

That's life in the bid city



At South Side landmark, Chicagoans stunned, saddened by rejection

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There had been more varying opinions about the White Sox' woes and the Blackhawks' upcoming season than there had been about the Olympics at Schaller's Pump. The South Side landmark is located so deep in the heart of Daley country that the 11th Ward Democratic Party headquarters is just across the street, a "We Back the Bid" sign stuck to the door, but the lack of Olympic debate wasn't because everybody was convinced the politicians were telling the truth.

It had long been assumed that this was a done deal, money in the bag. Why debate something that's inevitable?

That's what made the start of this day at Chicago's oldest bar and restaurant like no other. Several regulars stooled up, expecting to watch the historic announcement only to learn that Chicago's bid had been the first one tossed to the curb. Not even in an antiquated tavern that has suffered as much sporting disappointment as this one did anyone believe that at the end of another forgettable baseball season, Chicago's bid would finish fourth, behind the White Sox and the Cubs.

"Everybody thought it was for sure," Kim Schaller said. "Eighty percent of the people thought we had it. I guess that's part of life, getting knocked down."

Chicago history

The announcement was two hours away, and the last place I wanted to be was Daley Plaza, where supporters (many paid) in orange shirts held a pep rally while media types stood around interviewing each other. I went to Schaller's instead. Where better to watch history in the making than a place that has seen so much of it?

George "Harvey" Schaller opened the business at 3714 S. Halsted in 1891, and it remains family-owned and -operated to this day. It's a place where the people who gather for a meal or a shot and a beer know each other — and

their fathers and grandmothers knew each other, too.

There's still a peephole in the wall from prohibition days. There used to be a bookmaking operation in back. When the pay phone was removed in 2005, it was learned that the original had been installed in 1925.

If you've never been, it's one of those only-in-Chicago places that you couldn't imagine anywhere else.

"I sat up and watched it last night. I couldn't believe how well the first lady, the president and the mayor did — and it didn't even matter," Jay Schaller said while opening two more cans of beer behind the bar. "You couldn't watch the presentation without getting emotional."

What made him emotional? "It pointed out what a great city we live in and that we take it for granted. When you see the waterfront, Grant Park, everything, you realize what we have. We're better than those other cities, that's for sure."

This assignment isn't without its occupational hazards. A reporter came here in 2003 to research a story about how White Sox fans were dealing with the Cubs' success, and the patrons tried — quite successfully, it turns out — to get him inebriated. They still laugh at the memory of watching him print "I'm buzzed now" in big, shaky letters in his notebook.

I order coffee, then Diet Pepsi. After a bowl of beef-and-macaroni soup and a plate of roast pork, one beer.

"Now I know how Cubs fans feel," Sue Schaller cracks in a room filled with White Sox memorabilia.

Eddie Kochaney sits one stool away and watches the Blackhawks' season opener on TV. The 33-year-old bricklayer was hoping a winning bid would mean a steady paycheck. He's a Notre Dame, Bears, Blackhawks and — believe it or not here in the shadow of Sox Park — Cubs fan but said he would've attended as many events as possible just to bask in the moment and soak up the scene.

Not even here in Mayor Daley's



Patsy Dimm can't hide her disappointment after Chicago's 2016 Olympic bid was snubbed. | RICHARD A. CHAPMAN/SUN-TIMES

old neighborhood were people convinced the politicians weren't going to line their pockets. Not everyone was behind the bid. The idea of showcasing their city to the world would've won over critics, however. Chicago would've embraced these Games as they approached. It would've been difficult not to.

What could've been

"You know how loud it is in the United Center for the anthem [before Blackhawks games]?" he asked. "Imagine how loud it would be during the national anthem if Team USA won the gold medal in basketball. That would've been great."

If the same course used for the Chicago Marathon was used for the

Olympics, an international event would've taken place on these very streets.

"To see Olympic athletes running through your neighborhood would've been so cool," Kochaney said.

This is the South Side. This is Chicago. When you get knocked down, you get back up. There was disappointment, sure. Irish Dave promised to dance on a tabletop if Chicago won the bid. There will be no dancing now.

Kim Schaller received a text message from her daughter: "That's what we get," it read, "for being overconfident."

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