

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at an Olympic, Paralympic, and Youth Sport Event

September 16, 2009

Thank you, everybody. Thank you. It is true that I always wanted to fence—[*laughter*—and I thought that would be cool. So I might get a couple tips from you guys. [*Laughter*] Now you see one of the reasons that I love Chicago so much: It's the city where I met the woman I love.

Sixteen days away—we are just 16 days away from the deciding vote on which world city will host the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games, so let's get right down to business here. The United States is eager to welcome the world to our shores. This Nation would be honored to host the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games and to serve as host to thousands of athletes and millions of visitors from around the world. And within this great country of ours, there is no better city than that—than Chicago, Illinois.

Now, I may live in Washington these days. I love Washington, DC. And our house here is a little bigger than the one we got in Chicago. [*Laughter*] But I've called Chicago home for nearly 25 years. It's a city of broad shoulders and big hearts and bold dreams; a city of legendary sports figures, legendary sports venues, and legendary sports fans; a city like America itself, where the world—the world's races and religions and nationalities come together and reach for the dream that brought them here.

In Chicago, old and new exist in harmony. It's a city rooted in an industrial past that laid this Nation's railroads, forged this Nation's steel, rebuilt itself after a great fire, and reversed the course of a mighty river. And it's also a city of bustle and gleaming promise that Mayor Daley has pledged to make the greenest in America. And that's why I think that one of the most exciting parts of the Olympic and Paralympic Games is that all of the plans being made in Chicago exist within minutes of the city center, easily accessible to commerce and culture, parkland and water, because we don't want these venues to be far-flung, all over the place. We want to host these games where we live and work and play.

We want them in the heart of our proud city, the city that opened the way westward in the 19th century, that showed the way skyward in the 20th century, and that is leading the way forward in the 21st century. So Chicago is ready; the American people are ready. We want these games. We want them.

The Olympic and Paralympic Games, they hold a special place in our psyche. They lift us up; they bind us together. They're the sources of fleeting moments, instants, really, that have become permanently seared in our collective memories: the humble victory of Jesse Owens; the perfection of Nadia and Mary Lou; Michael Johnson's astonishment at his own feat; Derek Redmond and Kerri Strug bravely making it through with a little help; Jean Driscoll racing her wheelchair to gold after gold, be it over 100 meters or 26.2 miles. Moments of euphoria after years of hard work and moments when the human spirit triumphed over injury that should have been impossible to overcome, moments of a team's shared glory and moments of lonely disappointment despite one's best efforts, countless moments we live and relive again and again, silently and subconsciously, nodding yes, we do believe in miracles.

We find ourselves riveted by the games. Because even as we cheer, even as we live and die for each point or each tenth of a second, what we see reflected in the Olympic and Paralympic

Games are simple truths of our common humanity, and that no matter who you are, where you're from, or what you look like, with hard work and dedication and discipline you can achieve your dreams. You can make it if you try.

What we see is that although we may come from vastly different stories and very different walks of life, we are one people who possess common values and common ideals, who celebrate individual excellence but also share a recognition that together, we can accomplish great and wonderful things we can't accomplish alone.

It's the stuff from which our young Nation was forged, and it is a set of timeless values that serves as the underpinnings of the Olympic spirit. And so the United States of America does more than just stand behind the Olympic and Paralympic Games; we stand behind their ideals.

And that's why we've created the first ever Office of Olympic, Paralympic, and Youth Sport right here in the White House. Now, this office does the work of coordinating with Federal Agencies to support and promote Olympic and Paralympic Games, but it also works to support and promote the Olympic spirit. We've been working hand in hand with Chicago 2016, the United States Olympic Committee, Olympians and Paralympians, some of whom have joined us here today, to get our young Americans active and involved in sports, because we want to do more than just bring the Olympic Games to America; we want them to create a lasting legacy here in America.

I want to thank the members of the International Olympic Committee for their dedication to the Olympic and Paralympic movement and the values it represents. I am confident that they'll find no greater partners than the city of Chicago and the American people to fuel this movement, to ignite it in new generations, and to inspire the world in 2016 with magnificent games that bring this world together in noble competition and shared celebration of our common humanity.

The energy, excitement, and enthusiasm on display at the White House here today, these aren't new. The folks gathered here this afternoon have had the Olympic spirit blazing within them for years, working tirelessly to bring these games to the city and the country we love. And, I promise you, we are fired up about this.

I would make the case in Copenhagen personally, if I weren't so firmly committed to making real the promise of quality, affordable health care for every American. But the good news is I'm sending a more compelling superstar to represent the city and country we love, and that is our First Lady, Michelle Obama. She's going because she and I share the conviction that bringing the games to the United States isn't just important for the city, but for the American people. And I'm confident she and my senior adviser and director of the White House Office of Olympic, Paralympic, and Youth Sport, Valerie Jarrett, will represent the American people well.

Our Nation, from the local to the national level, is committed to the success of these games. The Chicago City Council unanimously supports this bid; both Houses of the United States Congress support this bid; I support this bid. And on behalf of the nearly 20,000 volunteers, the more than 1 million who've already signed up for—in support, and all who've already taken up this cause and made it their own, first as the cause of the city, and now the cause of a nation, the United States supports this bid.

Americans, like Chicagoans, we don't like to make small plans. We want to dream big and reach high. We hope deeply. We want these games. And if you choose Chicago, I promise you this: Chicago will make America proud, and America will make the world proud.

So as I said when we first were announcing this bid in Chicago, let the games begin right here in the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:11 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago, IL; former Olympic athletes Nadia E. Comaneci, Mary Lou Retton, Michael D. Johnson, Derek A. Redmond, and Kerri A. Strug; and former Paralympic athlete Jean Driscoll. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Olympic, Paralympic, and youth sport event.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Comaneci, Nadia E.; Driscoll, Jean; Jarrett, Valerie B.; Johnson, Michael D.; Obama, Michelle; Redmond, Derek A.; Retton, Mary Lou; Strug, Kerri A.

Subjects: Olympic Committee, International; Sports : Fencing; Sports : Olympic Games; Sports : Paralympic Games; White House Office : Olympic, Paralympic and Youth Sport, White House Office of; White House Office : Olympic, Paralympic and Youth Sport, White House Office of.

DCPD Number: DCPD200900718.