



April 11, 2008

As President of the U.S. Olympians Association, I oppose any attempt to boycott the Olympic Games in Beijing and thereby single out athletes to pay the price for the political agendas of others. Frankly, I am a victim of a boycott and know first hand how painful it is to have my hopes and dreams plucked from my heart because of political pressures outside my control. I am sure that those Olympians affected by the 1980 and 1984 Boycotts share similar sentiments.

I believe it is the responsibility of every Olympian to protect the rights of all accredited athletes to compete in the Olympic Games. Athletes do not participate in the Olympic Games as warriors, politicians nor activists. They are, and should be, athletes exercising their God given talent to compete on the world's greatest stage. We who have gone before this new generation of gifted talent pledged to compete "in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honor of our teams". That Olympic Oath continues today and gives us the basis for becoming Olympians. There is no political or social message in that Oath. All we did and all we can expect from every competitor, is to compete fairly for the glory and honor of sport.

Our athletes deserve to compete in these Games and to represent our country. The time to influence the politics of China was 7 years ago when China bid for the Olympic Games. While others may chose to debate whether the Olympic Games will have a political effect on China that is not the athlete's focus. There are many organizations that are engaged in efforts to affect change in China. If anyone sincerely feels compelled to send a message to the Chinese government, please direct your attention and send your donations to these groups. But, let's take athletes out of the socio-political arena and keep them in the sporting arena where they belong.

The future of the Olympic Games is hanging in the balance. Every Olympian is inextricably tied to the Olympic Movement. It is our duty as Olympians to protect the stature of the Games, defend the honor of sport and protect the sanctity of the Olympic Creed. I will not naively turn my back to abuses that are the province of politics but I will not let people who do not share my Olympic family tie twist the meaning of the Olympic Games to suit their political or social agendas. The 2008 Olympic Games must go on and they will. They will because Olympians, as guardians of the Games, carriers of the Torch, and keepers of the faith will not yield to those who wish to prevent the youth of the world from competing with dignity beside their brothers and sisters in sport.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Willie Banks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Willie Banks
President
U.S. Olympians

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