

NO-LYMPICS FOR CHICAGO

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Disappointing, but new dreams await

A walk in Washington Park shows setback won't dim our city's shine



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The great green expanse of Washington Park that would have been the center of the universe for a Chicago Olympics in 2016 was deserted even before the fateful first ballot was cast Friday in Copenhagen.

The only sound penetrating the howl of a cold north wind was the occasional honking from a couple hundred geese grazing on the athletic fields.

I could easily imagine the South Side park exactly this way seven years hence, the grass perhaps a few inches longer, the ball fields empty and waiting for the weekend action, a handful of walkers and joggers quietly circling the perimeter.

There was no longer any need to imagine the voices of 80,000 strong rising as one in the Olympic Stadium for the finish of a great race or the spectacle of the Opening Ceremonies. Or the buzz from an Olympic swimming pool churned up by the next Michael Phelps. Or how three weeks in August might shape a city for decades.

We'll never know what might

That's one of the advantages of losing out on the Olympics, along with the fact that we won't have to hear about it constantly for seven more years — seven years being long enough for anything to wear out its welcome.

But still I'm disappointed, maybe not quite as disappointed as when the Bears lost to the Colts in the Super Bowl, although in that range.

At least we were beaten by the city with the single most compelling argument for being chosen to host the Games: that they have never been held in South America. I always thought that would give Rio de Janeiro the advantage. In that regard, it's a little like consoling ourselves after the Super Bowl with the knowledge that we were beaten by the better quarterback.

As in the Super Bowl, there will continue to be plenty of abuse heaped on our quarterback this time, too: Mayor Daley.

Sorry, I'm not joining in. While I'd say he went about it wrong, taking the opinion of everyday Chicagoans for granted again with another episode of "Mayor Knows Best" and hiding the ball on the finances, I still believe Daley was smart to take a shot at bringing home the prize.

This was an opportunity lost. A lost chance to make history, to inspire our children and to strengthen our city. As to Chicago falling short, there's an old saying:



jacket when over the radio came the stunning announcement that Chicago had been prematurely ejected from the competition.

I passed this along to the first people I encountered in the park, Danielle Aaron, 29, and Cheryl Bivens, 41, out for their daily walk.

"Yes!" they shouted in unison and jumped into the air. "Thank you Jesus," said one. "That made my day," said the other.

Aaron and Bivens, who live just west of the park in Englewood, told me they were convinced they would be forced to move from their homes

shared my disappointment.

"I thought for sure that we had it, man," Ali said. "I already had my ideas on how I was going to capitalize — by renting out my basement."

Over in a corner of the park, the UniverSoul Circus had pitched its tent and was entertaining a packed house of squealing schoolchildren, oblivious to the Olympic decision.

Their happy faces were a reminder of what's good about being from a great city. No single setback can knock it off its moorings. Daley's right: Life goes on.

In which direction, though, is the next discussion: whether we can channel this Olympic energy into something new. I still say we should set our sights on making this the safest city in America by 2016. But I'd rather see the mayor pause a moment before lurching off in another direction.

There's only one matter to deal with in a big hurry. Somebody needs to take down those Chicago 2016 banners. No need to "Imagine" anymore.

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