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## U.S. Facing A Generation without Playing Host to Olympics

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## U.S. facing a generation without playing host to Olympics

RICK BURTON & NORM O'REILLY

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**RICK  
BURTON**

As you might have noticed, coverage of future Olympic Games in some U.S. newspapers declined significantly after Oct. 2 when International Olympic Committee voters in Copenhagen, Denmark, humbled Chicago by eliminating the Windy City in the first round of the 2016 bidding.

There are a number of potential reasons for this drop-off in stories, ranging from subliminal anger over Chicago's dismissal to the realities of a busy North American fall calendar where the NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, MLS and NCAA are fully engaged.



**NORM  
O'REILLY**

But what if it was something else? Could it be a subtle editorial realization that the Olympics may not visit North America again for more than a decade? Is it possible we've just witnessed the end of an Olympic Golden Age when North American cities hosted the Olympic Games on average once every 5.55 years?

Think about it.

There were nine Olympics on our continent in the last 50 years (1960-2010). At the moment, the earliest we could see the next Games is 2020, but probably 2022. Neither the U.S. Olympic Committee nor the Canadian Olympic Committee bid for Winter 2018, and it has been suggested the U.S. won't bid for 2020.

Conclusion? The earliest North America might see the Games is if Toronto (2020) or perhaps Quebec City or Denver (2022) bid and win. That is virtually a generational age. It means an American child born in 2002 will be at least 20 years old before seeing an Olympic Games hosted in the U.S. again.

It made us wonder what that might mean for Olympic sport avidity and for U.S.-based sponsors of the Olympic movement such as Coca-Cola, Visa, McDonald's and General Electric. Does it portend a possible drop-off in corporate financial support? Could it possibly push some of the smaller nonrevenue sports to the brink of virtual discontinuation?

One of North America's most important Olympic figures, IOC member Dick Pound, picked up on that theme during his recent visit to our campus. "I think it could affect domestic sponsorship if the Games are not held in North America for an extended period of time," he told students. "The billion-dollars-plus in Olympic and

domestic sponsorship the IOC has generated for the next quadrennial is critical to the health of national Olympic committees and sport development worldwide.”

Pound’s insights are further illuminated when one considers the IOC is actively pursuing younger generations with projects like the inaugural Youth Olympic Games (for 14- to 18-year-olds) Aug. 14-26, 2010, in Singapore. With more modern X Games-type sports seemingly invented every day (not to mention graphic video games), are young North American archers suddenly at risk?

The answer could be yes, and not just for smaller sports. At the Singapore YOG, water polo, synchronized swimming, slalom canoe and road and track cycling won’t be contested.

Clearly, hosting the Olympics is good for sports business and good for the development or sustenance of a sport, and a review of past modern Olympic Games shows how often the Games have hit North America in their history. Not surprisingly, of the 12 times listed, the U.S. hosted the vast majority (8). To illustrate, we collected the following data and arranged it by decade (see chart).

TRACKING NORTH AMERICA AS OLYMPIC HOST				
Decade	Games	N.A. Games	% in N.A.	Sites
1890s	1	0	0%	
1900s	4	1	25%	St. Louis
1910s	1	0	0%	
1920s	5	0	0%	
1930s	4	2	50%	Lake Placid, N.Y.; Los Angeles
1940s	2	0	0%	
1950s	4	0	0%	
1960s	6	2	33%	Squaw Valley, Calif.; Mexico City
1970s	4	1	25%	Montreal
1980s	6	3	50%	Lake Placid, N.Y.; Los Angeles; Calgary
1990s	5	1	20%	Atlanta
2000s	5	1	20%	Salt Lake City
2010s	5	1	20%	Vancouver

Source: www.olympic.org

It’s clear that the “rate of hosting” for the 30-year period of 1990-2019 has declined to 20 percent from the previous 30-year average (1960-1989) when 37.5 percent of Olympic Games were held in North America. And, if our forecasts are accurate, the rate of North American hosting may continue declining to only hosting one (6.7 percent) or two (13.3 percent) Games in future 30-year periods.

Now much of this, like anything, has to do with the external environment. Consider the increasing competition to host the Games and the concept of locational obligation. Isn’t it likely the Middle East and Africa will soon borrow Rio’s successful game plan?

And what about the loyalty of frequent bidding to show the IOC that a country truly wants the Games? Beijing bid previously before emerging victorious in 2008. Toronto, which bid for the 1996 and 2008 Games, is 0-for-2 (as are Paris and Madrid).

If we suggest hosting the Games is clearly tied to funding, corporate or government interest and medals won, one could argue the USOC has a big challenge to keep its Olympic performance record as one of the top two countries in overall medals at each and every Games and winning the most medals ever in a fully contested Games (110 in Beijing).

Is this the end of the American empire if the U.S. doesn’t perform at its normal level in Vancouver and London? What if forecasts come true and Canada wins the most medals in Vancouver following a decade of strategic investment through an innovative “Own the Podium” program led by the COC, its partners and the Canadian government? Wouldn’t it be interesting if Canada carries the new North American Olympic flag and hosts again in 2020 or 2022?

Arguably, one could say America must persevere by continuing to bid, specifically in 2020. But, if the corporate advantage of having multiple TOP sponsors and the biggest broadcaster is minimized, the U.S. might see a leveling of the playing field.

For now, there is no problem. But if America starts dropping in the medal count, it may be a function of many small forces at play. You remember the old nursery rhyme, don't you? For want of the nail and shoe, the horse and rider were lost.

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