highlighted problems with the bidding processes on a larger scale. The subsequent IOC investigation, which led to changes in how cities are selected to host a Games, revealed that John Coates, acting on behalf of the Sydney Olympic Bid Limited, offered \$A50,000 inducements to two African IOC members hours before the final vote. The IOC investigation cleared this action as being within acceptable guidelines, on the grounds that the money involved in the transactions was to be directed to improving sport in the member's home countries. Another Australian, IOC member, Phil Coles, did not fare so well. He was named in the *Salt Lake City Games Ethics Panel Report* and subsequently reprimanded by the IOC. He was also forced to resign from the SOCOG Board.

McGeoch's book and the Salt Lake City bribery scandal demonstrate that it is not only the Bid Books and technical ratings that influence the votes of IOC members. And, as noted above, it is not only individuals from other countries who have sought to gain advantage, either financial or political, from hosting the Games. So, before deciding whether the IOC should have awarded the 2008 Games to Beijing or not, we need to examine honestly the basis upon which we are making our judgement, and whether or not it we could be judged by similar criteria.

Whatever our own moral decision, it seems that the pragmatic realities and necessities of the global business of sport do not seem reluctant to embrace the Beijing Games. Already Austrade is running seminars for Australian businesses trying to leverage off Sydney's success and sign contracts with BOCOG. A number of Australian companies and individuals, associated with the Sydney Games, assisted the Beijing Bid committee before the Moscow vote.

Technically, the IOC believed that Beijing has the capability to stage a successful Games, as it also did with the Toronto and Paris bids. From this perspective it seems a pity that only one city could win. From my understanding of the Toronto bid, its technical merit and the quality of the people I know working on it, the city would have staged an athlete centered, and welcoming Games, one that was based on reality, not pomp and

circumstance. I was disappointed for Toronto, knowing what they had put into their bid, but that, of course, is little consolation for those who had worked for years on the project. My knowledge of the other cities' bids was far more limited, so I cannot comment on their relative entitlement. What is interesting is that the three 'top' cities represented different Olympic regions, political entities and power factions within the IOC.

Dick Pound has recently claimed the 2008 decision was also related to block *quid pro quo* voting for the IOC President. China would get the Games vote and the Belgian, Jacques Rogge, would get the votes for president. If this is indeed the case then Toronto has a legitimate right to be aggrieved.

Before hearing Pound's assertion I thought that people's political decision on whether Beijing should get the Games was primarily based two factors and their relative weightings, that is whether the Chinese government's human rights record was too poor to justify Beijing's selection for an event that holds peace and equality as goals, or, that by awarding the Games to the Chinese city, it would provide an impetus to open up the nation to scrutiny and thereby put pressure on the government to value human life more highly. In more simplistic terms, one's decision would really be based on whether one had a pessimistic or optimistic view of the Olympic Movement. Of course, there is the third view that in terms of hosting the Games it shouldn't matter what China's politics are.

If the Pound conspiracy theory is investigated and found to be true, then those who have a low opinion of the IOC and its operations will be strengthened in their convictions, while those who believe in the potential of the Games, may again have to question why reality and rhetoric do not match. The IOC Olympic Charter states 'the role of IOC is to lead the promotion of Olympism in accordance with the Olympic Charter' (IOC 1997: 10). Following this logic the processes used to achieve any IOC product are at least as important as the resulting outcome, especially one as important as deciding where the Games are to be staged.

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