

# How Chicago Had and Lost the 1904 Olympic Games

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On May 25, 1901, more than 2,000 college and high school boys gathered at Chicago's Marshall Field to celebrate the recent announcement that Chicago, had been named as the host city of the 1904 Olympic games. Each student carried a wooden item to add to the huge bon fire. Unfortunately, before all of the students had marched into the field, fights broke out as boys from different schools tried to capture other school's banners.

Noses were bloodied, banners were ripped to shreds, speakers were shouted down and the bon fire was fed with stolen bicycle racks. But the fighting of those students was nothing compared with the subsequent infighting between two American cities that caused Chicago to give up the right to host those 1904 Olympic Games.

In 1901, the International Olympic Committee under the leadership of president and founder Pierre deCoubertin chose Chicago to host the 1904 games over St. Louis, the only other serious bidder. The strength of St. Louis' bid was that the games could be part of the 1903 World's Fair, but would of course throw the games out of their quadrennial sequence. Chicago won because Coubertin loved the city and the University of Chicago.

However, the St. Louis World's Fair was delayed one year putting it in direct competition with the Chicago Olympics. After a few not very subtle threats delivered in an October, 1902 meeting between the Chicago Olympic Committee and the St. Louis World's Fair Committee, the resolve of Chicago to hold the games began to weaken. The Chicago leaders, in letters to Coubertin, said they feared St. Louis would run athletic competitions at the fair that would challenge the Olympic games.

Coubertin, faced with the dilemma of Chicago dropping the games at the last minute or shifting them to St. Louis, chose the latter and awarded the games to St. Louis in February, 1902. Unfortunately, the games in St. Louis were a dismal failure despite a great number of Chicago athletes who traveled to St. Louis to compete.