

If Obama gets 2016 Games, Daley will be king, not mayor

By **John Kass**
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The president of the United States shouldn't have to fly halfway around the world to humble himself before a posse of international sports influence peddlers and beg for a track meet.

But that's exactly what he is doing.

By going to Denmark with all the other City Hall politicians, including those from the White House, President Barack Obama is doing more than asking the International Olympic Committee to allow Chicago to host the 2016 Games.

He's asking the IOC to make Mayor Richard Daley the king of Chicago for life.

If Chicago gets the games, it will be Obama who will get the credit, for making sure that Daley, with all that Olympic gold to spend, will remain the undisputed political boss forevermore.

That's reform the Obama Way.

"I don't want to get into a political game," Chicago 2016 Chairman Patrick Ryan told reporters in Copenhagen, as contingents from Chicago, Rio, Madrid and Tokyo politicked for the right to host the Olympic festival. "This race is about sports and competition. This should not be about a competition between heads of state. It's all about the athletes and Paralympians.

"President Obama is coming here out of respect for the athletes and the bid," Ryan said.

Oh, really?

Ryan may be many things, but dumb isn't one of them. He's a realist, worth a gazillion dollars. His former archrival, Near North Insurance boss Mickey Segal, is a broken man, sitting in federal prison, probably going stir-crazy. Someday, Ryan will end up owning the Chicago Bears. Yet he talks in terms of sport and competition.

If you think Chicago's Olympic push is about sports, you're mistaken. Sports has nothing to do with this. It's like in the old movie, with Michael Corleone telling truths to his future wife, saying, "Now who's being naive, Kay?"

Whether you want the games or not, please try muffling out those giddy broadcast news types and their frenetic cheerleading and understand what you're really watching.

If Chicago gets the games, the contracts and the grease and immense leverage to reshape a city will be used as originally intended. To rebuild the boss, to give a mayor facing deficits and taxpayer revolts and headaches a much-needed shoring up of his political infrastructure.

Surely the Obama White House, run by former Daleyites, knows that a Chicago Olympics will keep the mayor politically secure. That crown was once heavy and uncertain upon Daley's head, when the feds were raiding City Hall and sending his underlings to prison. Only a few years ago, the mayor ridiculed the Olympic idea. These days, he carries the torch in his teeth.

It must be all about reform. When Obama was campaigning for president, there was that thrilling line about how he would "transcend the politics of the past" -- a line probably written by Daley's mouthpiece David Axelrod. It sent tingles up or down the legs of the fawning punditry, particularly among liberal commentators silently beseeching Obama to exorcise their racial guilt.

But it also had the effect of portraying Obama as some kind of dreamer.

Yet our president is no dreamer. His guys might sell Hopium, but he doesn't smoke or eat the stuff. He knew he had to go to Copenhagen. The mayor of Chicago and Oprah Winfrey expected him to be there.

If he didn't show, and Chicago didn't get the Olympics, Obama would be blamed. If he goes, and Chicago doesn't win, well, at least he tried. And if Chicago wins, he's the president who closed the deal.

"I've got so much to do here," Obama told NATO Secretary-General Anders Rasmussen in the Oval Office on Tuesday. "So, I will sleep on the plane. I'll land. I'll speak. Then fly right back."

But he is going.

At least his journey invited an entertaining squabble between some Republicans and the president's men.

Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele said that while it was noble for Obama to pitch the games for his home city, the trip distracted from truly pressing issues.

"Who's he rooting for?" snarked White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs in response to Steele. "Is he hoping to hop a plane to Brazil and catch the Olympics in Rio? I don't know. Maybe it's Madrid."

There is a good argument to be made on Obama's behalf for this Olympic push. He's the president from Chicago, where he was given his political birth. Obama knows what this is about.

It is about paying political debts. It is about waltzing with the one that brought him to the dance, not so much Michelle, as dancing with the little guy with the short shanks on the 5th floor of City Hall.

So he will fly halfway around the world when he doesn't have the time, with so many other items on his agenda, because he has to.

He's Chicago's president. And he got the call from the boss.

jskass@tribune.com

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