

Obama in Copenhagen

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 1, 2009 NCR Today

Conservatives never tire of finding things to criticize about President Obama and his decision to go to Copenhagen to lobby on behalf of his hometown's bid for the 2016 Olympic Games is no exception. Do they really think the President can't fly and chew bubble gum at the same time? Hell, his plane comes with a bedroom so he can sleep soundly and conduct meetings on the flight back.

I was surprised about his decision to go in person to Copenhagen not because of his busy schedule but because he risks a highly visible loss. Chicago has never held the Games, but the city's bid is now the American bid, not just the city's. And America has hosted the summer Olympics four times, most recently in 1996 when Atlanta played host. Incidentally, the Atlanta Games were loudly criticized for their hyper-commercialization and the poor layout of the venues and consequent daily traffic nightmares. The United States has also hosted the winter games four times.

Rio de Janeiro, on the other hand, presents an opportunity for the International Olympic Committee to award the games to a South American City for the first time. (Mexico City, in Central America, hosted the games in 1968.) There is one difficulty with games south of the equator ? it is winter there when it is summer here. But, this fact did not unduly prejudice the success of the games in Sydney or Melbourne. The chance to award the games to a new continent, however, is a bright prospect and one I suspect the IOC will seize so long as the actual bid is in order and they are reassured about the crime pandemic in Rio.

Madrid and Tokyo are both unlikely because Europe will host the 2012 summer games in London and Beijing just did so last year. Only once since World War II has a continent hosted consecutive summer games: in 1948, they were held in London and in 1952 in Helsinki. The Tokyo bid has the most imaginative venues and the city hosted the games way back in 1964, but they are still likely to fail: In addition to the closeness to the Beijing games, Olympics in time zones far from the United States also lower revenue from television networks that bid for the coverage.

If Obama pulls off a win, it will be a big feather in his cap and a great present to his hometown. But, the smart money is still betting on Rio.

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