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Visit from IOC members means high-stakes week for LA24

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With conventional wisdom suggesting Paris holds an edge in the volatile race for the 2024 Olympics, Los Angeles '24 will host an International Olympic Committee evaluation commission in a crucial site visit this week.

The 13-member commission, which includes 12 of the IOC's 89 members who can vote this September, will meet in secret with the LA24 leaders and tour the proposed Olympic venues. Under IOC ethics rules, they are the only IOC members permitted to make formal visits to Los Angeles during the campaign.

The sustained face-to-face time with close to one-seventh of the IOC makes for a high-stakes week, even if the commission's official report will probably be less influential than in past races.

Bid CEO Gene Sykes, Chair Casey Wasserman and Mayor Eric Garcetti will take the lead in the meetings, detailing plans for the budget, venues, security, transportation and lodging, promotion and other aspects,



with the IOC contingent looking for flaws or

LA24 set up a display for Olympics officials in Rio. Below: This week's visit includes a visit to the planned stadium site.

Photo by: GETTY IMAGES

inconsistencies. Unlike in past years when the evaluation commission was expected to provide arm's length analysis, recent reforms allow it to offer more guidance if problems are discovered.

Once finished in Los Angeles, the commission will head to Paris for an identical visit there May 14-16. LA24 also is taking the opportunity to show its venues and city to a large contingent of international journalists covering the meetings.



Rendering: LA2024

The site visits come as the 2024 race encounters historic uncertainty, lending handicappers to preach caution in characterizing the race. The race could yet turn on any one of several major factors, including reaction to the French presidential election on May 7, when a victory by right-wing nationalist Marine Le Pen could jeopardize Olympic relations; evolving U.S. foreign policy under the Trump administration; a May 6 election for president of the Australian Olympic Committee; and ongoing corruption investigations that could alter the IOC makeup.

Meanwhile, the IOC is still studying the possibility of awarding both the '24 and '28 Games to Paris and L.A. in tandem, perhaps the single biggest wild card.

"This particular race and the way it is playing out against a background of very fluid national politics in both of the host countries, combined with the IOC throwing into the open the idea of a potential double award, has made the whole race very fluid," said Michael Payne, a veteran Olympic consultant who's advising the L.A. bid. "And

anybody who's trying to call the result today could easily be caught off guard by a sudden change of events a week later."

Vote-counting in secret-ballot IOC elections is notoriously difficult, and it's impossible to independently confirm claims that either city has an advantage.

But many observers in and around the halls of Olympic power believe Paris would win a straight-up vote if it were held today, said longtime Olympic sponsorship salesman Rob Prazmark, a claim repeated by several others speaking privately. Prazmark based his assessment on what he described as the European-dominated IOC's desire to bring the Summer Games back to Europe, where skepticism of hosting the Olympics runs high, as well as a sentimental push to honor the French founder of the modern Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, on the 100th anniversary of the 1924 Paris Games.

But that's merely a snapshot of the moment. In 2005, Paris also was seen as the front-runner heading into the vote only to lose the 2012 Games to London.

"If you asked everybody what the chatter is, I think you'd hear that Paris is maybe out front by a handful of votes, but you don't really know this far out," said Prazmark, co-founder of 21 Sports & Entertainment. "So many things could change. You don't know until the vote is taken."

The final report of the evaluation commission will probably not alter the race, Payne said. The commission's job is to determine whether a city can deliver what's been promised — a process that boosted Rio 2016's candidacy in 2009 but carries little drama for the wealthy, developed cities of Los Angeles and Paris. According to IOC instructions, the commission's report must highlight the "opportunities and challenges" of each bid, with emphasis on sustainability, legacy and the athletes' experience.

Along with the well-known geopolitical and internal IOC strategic issues that could alter the race, the makeup of the IOC could be in flux, too. Already, Frankie Fredericks, the Namibian former chairman of the evaluation commission, recused himself from the entire 2024 bid race when he became ensnared in a French investigation into track and field corruption.

Also, Kuwaiti member Sheikh Ahmed Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, seen as a close ally of President Thomas Bach and friend to the U.S., stepped down from his leadership roles in FIFA after being indirectly mentioned in court filings in the U.S. investigation into international soccer. That investigation continues. Finally, IOC Vice President John Coates stood for re-election as president of the Australian Olympic Committee on May 6, and would lose his IOC spot if he's defeated. Both carry influence beyond their own votes.

The IOC Evaluation Commission

- » **Patrick Baumann** (chair), Switzerland
- » **Marisol Casado**, Spain
- » **Mikaela Cojuangco Jaworski**, Philippines
- » **Kirsty Coventry**, Zimbabwe
- » **Nawal El Moutawakel**, Morocco
- » **Ugur Erdener**, Turkey
- » **Habu Gumel**, Nigeria
- » **Poul-Erik Høyer**, Denmark
- » **Duane Kale***, New Zealand
- » **Gunilla Lindberg**, Sweden
- » **Kereyn Smith**, New Zealand
- » **Bernard Rajzman**, Brazil
- » **Tsunekazu Takeda**, Japan

* Member of the International Paralympic Committee

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