

opinions

Where is the spirit?

Brotherhood, sportsmanship and fair play. These three words are supposed to symbolize what the Olympics are all about. World-class athletes competing against each other for the love of the game and the love of their country. Funny, but the only things I can remember from past Olympics is Ben Johnson's steroid habit, the 'Dream Team' bore, the publicity ploy of Eddie "The Eagle" Edwards and most recently, the Tonya Harding scandal.

It's not that I don't like the Olympics and refuse to watch them. I just don't understand why at every Olympics the feats of the world's athletes are overshadowed by a stupid, melodramatic scandal that is milked for all its worth by the media. I find it very disheartening when a long-shot Canadian downhiller named Edi Podivinsky wins a bronze medal and the big story of the day is whether Tonya Harding will pose in *Playboy* or not. I'm sorry but the Olympics and sports in general have gone overboard.

In my mind, the 'Dream Team' which spent a week slamming a bunch of Third World countries hardly epitomized the Olympics. They arrived in Barcelona, refused to stay in the athlete's village and left immediately after they had won their gold. So much for the Olympic experience but hey, those amateur basketball players from around the world will never forget the five bucks they spent for Michael Jordan's autograph.

The problem is that the Olympics has become a money-making extravaganza. The Olympics is not a competition between the world's 'upper-class' athletes. Everyone seems to be covered in sponsors as they set foot on the track or prepare for the bobsled run. I remember a skater by the name of Gaetan Boucher who skated with the Canadian flag on his chest and not the Fuji, Nike or Visa logo. Maybe the Olympic standings should be listed first by companies and then by countries. I can just hear Rod Black of CTV announce that

Nike had just moved into the medal lead with 14 golds, 11 silver and 18 bronze. You know there are problems when you're cheering a credit card down the bobsled run (when did Canada's colours change to blue, white and yellow?)

To go along with the problem of commercialism entering the Olympics we have athletes like Tonya Harding. It's bad enough having to see her bitter face in the paper every day but she has done nothing to help the Olympic spirit at all. There is no way that all she wants to do is represent her country as indicated by the measly 25 million dollar lawsuit she threatened the US Olympic Committee with if they didn't let her compete in Lillehammer. I hope somebody could tell me where the law suits fit within the standards of brotherhood, sportsmanship and fair play.

Every four years, no matter how exciting the Olympics are, something will leave me with a bitter taste in my mouth. In '84, I was overjoyed when Canadian swimmers Alex Baumann and Ann Ottenbrite dominated the pools but after seeing Mary Decker's teary face for the 800th time on television I just couldn't stomach it any more. I just wished somebody would smack her and tell her that she fell, it was an accident, so dry up. In '88, I was so pumped up after Ben Johnson won big. Too bad he had already done a pretty good job of pumping himself up. This year's Olympics has produced my two newest role models, Tonya Harding and Petr Nedved.

What's that? Who's Petr Nedved? He's just one of the premiere Czech hockey players in the world (oops, I mean the best Canadian hockey players in the world). Nedved just became a Canadian citizen and seeing that he is a holdout from the Vancouver Canucks, what better practice than to be Canada's ringer on the Olympic hockey team? This is fantastic, our Olympic team was struggling so we picked up this Nedved guy. If the team wins gold possibly on a game-winning goal by

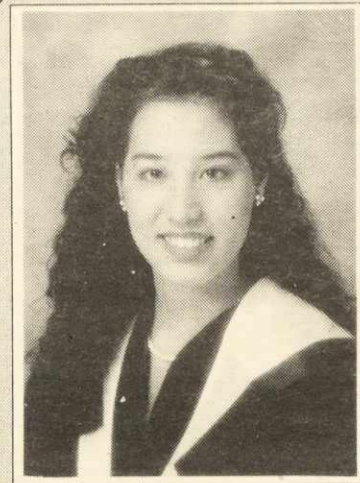
Nedved, I just can't see it ranking up there with such memorable hockey moments as US' 'Miracle on Ice' in '80. Heck, the way the Olympics are going, we might as well let Nedved carry the flag at the closing ceremonies just as long as somebody tells him that Saskatchewan is a province and not a vegetable.

What it comes down to is buying medals. In European soccer there are no trades, one team just pays another team a couple of million pounds for their star player and that's that. At the Olympics we see the same sort of thing. I mean, it's hard enough being forced to watch eight hours of luge or shot-put then have to watch twelve professional basketball players run circles around smaller, less skilled athletes. This is not the spirit of amateur sports and frankly, a Harlem Globetrotters game is more competitive.

What this all comes down to is that the Olympics are a bore. I used to watch the Olympics ten hours a day when I was younger. Now I can't handle more than half an hour. A couple of days ago I thought I would support Canada's Lloyd Eisler and Isabelle Brasseur in their quest for gold in the pairs figure skating event. They were fantastic, performed flawlessly but they only won a bronze medal because they were beaten by two Russian pairs that were allowed to compete despite being professionals. Eisler said that when he looks down he sees gold and the sad thing is the medal isn't and it will never be the gold they deserved.

Once again, at that very moment I felt the Olympic spirit leave me, forcing me to get a drink and wash the bitter taste from my mouth.

Chris Waldock



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