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Chicago supporters crushed, confused by early elimination

By Mike Dodd and Judy Keen, USA TODAY

CHICAGO — A huge sign hung on an office building across from the downtown civic rally in Daley Plaza Friday morning, showing the [Chicago 2016](#) logo, a woman weightlifter and the word "IMAGINE" in capital letters.

Imagine, indeed. The still-gathering crowd of several thousand supporters never dreamed their city's Olympic bid would end like this.

An audible gasp swept through the plaza when the large-screen video boards showed [Jacques Rogge](#), [International Olympic Committee](#) president, announce Chicago's elimination in the first round of voting for the 2016 Summer Games. That was followed by a buzz of disbelief, as if the spectators weren't sure they heard the announcement correctly.

"People were confused. This wasn't supposed to happen," said Rob Gray, 40, of Chicago, who arrived at the plaza at 8:30 a.m. local time, more than three hours before the scheduled announcement of the winner.

"I felt like I was going to throw up. like somebody just punched me in the stomach," added three-time Olympic gold-medal winning swimmer [Rowdy Gaines](#), who served as master of ceremonies for what was expected to be a celebration. "It was one of those feelings I haven't felt too many times in my life."

Many in the crowd which had packed the plaza with flags and posters left immediately, while more than 1,000 lingered in shock. The plaza remained half-full about 90 minutes later when the word came that Rio de Janeiro won the bid with a convincing majority over [Madrid](#) in the final round.

Spectators described themselves as "numb" and "heartbroken" by the stunning result. Some, like restaurateur Sisay Abebe, originally from Ethiopia, stayed up all night to watch the presentations from Copenhagen.

The rally was scheduled to culminate a few minutes before noon, local time, as Chicagoans expected a close vote against Rio in the final round. A large stage was erected, with two video boards on the side and a third hanging from an office building wall at the edge of the plaza. The well-known [Picasso](#) sculpture, which is adorned with oversized Bears, Cubs or [White Sox](#) caps for sports rallies, was decorated with the city's Olympic logo.

But, with apologies to [Yogi Berra](#), this one was over before it was over.

Gaines took the stage to sign off at 11 a.m., nearly an hour before the winner was declared. "You're welcome to hang out and watch the broadcast," he told the crowd. "It's a little melancholy right now for us. It's the end of the day; at least today it is."

All that was left was to decipher what happened and whether the Windy City should bid again, for 2020.

Rev. [Jesse Jackson](#), standing by the stage, didn't hesitate on the second question, urging another try. "A champion doesn't stay down," he said. "We fall down, we get back up again, because the ground is no place for a champion."

Gaines, who also supports another run, said organizers were worried about the first round because IOC members often vote for the country in their continent so it won't be embarrassed by early elimination.

Mayor [Richard Daley](#) told reporters in Copenhagen another Chicago bid is unlikely "at this time."

"If it's in our hemisphere, it has to move somewhere else" in 2020, he said.

"What happens is everybody votes in their own region. ... and North Americans don't really have great representation as far as the numbers go," Gaines said.

"Who's going to vote for Chicago in the first round besides Canada and Jamaica?" said 1960 Olympic gold medalist Bill Mulliken, walking dejectedly from the rally.

Added Jackson, "Maybe the poverty in Rio was an appeal factor. The idea that the Olympics can help a poverty-stricken country may have had some appeal."

Olympic protesters in the city rejoiced in the outcome. Anka Krewicz and two associates, not affiliated with any group, carried banners in the plaza as the crowd thinned. One was a "Chicago 2016" poster with the year crossed out, replaced by "needs jobs and schools, not Olympics."

Deborah Taylor, Chicago resident and supporter of No Games Chicago, said the loss "is a wonderful thing. I prayed for it because of the displacement that would happen on the South Side. There was no consideration for poor people or people of color. ... When you put profit before poor people, sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't."

A statement on the website of No Games Chicago said the organization "helped turn back a bad plan for our future. ... Representatives of the 2016 Committee said on many

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occasions at public meetings that this was THE plan for jobs and prosperity for our future. There appears to be no Plan B."

Gaines said the IOC vote may have represented, in part, a "political hangover of the previous eight years" of American policy under President Bush, a sentiment Jackson endorsed. Both added America's international standing is improving under President Obama.

Kent Redfield, political science professor at University of Illinois-Springfield, said "Obama is personally very popular internationally, but the U.S. as a country is still suffering the fallout of eight years of the cowboy foreign policy under Bush. Any acting out of negative feelings" by the IOC "is more a repudiation of the U.S.'s image and standing in the world, which Obama is trying to repair."

Larry Bennett, political science professor at DePaul University who wrote a research report on Chicago's 2016 bid, said the result will have "interesting implications" for Chicago and Mayor [Richard M. Daley](#), who might have thought of the Games as the "exclamation point at the end of his mayoralty."

Others question whether the vote will be seen as a personal setback for President Obama, who flew to Copenhagen to take part in Chicago's presentation.

"Did he lose standing by going? If he had *not* gone, it would have been bad," Jackson said.

Congressman Mike Quigley (D-IL) said, "Chicago was a world-class city before today's decision, and Chicago will be a world-class city tomorrow. Although disappointment hangs in the air, this is not the time for regret, but rather to see opportunity in the incredible work that was done across Chicago over the past months."

Eleven months ago, Chicago experienced an historic event a little more than a mile from Daley Plaza — Obama's election night celebration in Grant Park. There was a chill in the air and palpable excitement that built as the night progressed.

Friday's rally wouldn't have matched that, but Gray said he had a similar feeling as he walked to the plaza in the morning. Instead, it will be remembered as another stunning disappointment in the annals of the Second City.

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The Associated Press contributed to this report

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