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OPINION

Which candidate takes the gold?



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— *Editor's note: Tanya Amador-Daigle will be reporting for Florida Weekly on the national primaries until the presidential candidates are chosen this summer. She has a unique perspective on the primaries and the process for choosing a candidate, having traveled the country reporting on primaries and caucuses for the Purple States project. To learn more about Purple States go to www.purplestaes.tv.*

The Dalai Lama arrived in Seattle last week for the five-day "Seeds of Compassion" conference. In the midst of his arrival, the Olympic torch relay has been surrounded by Pro-Tibet protestors all round the globe. In the meantime, political candidates have been weighing in on the subject of boycotting the upcoming Olympics in China. With strong but mixed words, they have been using the opportunity to show the American public their positions on the issue as they gear up for the general election.

Before discussing these positions, I thought a little background on Tibet and the Dalai Lama might be helpful. I must admit I know very little about the situation so I did a little amateur research to see what I could come up with.

Besides the fact that China's burgeoning population needs land, rich mineral deposits were recently discovered in Tibet. That last part caught my attention. I couldn't help but compare that to the U.S. and Iraq. No wonder the Chinese want to keep Tibet. They want to continue to nurture their empire to grow to be strong and wealthy. But apparently this fight goes back even further in time.

Ancient history tells us that as an empire, Tibet first came into existence sometime in the 7th century with the introduction of Buddhism. As the monk ruler of Tibet, the creation of the constantly reincarnating Dalai Lama began in the 8th century. This holy monk ruled

with the military support of a country such as Mongolia, and later China as his overlord. This relationship was one of "priest and patron." The difference has always seemed to be that while Mongolia respected this tradition and mostly left Tibet and the Dalai Lama to their own devices, China sought to take over Tibet and exert its own authority in more stringent terms.

In 1950, China invaded Tibet (it seems China could not leave the Tibetans in peace) and succeeded. China's violent occupation of Tibet was marked by the annulment of Tibetan religious and political freedoms. In addition, there was widespread massacre and imprisonment of innocent men, women, children, monks and nuns. Many temples and monasteries were destroyed and thousands of Tibetans were forced to flee their own country, including the current Dalai Lama. The poor man currently resides in exile in India with thousands of other Tibetan refugees.

This historical information may or may not influence one's opinion on whether or not China should "Free Tibet," as the signs and T-shirts of protestors read. However, I don't believe it diminishes the gravity of human rights violations by the Chinese of the Tibetans. Anyone with a decent moral compass would agree on that. As I ponder the Tibetan plight I have been considering the recent statements of the presidential candidates. In my opinion they sound very noble, but incredibly short-sighted.

Hillary Clinton has called on the president to boycott the opening ceremonies. What? I thought she was supposed to be the Democrat with all the experience. I don't think that would be a much different reaction to what Bush haters called his response to 9/11. Wouldn't that be a "knee-jerk" reaction? Haven't we been through this before when the U.S. boycotted the Olympics in Moscow in 1980? Not very effective was it? In fact, four years later, 14 countries boycotted the games in Los Angeles.

Perhaps what is most interesting to me is Obama's initial answer, or lack of answer. He originally said that he is "deeply disturbed" by the issue. And? At

first I thought: that's it? That's all he has to say? Then I remembered that he usually waits for Senator Clinton to weigh in before issuing forth the same answer as Clinton. The only difference is that he does it with a little more flair. Sure enough, later on that same day, he did. I'm not sure if that is a sign of weakness in him as a leader or if it means he thinks things out thoroughly before he makes a decision. I do think his opponents view it as a lack of experience.

I'm not sure what pro-Tibet groups think boycotting the Olympics would accomplish. I have lived in Singapore and I have an idea of the Chinese culture. A presidential boycott would be a very bad slap in the face to the Chinese sensibility. We are talking about a society that takes saving face very differently than the western world does. China has become a world superpower and a country that has intricate economic ties with the U.S. If you really want to hurt them and make them consider their behavior in Tibet, you have to hit them where it hurts: in the economic belt. At the same time, you have to use common sense and consider the damage it could do to our economy.

Knowing how the Chinese interact in business and otherwise, Senator McCain's rational approach is the only answer that makes sense to me. "I think the president should evaluate the situation as it evolves, perhaps granting more autonomy and talking with the Dalai Lama as a world figure. All of us condemn the brutality of human rights abuses. If I were him (Bush), I'd keep all my options open."

At a recent meeting with Singapore Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, President Bush and the Minister agreed that the Chinese should meet with the Dalai Lama. China holds the monk responsible for inciting unrest among his followers, a claim the Dalai Lama refutes. For his part, the President is still planning on attending the opening ceremonies. He has stated that he is in a better position to influence the Chinese at the games rather than risk insulting them, thus alienating them and getting nothing accomplished.

So which candidate gets the political gold from me? McCain. ■

MOMENTS IN TIME

- On April 16, 1947, a massive explosion occurs during the loading of fertilizer onto the freighter Grandcamp at a pier in Texas City, Texas, killing 600 people. The blast was heard 150 miles away and was so powerful that the ship's 3,000-pound anchor was found 2 miles away.

- On April 17, 1937, Daffy Duck makes his debut in the Warner Bros. short "Porky's Duck Hunt." In the 1920s, movie houses had started showing a short cartoon before feature presentations, but the form became more popular after sound was introduced in 1928.

- On April 18, 1983, Joan Benoit wins her second Boston Marathon in the women's division with a time of 2:22:43.

The inaugural Boston Marathon was run on April 19, 1897, and was a men-only event until 1972, when women were officially allowed to compete.

- On April 19, 1775, at about 5 a.m., 700 British troops march into the Massachusetts town of Lexington to find 77 armed minutemen waiting for them. Suddenly, the "shot heard around the world" was fired from an undetermined gun. When the brief Battle of Lexington ended, eight Americans lay dead or dying and 10 others were wounded. The American Revolution had begun.

- On April 20, 1841, Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" first appears in Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine. The

tale is generally considered to be the first detective story.

- On April 21, 1918, in the skies over France, Manfred von Richthofen, the notorious German flying ace known as "The Red Baron," is killed by Allied fire. By the time he was 25 years old, Richthofen had downed 80 enemy aircraft.

- On April 22, 1992, dozens of sewer explosions in Guadalajara, Mexico, kill more than 200 people and damage 1,000 buildings. The series of explosions was caused by a gas leak, the warning signs of which were ignored by the Mexican government and the national oil company. ■