

Game Off

by Dan Jacoby

We didn't get the Olympics. Big deal.

Seriously, had the 2012 Olympic Summer Games been awarded to New York City, it would have meant construction of a few buildings we might otherwise not have gotten, and three weeks of slightly more tourism than we already have. But there would have been no real economic boon to the city, and no real legacy of improvements in urban development or infrastructure.

Meanwhile, native New Yorkers might have had to endure a security lockdown that makes Gitmo look like a Central Park rally.

But rather than sounding like sour grapes, let's look at why – the real reason why – we didn't even get a medal in this Olympic race.

First of all, let's face a simple fact: we lost not because Mayor Bloomberg and Deputy Mayor Doctoroff were stubborn and stupid regarding the location of the stadium (they were), or because New Yorkers weren't really supporting the effort (we weren't). Our effort lost – and lost badly – because the United States is despised by most of the world, and especially by the International Olympic Committee.

There is no need to go into the reasons why the world in general hates us – simply mentioning the name George W. Bush should suffice. But if we ever want to host another Olympic Games, we had better understand why the IOC hates us too.

In 1996, the Atlanta games were a combination of highly parochial jingoism and lowly crass commercialism. By that time, the 2002 Winter Games had already been awarded to Salt Lake City. But then it turned out that we had bribed our way into that Olympics. To top it all off, the U.S. can't seem to be involved in the Olympics without some ridiculous controversy over judging. And when that happens, rather than work with the IOC to reach a fair solution, we simply blame them for everything.

Message to U.S. Olympic Committee chairman Peter Ueberroth: You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

If we are going to make a run for a future Olympic games, we have to learn to work and play well with others. The schoolyard bully attitude doesn't work in foreign policy, and it doesn't work with the IOC either. Nobody outside our borders cares if we are the best, or even whether we're right. They care a great deal, however, whether we treat them with decent respect.

And since we don't get to decide who wins this match, we had better learn that lesson quickly.