

## Running the Torch, Witnessing Joy

Carrying the torch reminded me what  
the Olympics mean to China

this kind of luck: I was sworn in as a lawyer by the California Supreme Court on January 8, 1988 (1-8-88).

During my run, I had the Yangtze River to one side and the masses of people to the other. The combination of scenery and excitement created an incredible experience that I will always cherish. Foreigners were but a small fraction of the Jingzhou torchbearer group, which also included people from a cross-section of China. Other participants included the city mayor, past Olympic medalists from the Hubei Province, people with disabilities, movie stars, singers and many ordinary Chinese people chosen for their extraordinary contributions to society. In all we totaled 205.

On the day of the race, we slowly toured the city streets by bus. The crowds had begun lining up in the wee hours of the morning, awaiting the chance to greet us and witness their very own piece of the relay. I think of the bus ride through the streets of Jingzhou as a "reverse parade." Rather than having the entertainment march down the boulevard, as usually happens in a traditional parade, the streets were lined with millions of people whose goal seemed to me to be entertaining the torchbearers en route to their stations.


Enhancing the amazing spectacle all around us were hundreds of fan dancers in traditional garb, dragon-costumed troupes leaping about and dozens of bands with drums, gongs and an assortment of other Chinese instruments. There were students of all ages, hospital employees and office workers, and people from every walk of life, all dressed in China's national colors of red and yellow. Flags and banners waved in a sea of colors.

Everywhere I looked people excitedly flashed the "V" victory sign in a display of friendship and joy.

Thousands of police and troops, themselves clearly also excited to be part of the festivities, always maintained a highly professional manner while managing to hold back the crowds to keep the torchbearers from being overwhelmed. We were enthralled by the outpouring of enthusiasm and emotion. At one point it occurred to me that someone particularly important must be in the procession behind the torchbearers. Instead, it was just us, the 205 lucky runners, who had become China's heroes for the day. To this simple lawyer, I imagined I knew for a few moments what it was like to parade down Broadway for a ticker-tape parade following a first step on the moon or winning the World Series. It was a local and national victory party!

Having experienced this, I can more easily understand the hopes and sensitivities of the Chinese people when it comes to the Games. This is their event and their time to shine. After years of sometimes feeling ignored, this is their chance to show off to the world their achievements, goodwill, pride and excitement. And anyone looking to take that away risks offending more than a billion happy people.

**James Zimmerman**  
AmCham-China Chairman



I had the honor and the pleasure of being one of a handful of foreigners to carry the Olympic Torch on its way through China to Beijing. My leg of the relay took place June 2 in Jingzhou, Hubei Province, deep in the Chinese heartland. Jingzhou is a provincial city of about six million people some three hours west of Wuhan by car. This was a major event for the city, and a tremendous source of pride. I could feel this from the countless onlookers who had lined up all along the torch route to cheer us on, waving and shouting their encouragement with infectious excitement and heartfelt enthusiasm.

I was selected as a torchbearer based upon the "social influence" that someone thinks I exhibited during my 19-year career involving China. While slightly unclear about what that means, I am reasonably certain it is a compliment and am very proud of the honor. Organizers assigned me number 188 for the relay and I ran a distance of 188 meters. This was just long enough for me to break a slight sweat, although not quite enough of a workout that I can cancel my gym membership. More importantly, the number was extremely auspicious in the Chinese tradition. I've always had