

The Tokyo Olympics - More Than A Needed Escape As Our Athletes Provided Positive Lessons For Our Politicians

(by Bill Woods for StreetVibes) 8-25-2021

The Tokyo Olympics are over. Being immersed in the hundreds of events that took place for two weeks in Japan offered a way to escape from politics, the pandemic, climate change, and the summer doldrums. Further, beyond entertaining us with everything from track and field to beach volleyball, the Games also provided us with some hope during these troubling times in our country.

How was this hope communicated? First of all, it was so refreshing to witness the unity and goodwill that existed among the athletes comprising the U.S. delegation in Tokyo. Weary and often depressed about the polarization that characterizes political, economic and social life in this country, many of us were elated to experience this coming together of so many Americans.

This unity was especially refreshing, because it existed in a delegation of athletes that represented the diversity of the entire country. African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Caucasians worked together to represent the U.S. in Tokyo. Women athletes played as large if not an even more prominent role in the success of our delegation at the Games. I thought to myself, it's comparable to "we the people" coming together for a common purpose.

One must hope politicians, especially members of the Republican Party, watched the Games and observed this diversity and unity. The GOP during the Trump era caters solely to its white rural base, and acts like other diverse groups are the enemies that must be excluded from the governing process. Could the fact that nineteen Republican Senators voted for Biden's Infrastructure Bill on August 9th be a sign that some hope for political collaboration still exists?

Since winning gold medals by defeating competitors is a primary purpose of the Olympics, it is ironic that our politicians could learn a lot from how our athletes dealt with defeat. They abided by the rules of their particular sport, and they accepted the results with good will. Most of them communicated that although they competed to win gold, that winning for them was not everything. They accepted that they were all part of a bigger and more important process.

Compare that behavior to a majority of Republicans who won't accept the results of the November Presidential election. Instead of accepting that Biden defeated Trump in a fair, fraud free election, GOP leaders harm the democratic process by spreading the "big lie" that the election was stolen and that voter suppression laws are justified in order to prevent their opponents from promoting future voter fraud. Rather than acknowledging that representative democracy is more important than who wins or loses, the Republican Party currently marches to a mantra that says that winning at all costs is its top priority. This dangerous behavior stems from the Party's non-acceptance of diversity or the concept of serving all the people regardless of social, economic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.

Cynical readers may pooh pooh the theme of this article that we can learn a lot from how our

diverse athletes behaved at the Tokyo Olympics. They might say: "What do the actions of a bunch of gymnasts, swimmers, relay racers, and volleyball players have to do with the difficult decisions of government?" An initial answer is that we are talking about how to create a healthy public environment for making these tough decisions.

If we accept the fact that we are living in a dangerous and troubling time in this country, then any positive models of behavior by Americans can be of help. At the very least, we all need hope and a boost of optimism. The Tokyo Games certainly provided us with those feelings.