

BLAME IT ON THE BOSSA NOVA: LOCHTE AND BRAZILIAN POLICE

The travails of the Ryan Lochte gang of American Swimmers has been playing out for a full week now. The result has been almost universal scorn, if not hatred, for Lochte et. al, and almost complete credulous acceptance of the somewhat dubious, if extremely strident, pushback and claims of the Brazilian Police.

Frankly, neither side's story ever sat quite right with me. But Lochte's story, among other exaggeration/fabrication, always, from the start, indicated that the swimmers were pulled from a taxi at gun point, by people in uniform with badges, who pointed guns at them, and took money from them.

And then came the dog and pony show press conference staged by the Brazilian Police for a worldwide audience during mid-day on Thursday August 18. It was a bizarre and rambling presser, that was nearly comical in its staging during its opening portion. It did, however, make clear that there was a lot more to the full story than Lochte had told, and that some of his story was flat wrong. But, if you listened carefully, as I am wont to do with cops making self serving statements, it, along with previous statements made by the police, also pretty much confirmed the swimmers were pulled from a taxi at gun point, by people in uniform with badges, who pointed guns at them, and took money from them.

So, then the question was what "crimes" and/or "vandalism" had Lochte and the swimmers really caused? There was an early news crew, I think NBC, that went to the site and did not really find all that much damage. As the statements by both Lochte and the other swimmers, notably Gunnar Bentz, came out, it was clear that there was a real question as to what, if any, real

damage was done. And a question of who engaged in exactly what criminal behavior at that gas station in the early morning of August 15.

Well, now it is starting to come out. And, as expected, the Brazilians have ginned up every bit as much “over-exaggeration” as Ryan Lochte. From today’s USA Today Investigative Team of Taylor Barnes and David Meeks, which confirms some of the work previously seen from (again, I believe) NBC. It is a pretty thorough and convincing report:

But a narrative of the night’s events – constructed by USA TODAY Sports from witness statements, official investigations, surveillance videos and media reports – supports Lochte’s later account in which he said that he thought the swimmers were being robbed when they were approached at a gas station by armed men who flashed badges, pointed guns at them and demanded money.

A Brazilian judge says police might have been hasty in determining that the security guards who drew guns on the swimmers and demanded money did not commit a robbery. A lawyer who has practiced in Brazil for 25 years says she does not think the actions of Lochte and teammate Jimmy Feigen constitute the filing of a false police report as defined under Brazilian law.

An extensive review of surveillance footage by a USA TODAY Sports videographer who also visited the gas station supports swimmer Gunnar Bentz’s claim that he did not see anyone vandalize the restroom, an allegation that in particular heightened media portrayals of the four as obnoxious Americans behaving recklessly in a foreign country. Meanwhile, Rio authorities have declined to identify the guards or offer any details beyond confirming they are members of law

enforcement who were working a private security detail.

Now, we can't compare that with everything the Brazilian police have, because they have been hiding a *lot* of their material and, apparently, misrepresenting substantial portions of it from the start. But everything within the USA Today piece corresponds with the various videos obtained by the various media outlets, whether Brazilian, American or international, and corresponds with Gunnar Bentz's statement, which nobody, even, quite notably the Brazilians, including police, seems to contest in the least.

In short, the overall picture of the incident seems to be bigger and more complex, with some outrageous conduct by not just the American swimmers, but also, and substantially, the Brazilians. Oh, and about that "bathroom trashing damage"? That appears to be vapor too:

At a news conference Thursday, Rio police chief Fernando Veloso characterized the athletes' actions at the gas station as vandalism. He said they also had broken a soap dispenser and mirror inside the restroom. Reports quickly grew that the Americans had trashed the restroom.

A USA TODAY Sports videographer who visited the bathroom Thursday found no damage to soap dispensers and mirrors and said none of those items appeared to be new. Some media accounts suggested the men had broken down a door, which USA TODAY Sports also did not observe.

Bentz said in his statement that he believes there are surveillance videos shot from different angles that have not been released. He also said he did not see anyone damage the bathroom or even enter it.

Oh, and that much ballyhooed "sign" supposedly

damaged? Reports are that it was a minor crack in a cheap plastic cover and that the swimmers were made to pay out somewhere between \$100 to \$400 to cover what appears to be mostly ginned up nonsense. Additionally, irrespective of what the "security guards" extracted from the swimmers at gunpoint, swimmer James Feigan was made to pay the amount of \$11,000 as a "donation" simply in order to leave the country and return home. That is not a "donation", that is a flat out outrageous extortion demand and payment extracted by Brazilian authorities.

I wonder what bloviating sports columnists so full of righteous outrage and apologia will say now? Brazil is to be commended for putting on a great Olympics, and doing so under difficult constraints and conditions. But for the green pools (that affected nothing in the long run), they really pulled off a fantastic, admirable and beautiful show. Even the rain did not phase or slow down the glorious closing ceremonies Sunday night.

But one point on which Brazilian authorities "over-exaggerated", overreacted, and failed to acquit themselves well on was in relation to the randy American swimmers. According to the USA Today report, even judges in Rio are wondering if they were hoodwinked in the rush of outrage by the authorities.

The distress of the Brazilian authorities over the emerging story from the swimmers is perfectly understandable given the dynamics. But, if an international scandal was created by this incident, it appears as if it is every bit as much the fault of the Brazilian police and authorities as it is the American swimmers.

It took two for this little tango.