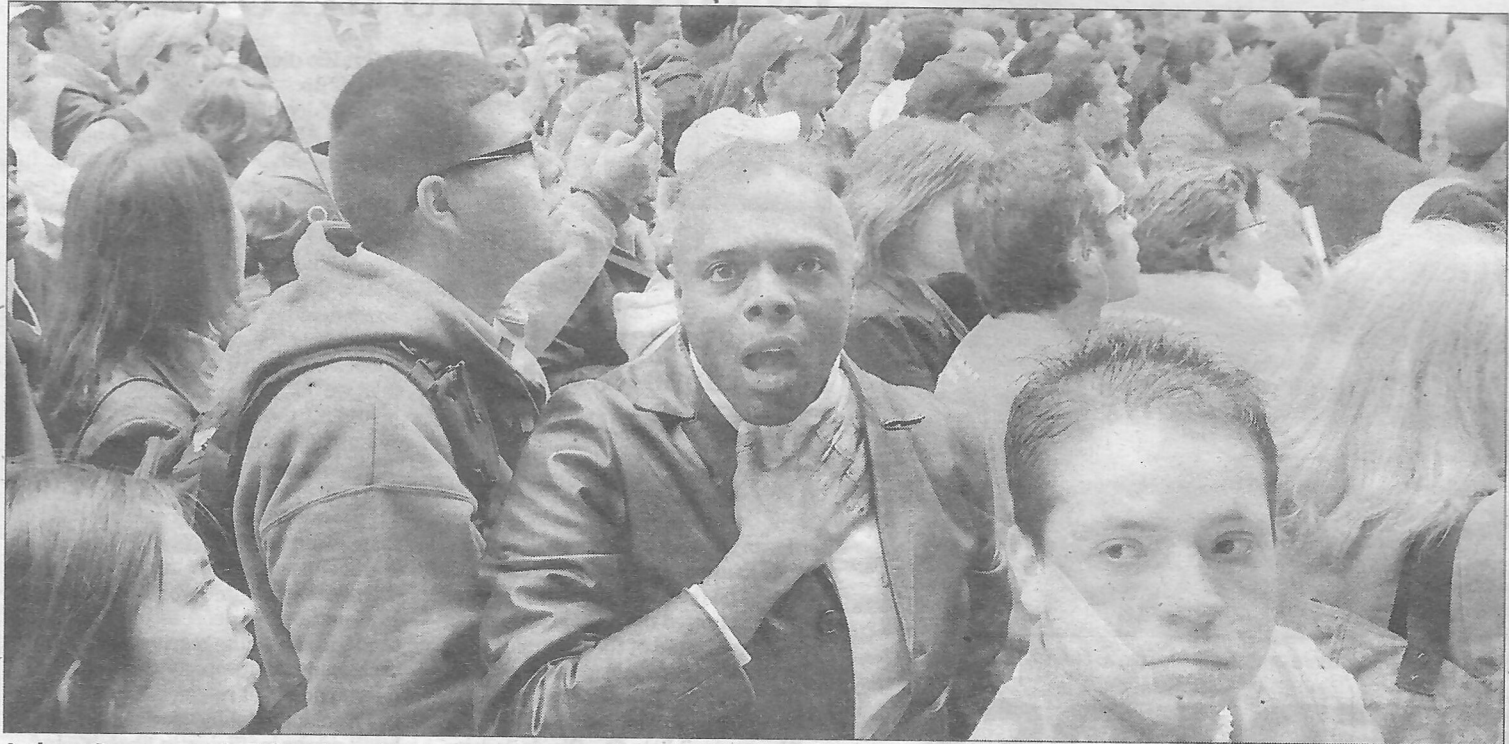


'It's awful — I thought we had it'

CHICAGOANS REACT | Olympic committee's decision comes as shock for many residents



Anthony Green reacts in Daley Plaza after the announcement that Chicago was eliminated. | JOHN J. KIM/SUN-TIMES

BY ABDON M. PALLASCH,
FRANK MAIN AND DAN ROZEK

Staff Reporters

Moments after he spoke those astonishing words, you half expected the International Olympic Committee president to say, "Just a little IOC humor, of course Chicago hasn't been eliminated in the first round of voting."

But for thousands of Chicagoans gathered in Daley Center Plaza and elsewhere in the city Friday, it was no joke, and the Olympic dream was over long before the widely expected final showdown between Chicago and Rio de Janeiro.

In the plaza, a shellshocked quiet fell over what was to have been celebration central. Jaws dropped. Flag-waving arms froze. People gasped.

"It's awful," said Mona Higgins, 37, a Chicago pharmacist who wore an orange Olympics T-shirt to the plaza. "I thought we had it. I wanted to bring the world to our city and show them. This would have been so fun. Now, this will be like last year with the Cubs."

Cook County Commissioner Peter Silvestri, who was also in the crowd, said: "This is so anti-climactic. It's really a tragedy. It would have been so great for the city."

"I'm stunned. I thought this was

going to be a contest between Chicago and Rio de Janeiro," said Ald. Toni Preckwinkle (4th), who was also at the Daley Center Plaza rally.

But the disappointment wasn't universal.

"I don't have a strong feeling either way," said Richard Ploucher, 67, of Chicago, munching a hoagie and walking through the plaza after a doctor's appointment. "I thought if we got it, it would be nice, but somebody had to lose. I am surprised we got knocked out in the first round."

All the same, Ploucher said he would have been willing to pay higher taxes if Chicago had landed the Olympics.

Meanwhile, in Washington Park — where an 80,000-seat Olympic stadium had been planned — dejection was widespread.

Luther and Romana Rogers came to the park from Crete. They brought two nephews and a niece, hoping for a family celebration of Chicago's victory.

"With Oprah and the president, we should have had it," Romana Rogers said.

Luther Rogers, who's a contractor, said he thought the Olympics would have been great for business.

"I think it's terrible," Rogers said. "It would have brought out

'GOOD!' | Disappointment at bid rejection not shared by all

Anti-Olympics activists cheered Friday morning as the rest of the crowd at Daley Center Plaza mourned the International Olympic Committee's decision to give the 2016 Games to Rio de Janeiro instead of Chicago.

As the Rev. Jesse Jackson tried to do TV interviews, Willie J.R. Fleming shouted, "Tell Mayor Daley and President Obama they need to come back here and come to Fenger High School!"

That was the school attended by honor student Derrion Albert, beaten to death last week.

The mantra of the anti-Games activists has been that the Olympics would divert money and attention from more pressing city needs, such as efforts to improve schools and in-

frastructure. The Games would raise taxes and enrich the connected, they said.

As dejected Olympics supporters left Daley Center Plaza, George Blakemore shouted, "Good! Now go home and work on parking meters and schools!"

Anka Karewicz, 28, another anti-Games activist, said she hoped opponents such as herself are part of the reason Chicago lost.

Amid the unhappy faces in Washington Park on Friday, one man didn't seem too upset. The Chicago resident, who declined to give his name, said, "The only Chicago people not happy about this decision are the ones in Copenhagen."

Abdon Pallasch, Dan Rozek
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the diversity of the city for everyone to see. It would have helped black contractors like myself."

As the news sank in, a small group of college students roamed an empty Daley Center Plaza, still holding their "It's Gonna Hap-

pen" banners. They had scrawled the word "Not" on their signs.

And there were still hundreds of people waiting in line for free "I BACK THE BID" T-shirts.

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