

February 7, 2022: Mitt Romney, “From a bad start to a glorious finish, the 2002 Olympic Games brought the Utah Spirit into clear view,” *Deseret News*

Mitt Romney led the organizing committee for the 2002 Winter Olympics in SLC. This article contains his reflections of the Games’ success, twenty years later. [Source simplified for easier reading.]

We got off to a bad start. The bidding accusations made the entire community less enthusiastic, and some even said we should give the Games back. But Utah soldiered on, doing our best to restore the trust that had been placed in us. We wondered: Would volunteers now step forward to fill the 25,000 posts that were needed? After all, volunteers would be required to work 17 straight days in the cold with no pay and no tickets. When we opened the application portal, we got our answer: Almost 50,000 signed up. Utah’s spirit of service was on full display.

The Utah spirit continued throughout the Games. People from Orem saw that the Kazakhstan women’s hockey team was not well-equipped for the competition, so they raised funds to buy the coats, gloves, and headgear that the players needed. People in Heber Valley created a cowboy village next to the Soldier Hollow competition site to give our visitors a taste of the Old West. One volunteer van driver noticed that the Paralympic athletes from Armenia had only wood skis, so he raised funds, negotiated with an equipment company, and got them competitive gear. The Paralympic athletes said that they had never seen such large crowds at their events before. Utah schoolchildren had selected a visiting Paralympic team to support — memorizing their national anthem, making their country’s flag to wave and cheering at their competitions.

Some of Utah’s most well-known citizens also stepped forward in ways I won’t forget, and tons of Utahns donated to the Games, which was a first for any Olympics. I asked The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for so many things that President Gordon B. Hinckley began to laugh, but we received everything we requested.

The Olympians themselves also demonstrated great qualities of the human spirit. Janica Kostelić of war-torn Croatia is one example. She and her family were determined that she would become an Olympian despite their lack of money. She competed throughout Europe, often sleeping in a car afterward because they could not afford a hotel. Just months before the Games, she had knee surgery. But in Utah, she won gold in two slalom events and silver in the super-G. It was the most dominant performance of a woman in Olympic history.

Utah is now the center of Olympic winter sports in North America. But it is much more than that for those of us involved in the Olympic Winter Games of 2002. It is a place of memories and inspiration, for here the Games did indeed “Light the Fire Within.”

Link:

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