

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Bidding on the Olympics

By Stephen Somerville

Canada has bid to host both the summer and winter Olympics a number of times, holding the 1976 summer games in Montreal and the winter games in Calgary in 1988, and in Vancouver in 2010.

Every once in a while, I see stories in the national news media where the mayor of a large Canadian city muses about placing an application to host either a summer or winter Olympic games.

While I do love amateur sports, I hope that Toronto doesn't bid for a future summer Olympics.

I believe that it costs too much to host an Olympic summer games, not only for the construction of all the necessary facilities but especially for the security costs.

As well, the increased traffic and congestion, which we got a glimpse of during the Pam Am games (which is a lot smaller event), could make for a potential debacle.

To bring some more perspective, the following are various long excerpts from a news story on the web that I found regarding prior Olympic Games costs.

?To win the right to host the Olympics ? usually a decade-long project in itself ? host cities need to demonstrate they can accommodate all the events, house the athletes and handle the crowds that will descend for the two-week extravaganza.?

But the modern Olympics have gone well beyond meeting the requirements of international athletic competitions. Now, the goal is to turn the games into massive extravaganzas, with construction and entertainment that runs into the billions.

Beijing's 2008 opening ceremony alone ? a four-hour fireworks spectacular with tens of thousands of performers ? is estimated to have cost more than \$100 million. It's a far cry from the humble Olympic Games of 1948 hosted by a post-war London.

The first post-World War II summer Olympic Games were held in London at a cost of \$32M.

?Amid rationing and economic hardship, the city built no new venues. They hosted more than 4,000 athletes, though Japan and Germany were not allowed to enter contestants.

?Munich 1972 Summer Olympics ? cost of \$4 billion. The Munich games were an opportunity for post-War Germany to forge a new post-war image as a democratic, forward-looking nation. Unfortunately, the Munich games are most remembered by the kidnapping of Israeli athletes by a group of Palestinian extremists, failed negotiations and a gun battle that left 11 Israelis and five kidnappers dead. The budget for security at the Munich Olympics was about \$2 million. At the next Olympics, organizers would spend \$100 million to keep the games safe.?

According to a recent Globe and Mail report, ?Montreal's official (1976) Olympic debt took 30 years [and billions of heavily taxed cigarettes] to extinguish, but Quebecers have not stopped paying for those Summer Games. The provincial government provides an annual \$17-million subsidy to the RIO, the body that maintains the stadium and adjacent infrastructure. Le Stade still needs \$300-million worth of repairs, on top of a new roof, to ensure its structural integrity.?

The only time that the Games seemed to run properly was in 1984, in Los Angeles. These games were not sponsored by government, but were instead funded by corporations.

I do hope to continue cheering on our Canadian athletes who compete at future Summer Olympic Games; I just hope the games won't be held in our backyard.

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