

What others think about winning bid

Media pundits across world comment on Olympic hoopla

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Whenever it rolls around, the Olympic bid story travels to the front pages of the world's newspapers. Here are a few highlights from the streams of stories that were devoted to the winner of the 2020 Games.

Veteran sports writer Philip Hersh of the Chicago Tribune has attended 15 Olympics, including nine Winter Games, during his distinguished career. And in his coverage of the IOC members' voting on Saturday, Hersh likened the Tokyo 2020 Bid Committee's approach to a well-known insurer's TV commercials.

"With a philosophy that seemed borrowed from Allstate commercials, Tokyo convinced the International Olympic Committee to give it the 2020 Summer Olympics," Hersh wrote.

"'You're in safe hands with Tokyo' was what the Japanese emphasized, actually using the words 'safe pair of hands' as a bid theme. They referred to a \$4.5 billion reserve fund already in place to cover Olympic cost contingencies and polls showing travelers think Tokyo is the safest city in the world.

"So the Japanese capital won the right to host its second Summer Games. It will be Japan's fourth Olympics, more than any other country except the United States with eight and France with five," Hersh added.

Owen Gibson, The Guardian's chief sports correspondent, noted that Tokyo's final presentation was vital to its winning bid.

"Previous Tokyo bids had been praised for their competence but criticized for lacking passion. That was not an accusation that could be leveled at them this time, with the urbane Princess (Hisako) breaking with royal protocol to travel to Buenos Aires and lobby on behalf of the bid, and Mami Sato - a Paralympic athlete who saw her hometown devastated by the tsunami - delivering poise and

passion," wrote Gibson, who served as the London-based newspaper's Olympic editor from 2010 to 2012.

Matthew Futterman and Alexander Martin of The Wall Street Journal filed a double-byline story from Buenos Aires and reminded the world that the end of the decade will be a boon for the IOC in Asia.

"The vote will bring the Olympics back to Tokyo for the first time since 1964, when the Games helped Japan reintroduce itself to the world less than two decades after the end of World War II," they wrote.

"The decision means that the Far East will become the center of the Olympic movement toward the end of this decade. The 2018 Winter Games are scheduled for Pyeongchang, South Korea."

In his analysis of the 2020 Olympic vote, Alan Abrahamson of 3 Wire Sports, chronicling events from Buenos Aires, offered this critique: "The vote Saturday ended a campaign sure to be studied long into the future, and deservedly so.

"After the luxury of choosing among some of the world's finest cities or turning to so-called 'new horizons,' Saturday's verdict offered evidence to some that the IOC picked what it had, given what it had. This was Istanbul's fifth bid, for instance; Madrid's fourth, and third in a row; Tokyo's third, and second straight."

Of course, budgets and sporting passion, the war in Syria and high unemployment in Spain were not the only factors being discussed by pundits and Olympic officials in the Argentine capital.

There clearly was also an emotional element to Tokyo's bid. Tohoku's slow recovery from the devastating earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis were mentioned on several occasions by different speakers during Tokyo's final presentation.

According to Abrahamson, Naoko Takahashi, the 2000 Olympic women's marathon gold medalist, said Japan's commitment to helping promote sports in the developing world has brought the nation positive relationships that have grown stronger over time.

"(Takahashi) talked about how she had been in charge of a project to send shoes to kids in

Kenya; instead, the shoes were sent to kids in northeastern Japan; when the kids in Kenya who were supposed to have gotten the shoes heard what had happened, she said, those kids sent the Japanese kids a prayer song," Abrahamson wrote on 3 Wire Sports' website.

"I promise in Tokyo every one of you will feel the Olympic spirit," he quoted her as saying. "In the year 2020, it will be full of feelings of celebration."

Best-selling author and journalist Robert Whiting, an American expert on Japanese culture who has been living in Japan since 1962, said that what happened in Buenos Aires was unexpected.

"Frankly, I was surprised. But Tokyo made a good closing effort," Whiting wrote in an email from Honolulu, where The Japan Times baseball contributor is vacationing.

He said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the final speaker in Tokyo's presentation, handled himself with poise.

"He had an uphill climb after his 731/Yasukuni escapades, (Tokyo Gov. Naoki) Inose and his anti-Muslim remarks, (Osaka Mayor Toru) Hashimoto and his sex slaves comments, (Finance Minister Toru) Aso and his Nazi approach to constitutional revision and (former Tokyo Gov. Shintaro) Ishihara with his anti-French, Korean, Chinese, black and gay diatribes," Whiting said.

"In that light, it's a miracle Tokyo won the bid."

But "the Tokyo delegation put on a full-court press at Buenos Aires and, I guess, in the end the IOC came to the conclusion that Japan was the most stable of the three finalists and that the threat of nuclear contamination from Fukushima has been overstated by Japan's critics," he told The Japan Times.

"Madrid's lousy economy and poor record on doping hurt its chances," Whiting said, noting that in Istanbul, "holding the Olympics would have benefited it more than anywhere else, (but it) was done in by the civil unrest the city went through this year and by its proximity to Syria as well.

"Still, I am happy for Tokyo. I haven't seen adult males cry like that in public for a long time," he said.

"This will make a good subject for a book."