

WHAT IF THE OLYMPICS WERE IN TOLEDO?

Curling at BGSU, the Olympic Village at The Docks — we can dream

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Cue the theme music. Ready the athletes. The Olympics are coming to Toledo.

Or at least we think they should.

It turns out that the Winter Games this year will kick off Friday in Vancouver. But what if they were here? Forget for a moment that there are no mountains around the Glass City and focus on the positive.

"Give me a list of the events, and I can find someplace in Toledo to hold all of them," said Toledo Mayor Mike Bell.

A few of his tongue-in-cheek suggestions: build the Olympic village near The Docks in International Park — how appropriate! — and retrofit the Glass Bowl at the University of Toledo, where the mayor was captain of the football team and a cheerleader, as an outdoor speed skating rink. Pretty cool, right? (Or cold, depending on the weather.)

It turns out there's more to hosting an Olympics than having certain athletic facilities. The host of the 2014 Winter Games, Sochi, Russia, didn't have half of the venues built when it made its bid. That's according to David Woodward, president and creative director of NORTH, design, branding and advertising, a Toledo firm that assisted Sochi. He said other factors include the political and economic climate, accommodations, transportation infrastructure, and much more.

The fact that this region can boast easy highway access thanks to its place at the Crossroads of America should help, as should the plethora of eateries and the 7,000 hotel rooms. Still, the real trick is where to host the events.

Luckily, we've given it some thought here. All that's left to do is sit back and wait for the International Olympic Committee to come calling.

OPENING & CLOSING CEREMONIES: Fifth Third Field

Imagine a parade of nations led by Muddy and Muddonna. The Olympic flame could be lit from The Roost by a notable city native like actor Jamie Farr, former Olympic boxer Devin Vargas, or — if Toledo wants to boost the star power — Katie Holmes.

FIGURE SKATING: Bowling Green State University Ice Arena

How can you ignore the sentimental value? This is where gold medalist Scott Hamilton learned to skate (well before kids today saw him in *Blades of Glory* with Will Ferrell). Plus, it could boost any future bid by Alissa Czisny, a former national champion and BG native who didn't make this year's Winter Games.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING: Oak Openings Preserve Metropark

Finally, an event for which this area was made! There's so much flat land around here that athletes could cross-country ski forever, but it might be better to limit them to the 20 miles of trails available to skiers in the largest of the area's metroparks.

CURLING: Bowling Green State University Ice Arena



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No, this event cannot take place at a beauty salon. That rules out a lot of promising options. Fortunately, it turns out that BGSU may be the only university in the country to have its own ice sheets on campus dedicated solely to this 500-year-old game that some have called chess on ice.

ALPINE SKIING: Uh ... hmmm ... well

Now would be a good time to tell a joke and hope that the International Olympic Committee doesn't know anything about local geography. After all, the 70-foot hill at Maumee Bay State Park in Oregon is said to be the highest elevation in the county. A better alternative might be to head north to Mt. Brighton in Michigan.

LUGE: Cedar Point and Soak City in Sandusky

Nothing else is going on here during the winter and the world-class roller coasters and water slides could serve as the frames for some really cool tracks for this event (and bobsled too). Sure, there's an actual luge track already sitting in Muskegon, Mich., but that's more than three hours away.

BIATHLON: Ottawa Hills

Residents already are preparing to consider a proposal that would allow sharpshooters into the village to cull deer. It should be no big deal to let a few Olympians ski around and aim at targets.

SNOWBOARD: William P. Coontz Complex in Oregon

The half-pipe here was built as part of a skate park, but that's no reason not to use it for snowboarding. Then the competitors can handplant or catch air or whatever it is that they do.

HOCKEY: Lucas County Arena

The new downtown facility, normally home to Toledo Walleye hockey, deserves an international spotlight. The real miracle on ice, though, would be squeezing in an Olympic-sized hockey rink with its larger dimensions. Just remove a few rows of seats here, add some temporary refrigeration there .

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