

PRO/CON: Should the Olympics have a permanent home?

By Tribune News Service, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.18.16

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In this July 2015 photo, the Olympic Park for the 2016 Olympics is under construction in Rio de Janeiro. The Olympics offers 28 sports, 300 events, 10,500 athletes and, with the exception of five football venues, are all packed into Rio for 17 days. The Paralympics add two more weeks, and thousands more athletes. Photo: AP Photo/Leo Correa, File

PRO: Billions spent on the Games could help people

The Olympics are in need of a financial solution.

In the heat of summer, there's nothing better than cheering on American swimmers Katie Ledecky and Michael Phelps or the United States women's gymnastics team. But the Games' price tag for host nations has soared too high. That's why we need to consider permanent sites for the Summer and Winter Games.

Though Brazil has been sliding into what it is calling "financial calamity," the Olympics have gone on as scheduled in Rio de Janeiro.

No matter that a security force of 85,000 soldiers and police officers was required.

No matter that Brazil would benefit more from using public funds on affordable housing and clean water for its citizens rather than costly new sports facilities.

No matter that the final price tag is expected to be greater than \$20 billion.

“We are in a moment in the world where we need to be reasonable with the way we spend money,” said Fernando Meirelles, the film director who choreographed the opening ceremonies. “When 40 percent of the homes in Brazil have no sanitation, you can’t really be spending (billions) for a show.”

That’s a message that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) needs to hear loud and clear.

Picking A Permanent Home

The idea of permanent Olympic sites dates back more than three decades.

In 1984, F. Don Miller and William Simon of the U.S. Olympic Committee proposed permanent sites in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. According to their plan, the Olympics would alternate between them.

Where should the permanent sites be? Why not ask the athletes? A board of former and current medal winners would know the top existing facilities in their sport. Oslo, in Norway, might work for track, and London or Sydney for swimming.

It may make sense for Greece, where the Olympics originated more than 3,000 years ago, to be among the permanent sites, too. Such facilities would receive regular upkeep to remain state-of-the-art.

What else would such a change accomplish?

First, it would end the insane bidding wars to host the games, and help put a stop to the bribes that are often involved. More importantly, it would hold down costs for the host cities.

Cutting Costs That Keep Rising

Montreal in 1976, Athens in 2004 and now Rio compromised their citizens’ future for the opportunity to throw a party for rest of the world. These cities spent billions of dollars they didn't have. Unfortunately, the spending continues to spike. The 2008 Summer Games in Beijing cost more than \$42 billion, and Sochi spent more than \$50 billion for the Winter Games in the Russian city six years later.

Costs will continue to spiral upward with the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, where a new stadium will cost \$2 billion alone. That is even higher than the construction costs of MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, Yankee Stadium in New York, and London's Wembley, which serves as England’s national soccer venue.

By splitting television and advertising revenue between the permanent sites, they could easily become a reality. There would be no need to build new facilities for the next Summer or Winter Games.

Of course, the world rarely operates in such a logical, fair way. But by using permanent sites, the IOC would also have a chance to polish its tarnished image. Fewer upfront costs would mean a better bottom line for everyone. It would also give officials a chance to redirect profits to developing countries for vaccines or food assistance.

Such programs would revitalize the image of the games. From the recent doping scandals to reports of the polluted water in Rio, you would think those in charge would be eager to clean up their act.

Now's their chance.

A graduate of Syracuse University, Tim Wendel is the author of 11 books, including "Going for the Gold" and "Summer of '68." He is the writer in residence at Johns Hopkins University's Washington, D.C. campus

CON: Hosting the Olympics promotes national pride

Anchoring the Olympic Games in Greece or in permanent sites on five continents would diminish the majesty and international scope of the games. Doing this would be very wrong.

The seemingly endless problems with this year's Rio Games have prompted calls for new ways of organizing the games. Instead of having nations compete to host the games, some think they should be held in permanent facilities in North and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa.

This would be a serious mistake. It would deprive countries of a chance to show national pride, boost their economies and, most importantly, make history.

The Olympics represent the ultimate opportunity to showcase a national identity on the global stage.

Celebrating Recovery From World War II

For example, the 1964 Tokyo Olympics marked a shining moment in Japan's history. It restored Japan's national pride after it was defeated in World War II, and it signaled the country's long, victorious climb toward becoming an international economic power.

Those Olympics helped rebuild the nation's infrastructure. The bullet train connecting Tokyo and Osaka started operating just days before the Games were held. The core of the Metropolitan Expressway, the highway system in central Tokyo, was newly constructed. Tokyo's public transportation network was given a major boost, while the public broadcasting system was upgraded, which encouraged families to purchase color television sets.

In Great Britain during the 2012 Olympics, polls showed that a vast majority of British men felt a renewed sense of national pride because their nation was hosting the Games. This sense of pride is invaluable to a nation.

Making History Beyond Sports

The Olympics have also made history for reasons larger than the sports themselves.

During the Berlin 1936 Olympics, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler planned to show the world that the Aryan people, meaning whites of Northern European ancestry, were the dominant race. Jesse Owens, an African-American, proved him wrong by becoming the most successful athlete of those games.

Owens also became the first American to win four track and field gold medals at a single Olympics. This record stood for 48 years.

The fact that Owens did this in Berlin added a layer of meaning to his achievements. Hitler wouldn't have been as humiliated if the Olympics had taken place somewhere else in the world.

Standing Up To The Soviet Union

Another case where the world was focused on the Olympics at least in part because of their location came in 1956, in Melbourne, Australia. Back then, Australia was an exotic, unknown place for much of the world. This increased interest in the Melbourne games.

Armed conflict in Hungary threatened to disrupt the 1956 Games. In November of that year, tanks from the Soviet Union rolled into that nation to crush an anti-Communist armed revolt by the Hungarians, who were vastly outnumbered and outgunned.

Shortly thereafter, the Soviet water polo team met the Hungarians in the semifinals. Hungary got the world's attention by winning 4-0. The match turned ugly after a Hungarian player was pulled bleeding from the pool with a deep gash over his eye, the result of a Soviet head butt.

A brawl involving players and spectators quickly started, and the police had to step in to prevent a riot. But again, the brave Hungarians prevailed.

The Olympics belong to the world, not to any single nation. Any major city that wants to foot the bill should be eligible to host them.

Whitt Flora, an independent journalist, covered the White House for The Columbus Dispatch and was chief congressional correspondent for Aviation Week & Space Technology magazine.

Quiz

- 1 Read the sentence from the first section of the PRO article.

No matter that a security force of 85,000 soldiers and police officers was required.

How does this sentence help develop the author's argument?

- (A) It shows that the crowds at the Olympics can get large and out of control.
 - (B) It shows one of the costs that made the Rio Olympics so expensive.
 - (C) It shows that the Olympics are a dangerous event to participate in.
 - (D) It shows that many Brazilians are employed as security workers during the Olympics.
- 2 Read the final two sections of the CON article, "Making History Beyond Sports" and "Standing Up To The Soviet Union."
- Which of the following statements can be inferred based on these sections?
- (A) Most Olympics have been held during times of war.
 - (B) More violence tends to occur in cities that host the Olympics.
 - (C) The Olympics are often a site where political statements are made.
 - (D) Some countries are not prepared to handle the controversies around the Olympics.
- 3 Which sentence BEST summarizes the CON author's main argument?
- (A) Most countries do not have enough money to host the Olympics.
 - (B) The Olympics can have a strong effect on a country's infrastructure.
 - (C) Any country that can pay for the Olympics should be allowed to host them.
 - (D) Most countries that host the Olympics have problems with war and violence.
- 4 Which sentence would BOTH the PRO author and the CON author agree with?
- (A) Hosting the Olympics should be limited to richer countries.
 - (B) Hosting the Olympics can bring more violence and war to a country.
 - (C) Hosting the Olympics can have a lasting effect on a country.
 - (D) Hosting the Olympics tends to benefit the citizens of a country.

Answer Key

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