

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

AN ANCIENT NATION IS MADE YOUNG AGAIN THROUGH THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT

On July 13, 2001, at the 112th IOC Session in Moscow, Beijing was elected the Host City for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad in 2008.

The vote followed in line with the recommendation of the IOC Evaluation Commission that “a Beijing Games would leave a unique legacy to China and to sports. The Commission is confident that Beijing could organise an excellent Games.”

One of the great leaps leading up to the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games was the remarkable change in China between its near-miss bid in 1993 and the successful bid eight years later. Overseas media report that two events in the late 20th century and early 21st century will go down in history as events of historic significance for China. One was the smashing of the Gang of Four and launching of reforms to opening-up; the other is Beijing hosting the Games.

Chinese are passionate about hosting the Olympic Games because it is a symbol that China is switching from an ancient nation to a youthful one and from a big country to a powerful one. As a matter of fact, winning the bid to host the Olympic Games demonstrates the country’s rising standing among its world peers and its ever stronger national strength.

In their intensified rivalry to host the Games, coun-

tries are actually competing with one another in the fields of economic power, development potential, cultural tradition, education and science as well as international image. In the course of Beijing’s bid for the Games, the coherence of the Chinese nation and the Chinese people’s passion for hosting the Games were fully demonstrated to the world. This helped in Beijing’s outbidding its rivals.

All these historical and emotional factors are superficial compared to the most important ones: China’s rapidly rising national strength since the reform and opening-up were launched in the late 1970s, the growing role played by the country in international affairs, and the trust it widely enjoys among the world’s nations. By comparing Beijing’s failure to win its Olympics bid in 1993 and its success in 2001, we can see these factors at work.

In 1993, Beijing lost to Sydney by two votes. The defeat could be regarded as a kind of success, taking into account the unfavorable international climate China found itself in. To begin with, the economic sanctions imposed on China by Western countries still existed and some people were skeptical about socialism with Chinese characteristics in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse.

By the way, the influence of politics is still felt in many areas, although the Olympic credo is that sports goes beyond ideology, culture and race. Eight years had passed and now it was 2001, time for another bid. In the intervening years, extensive and intensive changes had taken place in China and in the rest of the world as well. The country's GDP had risen 2.5 fold. China's transportation and communications infrastructures had been significantly improved. The construction of sports venues and environmental protection projects had also made impressive progress.

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Furthermore, democracy and rule of law were being pushed forward. In Beijing, the bidding city, GDP reached US\$24 billion in 2001, increasing at an annual rate of 10 percent. Hong Kong in 1997 and Macao in 1999 returned to the sovereignty of China. They were functioning smoothly as two special administra-

tive regions of China, which helped enhance China's international status.

Internationally, the country's relations with the United States and European countries began to develop in directions favorable to China, thanks to effective diplomatic strategy and policy. To cope with the impact of the 1997 Southeast Asian financial crisis, China adopted effective monetary policies, including maintaining the stability of the renminbi foreign exchange rate. This helped keep the crisis from spilling over to larger areas, while maintaining the stability of China's own economy.

The economies of China's neighboring countries began to recover, thanks in part to the Chinese economy. China's role in maintaining regional economic stability was recognized by its neighbors and the world community. Against this background, Beijing outbid rival cities in 2001. We often say that we are capable of doing something because we are standing on the shoulders of a giant. In winning the bid to host the Games, we were standing on the shoulders of the increasingly powerful motherland and the Chinese people.·

Source: China Daily



A night time view of the National Stadium, nicknamed The Bird's Nest adds to Beijing's stunning scenery. (Xinhua/Luo Xiaoguang)