

Light the Fire Within

FRASER BULLOCK

What a delight to be here. I have a very fond place in my heart for this wonderful institution and for all of the great work that is accomplished here. Thank you for joining me this morning. I would like to recognize my wife, Jennifer, with me here on the stand. She is my angel. I am also delighted to have my parents and children here.

On February 17, 2002, nervous anticipation filled the Salt Lake Ice Center for Apolo Ono's first Olympic short-track, speed-skating final, the 1,000 meters. Apolo was heralded as an Olympian who had a chance to win four gold medals. He typically waits until late in the race to make his move, and this race was no different. With two laps remaining, he finally moved to the front of the pack of five skaters. On the very last corner, Apolo and Li Jiajun from China bumped lightly, then Li bumped Ahn Hyun-soo from Korea, and in an instant they found themselves spilled across the ice, sliding into the padded walls. Only the Australian, Steven Bradbury, remained upright to cross the finish line, the first Australian ever to win a gold medal in the Winter Olympics. As he would later say, his strategy worked perfectly—he hoped the others would crash.

As Steven was crossing the finish line, the crowd breathed a collective groan, their hopes

of an American gold medal fallen with Apolo, who was also injured in the crash with a gash that would require six stitches. Largely unnoticed in the instantaneous aftermath of the fallen skaters, Apolo scrambled to get up and slide, skate first, across the finish line. He knew that winning the silver medal was still possible and that what would determine his order of finish would be when his skate crossed the line. He barely edged out the Canadian for the silver medal. During the medal ceremony Apolo exuded how thrilled he was. He didn't lose the gold. He won the silver. When Apolo fell, he not only got up, he got up quickly.

I would like to touch on a few lessons for life that we can learn—each illuminated from events in the Olympics. One of life's experiences is that we all get knocked down. As in Apolo's case, we are never sure what is around the next corner. In our case, we may not get knocked down on ice, but we can experience reversals in health, finances, or with family, friends, or other areas. Our challenge is what happens next. We need to get up and get up quickly.

Fraser Bullock was president and CEO of the Salt Lake Organizing Committee for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. This devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 1 October 2002.

In our theme song for the Games, “Light the Fire Within,” sung by LeAnn Rimes, we find the following:

*And if we fall,
We won't stay down.
We will get back up
And use the strength we've found—
And we will rise
Like champions.
Every obstacle we'll overcome.*

*Once in every lifetime
There's a chance to stand apart.
We can show the world
Our very best,
Reveal what's in our hearts.
And so the story goes and glory
Never will end.
Inspiration lights
The fire within.*

[“Light the Fire Within,” by David Foster and Linda Thompson]

Everyone faces challenges we never thought would come our way. The key question we face as a result of these reversals or trials is whether it will bring us closer to God. I believe we face this basic choice every time we encounter these difficulties: Will it push us farther away from God or bring us closer to Him? We should see more clearly our complete dependency upon God and humble ourselves in our relationship with Him.

The people of Alma provide an inspiring example and enlightenment on the trying times we encounter. In Mosiah 24:15 we read: “The Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.” I believe one of the great purposes of the burdens we face is to recognize our dependence upon the Lord and to submit our will to His. Indeed, the Savior is our schoolmaster in this principle. In 3 Nephi 27:13 the Savior said,

“I came into the world to do the will of my Father.” Is that not also true of us? Are we here to do the will of our Father? When we encounter such trials in our lives and at times feel helpless on our own to resolve them, we can turn to our Father for that source of divine assistance and in turn more closely mesh our will with His.

A second lesson was embodied in the experience of Jimmy Shea, Jr. Several years ago we asked the International Olympic Committee, or IOC, to add the skeleton back to the Winter Olympic program, particularly in light of the fact that, at the time, Jimmy Shea was one of the best in the world. We wanted the U.S. to do well in these Games. The skeleton is a sport in which competitors lie on a sled face first and fly down a bobsled track at 80 miles per hour.

Jimmy dreamed of becoming part of the first three-generation Olympic family in history, with both his father and grandfather having competed in the Olympics. We invited them to participate in the opening ceremonies, but then we were all struck by the tragic death of his 91-year-old grandfather last December when his car was hit by a drunk driver.

The day of the skeleton competition began with a light snow falling. Expectations were not high for Jimmy Shea, since for the past season his performance had not been up to what it had been previously. He had also been recovering from invasive surgery to his leg. However, after the end of the first of two runs, everyone was astonished to see him in first place. Because the athletes compete in reverse order of the standings, in the second run Jimmy would be last. The snow continued to fall, potentially making the track slower, even though we briefly cleaned it between each competitor. Jimmy began with a lead of five one-hundredths of a second, and as he moved through the turns, his lead became less and less. As he passed through the final time interval before the end, he was actually behind by one one-hundredth of a second. Experts in the sport tell you that it is impossible to make up time at the very end of the track.

But when Jimmy Shea finished the last three turns, he ended up winning the gold by five one-hundredths of a second. We had witnessed a very magical, emotional moment, especially when he took a picture of his recently deceased grandfather out of his helmet. When asked how many Sheas were on the sled, Jimmy answered, "Two." His father suggested that Grandfather Shea gave him a little extra push. It was like Jimmy had a divine hand pushing him down that last part of the track.

During the Games I am certain we had a divine hand with us. There were many instances when we received assistance beyond our capabilities. There was one area in particular that would dramatically affect the outcome of the Games—the weather. Wind and snow are very problematic—though you wouldn't think so for the Winter Games. For example, we turned the downhill run into a sheet of ice. We used a water bar to inject water every eight inches into the entire slope and then let it freeze. The competitors' skis bite more effectively and consistently into an icy surface. Imagine flying down a sheet of ice at 80 miles per hour. When it snows, it ruins the prepared surface, and we start over with 27 Sno-Cats and 1,600 volunteers just for the downhill runs.

We enjoyed miraculously superb weather during the Games, beginning with a storm the morning of the opening ceremonies to blow out the inversion and to put a blanket of white on the mountains. During the 17 days of the event we showcased the majestic, white mountains and deep blue skies of Utah. We could not have scripted better weather. It made a fundamental difference to the outcome of our Games.

As the closing ceremonies approached, I kept an eye on an approaching storm that was forecast to hit that evening. Late in the afternoon of the closing ceremonies I was in the stadium monitoring the load-in when the storm hit with large black clouds and then rain. It cleared out before the start of the ceremonies, but the forecast called for a major windstorm to come through

between 7:30 and 9 p.m., right in the heart of our program. Winds would be a problem. They would hinder the dinosaurs, prevent the large balloons from being used, and, worst of all, cancel the fireworks—more than 36,000 shells.

I stayed in touch by cell phone with our weather center, which was tied into ground-monitoring stations for hundreds of miles. Each successive report updated the storm approaching Salt Lake from the west. Then, at 7:30, I received a call that went something like this: "The strangest thing has happened. A wind has come in from the east, which almost never happens. It has stalled the wind front over the Great Salt Lake, so you are good to go for the entire show."

A feeling similar to electricity coursed through me. The closing ceremonies came off perfectly, and just 15 minutes after the stadium emptied, the storm hit with ferocity, tearing to shreds left-behind ponchos and programs. Mitt Romney and I watched this and commented that this was like a divine punctuation mark of who is really in charge. In our minds the weather was divinely provided.

We know we had a divine hand with us. We all have a divine hand in our lives. Our Father in Heaven and His Son care deeply for each of us. We need to recognize that They are ever present beside us to guide us along the way if we will but reach out to take the hand that is offered. It is real. It is a marvelous comfort. It is ever present, as we are worthy. It can keep us focused on our true mission in life as we take that divine hand and let it remind us and guide us in what we do. Remember that it is there.

One of the Olympic firsts for our Games was to choose a theme and amplify it through everything we did. Our theme was "Light the Fire Within," suggesting to us all to strive harder, to reach higher to accomplish things we never thought possible. It also tied to the idea of inspiring others with that light kindled within each of us. You probably recall seeing the children of light throughout our ceremonies

and at the Medals Plaza. The athletes certainly exemplify the theme of “Light the Fire Within” and the inspiration of achievement. There are dozens of stories, but one in particular is very poignant.

Eighteen months before the Games, Chris Klug lay on an operating table wondering if he would live. In 1998 he competed in Nagano in the men’s snowboard parallel giant slalom, finishing just out of the medals. His resolve was to compete in his home country, the United States. But in the summer of 2000 he was diagnosed with a life-threatening liver disease—the same disease that had taken the life of Walter Payton. Chris was wasting away, losing 30 pounds awaiting a liver transplant—a highly risky procedure, but his only hope to live. His operation was successful. He went into a special but very difficult training regimen, hoping to once again compete. At the Games he unexpectedly made it into the final round, and then—unbelievably—he won the bronze medal. He is the only organ transplant recipient ever to do so, and he won the medal on National Organ Transplant Awareness Day.

Chris was another example of “Light the Fire Within.” He had been knocked down but got back up and reached heights as yet unconquered. Focus and determination resulted in what almost all thought impossible. Each of us can strive to reach heights that may not seem possible today. Life is full of many twists and turns, and it is so exciting to contemplate what lies ahead of you. As you reach to light the fire within you, you become an inspiration to those around you. What you reach for may be in studies, career, or service to others. But it may also be to light the divine fire within yourself. Each of us has the seeds of divinity within us, lying dormant until we consciously plant them and nourish them to grow. Many times the goal may seem infinitely distant and the journey uncertain and challenging, but making that journey is what allows us to accomplish what we never thought possible and imparts some

of life’s great lessons. So let each of us look inside ourselves to see how we may light that fire within and achieve more than we may think possible.

Certainly that was the case with the Salt Lake Organizing Committee. I recall looking from the outside at the organization as the bribery scandal unfolded. I thought, “What a tragedy for our community, especially since we try to be the most honest of people.” Yet here were some of the headlines from around the world: “Biggest Scandal to Ever Hit the Olympics,” “Oly Scandal Leads to Resignation,” “Olympic Shame.” When I traveled across the U.S. or abroad during those times and mentioned that I was from Utah, I was met with comments about bribery and dishonesty. The thought of having great Olympic Games seemed an improbable dream.

Yet the people of Utah did have a dream to host the world. As the new management of SLOC, our objective was to do it in such a way that the past would fade away and be replaced with memories of magical Games. We had been knocked down, but it was time to get up and do what many thought impossible: put on great Games.

The Games were indeed magical. The headlines read: “The Little City That Could Did,” “2002 Olympics Light the Fire Within,” “Basking in Olympic Spirit,” and “Unbelievable Games.” Dick Ebersol, chairman of NBC Sports, said, “The Salt Lake Games are far and away the most successful Olympics, summer or winter, in history.” Jean Claude Killy said, “Salt Lake, we will always remember you. These were perfect Games.”

Our collective success had many sources. We had a great team, led by my partner Mitt Romney. We had superb organization. We had a divine hand of assistance. But one key factor noted throughout the world were the wonderful volunteers. President Jacques Rogge said to the world in the closing ceremonies, “Volunteers, you are, with the athletes, the champions of

these Games. Your generosity and profound kindness has won our hearts. You were marvelous." President Gordon B. Hinckley said in general conference last April, "I compliment and thank our people who participated in such numbers and so generously . . . to make of this a wonderful and most significant event" ("The Church Goes Forward," *Ensign*, May 2002, 6). So I am here to thank the wonderful volunteers from the community and BYU. Thank you, BYU, for lending us thousands of your superb students and for the wonderful job they did in hosting the world.

I would like to tell you a key statistic regarding these volunteers. In every Games previous to ours, the attrition rate of volunteers was 15 to 20 percent. In our Games we had attrition of less than 1 percent—an Olympic record.

As a thank-you for BYU's partnership in hosting these Games, allow me to present you with an Olympic torch. President Bateman, you will note that the inscription on the torch reads, "Light the Fire Within," something exemplified by your fine students.

Last summer, in commemorating the pioneers, President Hinckley quoted Brigham Young, who said, "Kings and emperors and the noble and wise of the earth will visit us here" (in *Life of a Pioneer: Being the Autobiography of James S. Brown* [Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1900; New York: AMS Press, 1971], 122; cited by Preston Nibley in *Brigham Young: The Man and His Work* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1936], 128). During the Games we had more than 140 dignitaries from around the world, in addition to our own president, vice

president, and most of the cabinet. After the conclusion of the Games, President Hinckley said in April conference that "we have witnessed the fulfillment of that prophecy in these recent days" ("The Church Goes Forward," 6). He also said, "But out of all of this came something wonderful for this Church. Representatives of the media, so often a tough and calloused group, with very few exceptions spoke and wrote in language both complimentary and accurately descriptive of a unique culture they found here . . . , of the spirit of hospitality which they felt" ("The Church Goes Forward," 5).

Now when I travel around the world and mention that I am from Salt Lake City, a smile comes to the eyes, followed by a warm handshake thanking us for marvelous Games. These Games were important for our community and for the Church. Many around the world did not even know of us, but now they do. And their reactions are almost universally positive and warm. Salt Lake City is now an Olympic city, and one with the magical Games.

As we continue our journey in life, let us follow some of these simple lessons. We will get knocked down—and many times unexpectedly—but when we do, let's get up, and let's get up quickly. Let's rely on the Lord and use the opportunity to draw closer to Him and align our will more with His. Let us take His divine hand every step of the way throughout our lives to navigate the many challenging turns that await us. And let's light the fire within to achieve more than we perhaps think possible. Let's light the divine fire within each of us to realize the divine potential we each have.