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national news

Olympics flee Cobb County

*Organized pressure from gay and lesbian groups
and a former Olympic star prompt the move*

by Martha Allen

The 1996 Olympic volleyball games will not be held in Cobb County, Ga.—where commissioners passed and continue to support a homophobic resolution. Pressure from gay and lesbian groups and former Olympic star Greg Louganis prompted the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games to move the event.

Gay and lesbian residents of Cobb County formed the Olympics Out of Cobb Coalition, with the goal of removing the prestigious Olympic competition from the county.

Last year, the local government of Cobb County passed a resolution condemning same sex orientation. Specifically, the resolution says the so-called "gay lifestyle" is incompatible with the community's standards. The county commission had refused to rescind the measure, despite mounting opposition from residents and the Olympic committee.

In late July, the Olympic committee announced that no part of the 1996 games will take place in Cobb County. Preliminary volleyball competitions were scheduled to be held in the county, which is near suburban Atlanta.

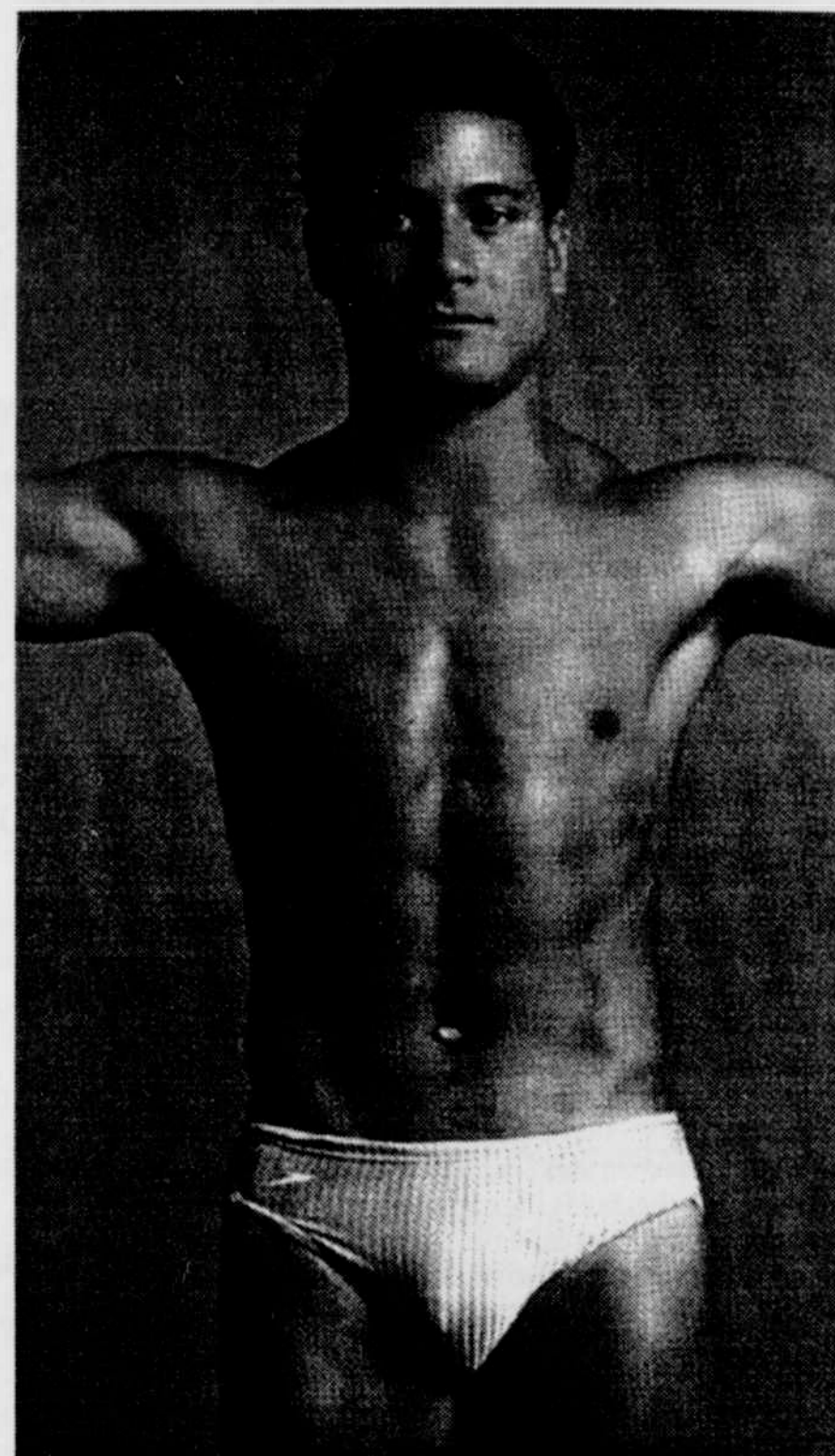
The total pull-out followed an attempted compromise between gay activists and the commissioners. However, the commissioners repeatedly refused to rescind the resolution, and also voted down a compromise resolution offered last month.

Commissioner Bill Byrne said, "I resent the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games using the media to pressure us." He added, "We can withdraw the [compromise] proposal and tell ACOG to find another place."

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force applauded the Olympic committee's action. Executive Director Peri Jude Radecic said, "We commend the Olympic committee for taking this principled stand and agreeing that Cobb County does not deserve the honor of hosting the Olympic games."

She added, "It would have been an international disgrace to host the multicultural Olympics in a county where bigotry and prejudice are proclaimed through anti-gay resolutions."

"Most communities in this country would embrace the historic opportunity to host the Olympic Games. Instead, Cobb County Commissioners have proclaimed that their No. 1 priority is anti-gay prejudice," Radecic said.



Greg Louganis

Four-time Olympic gold medalist Louganis was among many who protested when Cobb County was selected as the site for volleyball competitions. In July, Louganis received the Robert J. Kane Award, given by the U.S. Olympic Committee to honor athletes who have succeeded at the U.S. Olympic Festival and who continue to support athletics in their sport.

Louganis dedicated the award to Dr. Tom Waddell, former Olympic athlete and founder of the Gay Games. Waddell died from complications of AIDS in 1986.

"The U.S. Olympic Committee has already sent a strong message to all Olympic athletes by giving the Robert J. Kane Award to an openly gay athlete," Louganis said before the decision was made to pull out. "Now they should reinforce that message by encouraging the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games to move the volleyball preliminaries to a venue that is open to all athletes, including gay and lesbian athletes."

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