Olympics 2000 Go to Sydney

By William Drzeniak
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Sydney was awarded the Summer Olympic Games for the year 2000 Thursday by the International Olympic Committee, culminating the most highly publicized battle to host the Games ever seen in the history of the modern Olympic movement.

The compromise favorite after Beijing ran into hostile opposition at the last two rounds of voting, Sydney prevailed in the fourth and final round to win by votes of 43 to 43, over Beijing. The Chinese city had mobilized enormous political and economic resources to host the Games to one-fifth of the world's humanity and mark the dawn of a new era.

The victory followed three years of bruising competition among five cities vying to host not more than 10,000 athletes and to gain commercial rights worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Melbourne, Australia, hosted the 1956 Olympics but it and Brisbane lost subsequent bids to host the Games.

Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating, who spearheaded the final-hour presentation to the IOC in Sydney, described the Games as the country's superb sports facilities, pro-environment policies and stable democracy as he staked out Sydney's merits over Beijing.

The 28 IOC members elected first Iceland, then Berlin and then Manchester, England, the contender with the fewest votes was knocked out of each round until a majority emerged to place the member abstaining on the final two ballots. The long process of ballots was over as the Keating said, "We got seven of Berlin's nine votes and eight of Manchester's 11 votes. So it's a European victory too."

The Chinese bid enjoyed strong support from the IOC's powerful chairman, Juan Antonio Samaranch, and its members from developing nations who believed the 2000 Games would hasten the modernization of the Asian giant. Corporate sponsors were also enthusiastic about the commercial prospects in an event that would draw a market of 1.2 billion people.

But Beijing ran into hostile opposition from many Western governments because of continuing abuses of human rights four years after the brutal crackdown in Tiananmen Square. In the United States, Sen. Bill Bradley, D-N.J., led a campaign urging the IOC to reject Beijing, and the House of Representatives passed a resolution opposing China's candidacy for the Olympics because of its human rights record. Some IOC members also were worried about the many record-breaking times posted recently by China's long-distance women runners at the Stockholm Games in June. Earlier this month, which fueled speculation that they were taking drugs.

Defense Minister Pavel Grachev also warned that if the confrontation with Beijing continued, the armed forces would step in.

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