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Athens Wins 2004 Games

Olympics Go to Greece in Deal With Mandela

By Ian Thomsen
International Herald Tribune

LAUSANNE, Switzerland — After fretting and doubting itself for seven years, which is not a long time by Greek standards, the International Olympic Committee reversed an earlier decision and awarded the 2004 Summer Olympic Games to Athens by a huge margin.

Many experts within the Olympic movement had expected that these Games would go to Rome. But Athens won every round of voting as Buenos Aires, followed by Stockholm, and then Cape Town, were eliminated from the election. On the final ballot, with just the two ancient rivals left standing, Athens won, 66 votes to 41 for Rome — the result of a deal the Greeks worked out with the South African president, Nelson Mandela.

Not only have the IOC delegates completed an Olympic ring of a kind by returning the world's richest sporting prize to its original home, they have also opened doors that would have remained shut if Rome or Stockholm had been chosen. With this election the IOC decidedly moved away from the almost perfect setting that Rome would have provided and taken its heavily-sponsored treasure to a city with some rather

obvious pollution and traffic problems — the kind found commonly throughout much of the urban world.

It will be Athens's responsibility to solve those problems and stage, by its own unique standards, a spectacular Games that will eventually help steer the Olympics to Africa and South America for the first time. To that end, the IOC can take some credit for having given Athens a kick in the pants seven years ago.

It was in 1990 that the Greeks, having given birth to the ancient and modern Olympics, took it for granted that they would be invited to hold the Centennial Olympic Games. Instead those Games took place last summer, somewhat disastrously, in Atlanta, a decision that has forever since been second-guessed within the Olympic movement. At first the Greeks reacted with outrage to that decision. By the time they had gathered for a final presentation before the IOC Friday morning, that outrage had been distilled to a single reasoned, determined and feminine voice.

As Roman officials had feared, the most dynamic figure in this two-year-long election turned out to be Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, the chief executive of the new Atheni-

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GAMES: Athens Gets the Nod

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an bid, the society wife of a millionaire and, more important, a trained lawyer herself. Yes, she admitted to the IOC, her city's previous attempt at winning the Olympics had failed because of the mistaken belief that its Olympic heritage would magically solve its problems.

The IOC had always sympathetically hoped that Athens would take a more honest look in its own mirror.

This issue of Greek stubbornness gave Angelopoulos something to attack, point by point, giving her arguments a strong-willed coherence that the other 55-minute presentations lacked. If as many as half of the 107 IOC delegates were still undecided, as was suggested Friday morning, she clearly won them over by proving professionally and with minimal ballyhoo that plans to build a new airport, metro and highway — among other projects — would permit Athens to stage a first-class Olympics.

Running in the backdrop of her speech were hints and memories of the Olympic heritage that might regenerate the spiritual base that the IOC has tended to take for granted in this commercial era.

Unknown to the IOC members, who were voting by secret ballot and didn't know which city was receiving the most support, Athens won 32 votes in the first round compared with 23 for Rome. Buenos Aires, which was bidding for a fourth time, and Cape Town, representing the first formal African bid to hold the Olympics, were joint last. In a secondary ballot to break their tie Buenos Aires was knocked out by 62-44.

The Argentine supporters spread their votes fairly equally among Athens (38), Rome (28) and Cape Town (22) as Stockholm fell out in the second round. The news that Swedish police had captured the alleged Stockholm terrorist, which the Stockholm organizers announced dramatically during their presentation Friday morning, apparently had no effect on the IOC.

After Cape Town went out with 20 votes in the third round, 14 of those votes went in support of Athens in the final round. "Now I can speak about it," Angelopoulos said. "I met yesterday with President Mandela. He promised me that if Cape Town was not in the draw to



Athens' booster: Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki.

the end, he will support Athens."

"The first winner was Athens, the second winner was Mandela," said Ottavio Cinquanta, an IOC member from Italy. Mandela obviously believed his favor would be returned. "I think the host of the 2008 Olympics will be South Africa," said Mario Pescante, head of the Italian National Olympic Committee.

Not even Mandela's short, noble speech could catch the mood of the day.

The IOC can put up with only so much talk about social truths and responsibilities. It also wants results. When the envelope was torn open and the vote announced by the IOC president, Juan Antonio Samaranch, at the end of a half-hour live TV special beamed around the world, the Greek organizers in the theater audience realized with screams of joy that they, like their Olympics, had joined the modern world.

■ Bomb Suspect Held

Swedish police arrested a 26-year-old suspect in two bomb blasts aimed against Stockholm's bid for the 2004 Olympics, The Associated Press reported.

The police declined to name him, but Swedish tabloids Friday identified him as Mats Hinze, a member of an extreme right group, Frihetsfronten (Freedom Front).

The suspect was arrested late Thursday as he tried to blow up a statue being used as the symbol for Stockholm's candidacy. Last month, bombs destroyed large parts of the Olympic Stadium in Stockholm and the Ullevi Stadium in Gothenburg.

The man was arrested with nine pounds of explosives in his knapsack, only 18 feet from the statue, the Expressen, an evening newspaper, said.