

"Writing the truth
as I see it;
trying not to
offend
those who will
disagree."

The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



Craig L. Bosley, MD

Should America boycott Beijing?

April 21, 2008

August 8th is the opening ceremony of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China. This Olympics will open with controversy, just as have some prior Olympics. The controversy surrounding this Olympics is the ongoing human rights violations attributed to China. Political dissidents in China often face imprisonment, torture, or even death. There is escalating violence in Tibet along with alleged genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan, believed to be supported by the Chinese.

Some world leaders are demanding China recognize the dignity, the human rights, and the religious freedom of the Tibetan people if they are to host this summer's Olympics. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has ordered his country's Olympians to boycott the opening ceremonies. Members of the European Union are considering boycotting the opening ceremonies, as well.

Surprisingly, boycotts, even violence, during the Olympics is nothing new. Twenty-five African nations, in protest of New Zealand's links with South Africa, boycotted the 1976 Montreal Olympics. Our own President Carter boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics, even threatening to revoke the passports of any U.S. athletes who tried to attend the games. He was protesting the Soviets militarily entering Afghanistan. Not to be outdone, Moscow retaliated in 1984 boycotting the Los Angeles Olympics, the very same year China returned to the Olympics following a 32-year absence. And the worst violence in Olympic history occurred during the 1972 Munich Olympics when Israeli athletes were murdered by a group of Palestinians.

What should our nation do? What is the appropriate response to concerns with China's human rights violations? China has pursued hosting the Olympics

for some time. The Olympic Committee finally selected Beijing as the site of this year's summer Olympics when China added Article 35 to their country's constitution, attempting to prove they were serious about changing their views on human rights. Article 35 guarantees "citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession, and of demonstration." Most informed observers however, believe China has done little to fulfill these new commitments.

How should we respond to these failed promises? Should the United States boycott the opening ceremonies, as England is doing? Perhaps we should boycott the entire Olympics, as President Carter did in 1980. There are critical human rights issues that must be addressed. People are dying in China, in Tibet, in Darfur. Moreover, an obvious end is not in sight. Is it appropriate to use the Olympics to advance worthy agendas, to make important international statements? And is there anything more worthy than basic human rights and human dignity?

Let's look to the origins of the Olympics for guidance. Why were they conceived? What did they wish to accomplish? Are those original intentions, those original dreams still applicable today?

The Olympics began in the Greek world, an expanse from the Black Sea to Spain, celebrating the first games in 776 B.C. Ordinary tradesmen of the ancient Greek world trekked to Olympia every four years to compete and to "build diplomacy" throughout the vast Greek world while honoring one of their gods, Zeus. Surely, the Olympics of the ancients were pure and unstained, unlike the scandals and political turmoil of modern Olympics. But, just as in modern day Olympics, there were scandals, sabotages, bribes, and

cheating. Even so, the Olympics continued, every four years coming together focusing once again on their dream, their hope; bringing a "fragmented world" some unity through healthy competition. The Olympics brought Greeks together in a friendly, diplomatic setting establishing conciliatory connections between neighbors, creating new alliances, and easing the "unsettled and volatile warrior's world."

But how should we view the Olympics today? Should there be protests at the Olympics? Should demonstrators hinder the torch relay? Should countries boycott opening ceremonies or entire Olympics? Did the Olympics ever demand those participating meet a certain political standard? What did the dreamers of the Olympics foresee? Did they recognize what we cannot, that the Olympics are a time for a short truce, a time to compete, a time to get to know each other, a time to reflect, a time to think, a time to learn about one another? The dreamers of the Olympics had no delusions the games would solve all conflicts and disagreements, that the games could end the evils in the world. But they did have the understanding, the wisdom, and the vision to see the Olympics as a beginning.

The games are not for political statements, they are for quiet communication. The games are not for boycotts, they are for teaching and healing by example. They are not for political gain; they are for creating political partners.

Let us look to the ancients and their wisdom. Let us learn from history. Let us celebrate the Olympics for all they were intended, even in this world with so much evil. After all, it is a beginning.

Dr. Craig Bosley is an emergency physician practicing in Pocatello, Idaho. His column appears in the Idaho State Journal each Monday. If you would like to contact him directly, you can email him at craig@craigbosley.com or visit his Website, www.craigbosley.com where all of his columns are available.