

It's too late to get nasty about Beijing Games

by Nick Canepa

Politics and sports make a bad, bitter cocktail. It's hard to sweeten. The two ingredients also make horrible Chinese food.

Best we can tell, China has been around at least 5,000 years and has survived despite probably inventing gunpowder, paper and pasta. China is more than dishes. It is what it is. China has had a great many bad people run through its yard.

Human rights has nothing to do with kung pao chicken. Have we already forgotten Tiananmen Square?

But that has nothing to do with the Olympics. We're stuck.

When the International Olympic Committee awarded its 2008 Summer Games to Beijing, it didn't have to study. This is a country with an abominable human rights record, Beijing is so smog-infested it makes Los Angeles look like Zurich, there are about 80 billion people around, and Tibet is being squeezed, probably, eventually, into submission by a government that sells us just about everything but baseballs.

But we're going anyway. And we should. Because the Olympics is sports, not war. And still, some people are talking boycott. It's easy for them to say, because they do not play. They talk.

Politicians have not put in the incredible time and dedication these athletes have. They live for the Olympic moment. Maybe China can keep its people from doing things. The United States and other free nations should let their people go - and stay out of the way.

Jimmy Carter has been, by far, a better after-president, but the biggest mistake of his administration was his ordering the United States to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Why did he do it? Because the Russians were in Afghanistan.

Well, we're in Afghanistan now. The United States is in Iraq, too.

And yet we have some pols talking about boycotting the opening ceremonies. Face it. It would be a wrist slap, an internationally embarrassing one, at that, and it would do absolutely no good for anyone involved.

U.S. Rep. Thaddeus McCotter, R-Mich., has drafted a bill to restrict U.S. government officials and employees from attending the Aug. 8 parade, which probably is the only feel-good moment of the logistically ridiculous games.

"President Bush, as the leader of the free world, must uphold America's beacon of liberty to the world's oppressed," McCotter said on his Web site. "This noble cause is harmed through his attendance as a guest of this oppressive communist government."

Well, it really isn't. I have too many problems with the president to get into here, but his country is going to be represented in China, like it or not. It was not his decision to stage the games in Beijing, and he's not ordering the athletes to stay home, nor does he plan to personally boycott opening ceremonies.

The United States will be there and should be there. I hate to imagine how many American businesspeople visit China every week. That's about the money, so that's all right, Mr. McCotter?

I don't know, to this day, how many young lives Carter affected with his 1980 decision. What's the sense in boycotting opening ceremonies? It's a parade. Do our elected officials actually believe China is going to change course if a few countries don't march?

Does China care? Has it ever cared? Hey, it's China.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy wants China to stay away from Tibetan protesters. He might not attend. A shame. German Chancellor Angela Merkel isn't going. Another shame. Their athletes can use them there.

This isn't Baghdad. We're not marching off to war. The mistake was awarding China the games in the first place, and, believe me, if that country didn't get these Olympics, it wouldn't have changed a bit. Nor will it change if a few countries decide not to hoist a flag.

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi is urging Bush to boycott the ceremonies. She wants the athletes to compete but would like the president to stay away. Why? For political reasons, and it's just incredible that the Olympic Games are so political.

"I think boycotting the opening ceremony, which really gives respect to the Chinese government," Pelosi said, "is something that should be kept on the table."

No - it should be kept off it.

Why does it only give respect to the Chinese government, which everyone knows deserves no respect? Do the opening ceremonies not represent all countries?

Let's get with it here. Just because the exiled Dalai Lama - "big hitter the Lama, long" - has stirred things up in Tibet, doesn't mean anything's going to change.

San Francisco, which has a huge Chinese-American community, will be the only North American city through which the Olympic torch will pass, and there are people who want the celebration canceled.

Will that help? I'm sure there are Chinese folk living in San Francisco because they didn't want to live in China anymore.

This all is about sending a message, and it will be a message not received. We're not dealing with Switzerland here.

Look, China was a bad choice, but it's the bed chosen. Let's not mess up the linen for our kids. Washington, stay out of this bedroom.

China, alas, also may have invented linen.

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