

VIEW From The Cheap Seats

By Mark Savoie

Congratulations to Sweden's Olympic Hockey Team for capturing a well-deserved gold medal last weekend. Also, congratulations to Canada's Olympic Hockey Team for their well-deserved silver medal. It must have been especially satisfying to prove all the so-called expert pundits, who called for them to fail to reach even the medal round, wrong. In actual fact, congratulations should be given to all the medal winners—Kathy Turner excepted—but as this is Canada and as hockey has a place in the Canadian psyche like that of no other art or sport, I will limit my public congratulations to the two mentioned above.

I am also very proud that I have heard very little whining from Canadians about the shoot-out format in which Canada lost to Sweden. My fear was that many Canadians would take out their frustration at this format by crying that it is unfair. Obviously, it is not unfair. Both teams have the same opportunity to win or lose in this format. True, the team with the best and most snipers has the best chance for victory, but both teams picked their teams with full knowledge that this was a possibility. However, the fact that the format is not unfair does not change the fact that it is inherently wrong. Both Sweden and Canada played their hearts out for a full seventy minutes last Sunday; both teams recovering from situations in which it would have been very easy to become discouraged and disheartened. In turn, the spectators were given a chance to watch one of the best hockey games ever played at the Olympic level. Then, after the seventy minutes were up the players and spectators were forced to turn their backs on hockey. While it can not be denied that the shoot-out was exciting and dramatic, it was not hockey but instead showdown. (The older among you might remember an intermission feature of a similar nature called Hockey Showdown. Fredericton's own Danny Grant was the only multiple winner of this contest.) In a sense, this Olympic's hockey gold medal winner is still to be determined. What has been decided is that Sweden has won the showdown gold medal. Nevertheless, this is not the CFL and the rules were not changed in mid-season or mid-tournament, so once again I offer my congratulations to the Swedish Olympic Hockey Team. They deserved the gold. Hopefully, the NHL's Bruce MacNall and Michael Eisner will have learned from this and now realise the unacceptability of using the shoot-out to determine a hockey game.

I found Lillehammer to be a near perfect site for the Olympics. The Norwegian people are perhaps the most educated fans in the world when it comes to winter sports, particularly the nordic events. From what I was able to gather from the inexpert eye of CTV, the facilities were all first-rate and the fan appreciation was of the same class. This could have been the best Winter Olympics ever held. It failed in this regard because of a problem that has long been chronic within the Olympic movement. This is the inability of the judges and officials to maintain the same standard of quality as do the athletes. Albertville and Barcelona were both largely spared this problem, but unfortunately, Lillehammer was not. It was most apparent but not restricted to the short track speed skating. It is a shame that the athletes in this sport saw their sport embarrassed and all of their training go for naught because of decisions which can only be described as incompetent. Sport and art have developed to the point that it is the rare athlete who can win without devoting themselves to their activity full time. As a result, it is necessary that the judges and officials be equally dedicated.

Also, it is equally necessary that the judges and officials be capable of coping with the cutting edge of their event. This is especially true of figure skating. Figure skating judges for the Olympics are selected on the basis of tenure and longevity. It is a reward for time served. As a result, the conservative judging to be found in the Olympic competitions is legendary. In my admittedly inexpert opinion (if I were to claim to more the figure skaters of this university would step up their plans to have me neutralised) this is why Elvis Stojko did not capture the gold medal in men's figure skating. Stojko is on the cutting edge of the sport; the judges are not.

I hope that some way, somehow, Kathy Turner and I will be playing in a charity hockey game together; just so that I can have the chance to cross-check the individual. (I had a couple of other terms in mind, but have been told that it would be defamation of character. How can you defame her character?) I personally applaud Zhan Mhei of China for throwing her bouquet of flowers back onto the ice after the medal ceremony. A couple of people have voiced mealy-mouthed platitudes about poor sportsmanship and the Olympic ideal. First of all, it was not poor sportsmanship. It is not good sportsmanship to blithely accept the fact that you are being cheated. It is victimisation. Mhei had a very valid protest to make and she made it in a very highly visible manner. Perhaps nothing else is more likely to have embarrassed short track speed skating officials enough to make them realise that changes have to be made.

Still with short track speed skating, I was appalled at the insensitivity of CTV's Rod Black when he interviewed Fredericton's Stephen Gough after the men's 5,000 km short track speed skating relay. Black had the gall to ask Gough if he felt that he had let the team down by falling in the race and eliminating the team's medal hopes. The perfect answer to this question is: "Of course I feel that I let the team down! And it's damn insensitive of you to ask me that question. This interview is over." Then walk away, leaving Mr. Black holding the mike. Insensitivity such as his does not need to be tolerated, but should be exposed. As above, being a good sport does not mean allowing yourself to be victimised.

As a whole, the Canadian athletes at these Olympics handled themselves with a degree of class I have seldom seen before. Stojko never once railed at the judges who may or may not have robbed him of a gold medal. Kurt Browning handled his disappointment at the failure of his dream with a grace that has made all of Canada feel sympathy for this wealthy athlete; and rightly so. Josée Chouinard was equally classy, refusing to jump on the 'Everything is Tonya Harding's Fault' bandwagon, even though she had reason to do so. My only complaint was with Lloyd Eisler. Someone should have put a gag on this guy. Listening to this guy whine about the entry of professionals into the figure skating events was embarrassing. The whole amateur ideal was originally a bias against the working class. Amateurism was defined with the intent of restricting sport to those who had the time and money required to pursue a sport at the elite level without financial recompense. It is admirable that this class bias has become largely outdated. The Olympic ideal is now one of athletic excellence and not about amateurism. Therefore, it is essential to the continued relevance of the Olympics that the best athletes be made available. Eisler's blatherings had little to do with this philosophical debate however, he was simply whining that life was unfair and that he and Isabelle Brasseur were being picked upon.

I found it disgusting to listen to Bob Goodenow hedging about the possibility of NHL players participating in the Nagoya Olympics of 1998. It boggles the mind and wilts the imagination to realise that Gary Bettman and the NHL are more willing to allow this to happen than are Goodenow and the NHLPA. This is an opportunity to promote the sport and for the players to play for their country that should not be passed up. For the NHLPA to hold the NHL and through them the hockey fans of the world hostage to their financial demands borders on the irresponsible.

Finally, in the world of the NHL the Gretzky-watch has begun. At time of writing Gretzky has 797 NHL goals, a mere four behind Gordie Howe's total of 801. Accordingly, the media lemmings are beginning their countdown for Gretzky to become the greatest goal scorer of all time. Unfortunately for them, Gretzky is still at least three seasons away from catching Howe. Not included in the goal scoring totals mentioned above is the fact that Gretzky scored 46 goals in the WHA to Howe's 174. This means that Gretzky is actually 132 goals away from catching Howe. Some (read as 'most') will argue that the WHA was not the equal of the NHL and therefore the WHA's statistics should not be considered. However, the NHL did absorb the WHA and one of the teams from this supposedly inferior league (the Edmonton Oilers) has been remarkably successful, capturing five Stanley Cups. By absorbing four teams from the WHA the NHL has legitimised the existence of that league and should recognise the statistics and records of that league. Both the NBA and the NFL had the good sense to accept the statistics and records of the ABA and AFL when these two leagues were respectively absorbed. However, given the myopic and self-indulgent nature of the NHL's Board of Governors I would not suggest holding your breath waiting for this event to occur.

WOMEN'S SOCCER

Yeowomen make impact at invitational



The Yeowomen soccer team shows off their Moosehead Invitational trophy after defeating the Mount Allison Mounties in the final. Photo by Bea Scholten

After an undefeated outdoor season the Yeowomen Soccer Club proved once again this week how strong a team they are. The Moosehead invitational held at UNBSJ was the venue the Yeowomen chose to make their indoor impression for anyone who cared to watch.

In their first game against Modern Business College the Yeowomen came out strong and got on the board quickly and never looked back winning 3-0. An hour and a half later the team took to the floor again against the Saint John under 19 team, this time winning 3-1 with Penny Barwise on a tear scoring all 3 goals. In our final game on Saturday the Yeowomen met up with Saint Mary's University's Varsity team and after a long hard fought game the Yeowomen were again victorious, getting by SMU 1-0.

The Yeowomen's performance Saturday placed them on top of their division in the tournament and gave them a bye into the semi finals to be held the following day. Sunday morning the team made the journey once again to UNBSJ to learn that they would be playing the under 19's once again in the semis. This time the game was much tougher than our first encounter the day before. Twice the Yeowomen had to come back from a one goal deficit to eventually win 3-2, just barely scoring before the whistle to end regulation time. This victory then set the stage for the final game in which the Yeowomen met up with Mount Allison's Varsity team.

As always the Yeowomen played with incredible heart that coupled with a strong defensive game proven to be the deciding factor in the game. After all was said and done the Yeowomen came out on top, defeating Mt. A. 2-1, and taking away the championship trophy.

Once again the Yeowomen have proven to everyone (especially the Varsity teams we defeated) how competitive we are now and how deserving we are of varsity status.

Each and everyone of the Yeowomen deserves credit for having played fantastic soccer. This past weekend and for the patience each of them has shown during a frustrating period for women's soccer at UNB.

They've submitted their proposal for varsity status so now it's hurry up and wait. In the meantime, the team will keep on competing (upcoming tournaments in Halifax & Saint John) in hopes that someone will take notice and give them the credit they deserve.

CLUB SPORTS

New Brunswick

Fencing Championships

March 12 and 13 in South Gym
Competition begins at 9 am each day



Come out and support your UNB Fencing Club and Canadian Junior Nationals medalist Robin Beyea.

Admission: Absolutely FREE!
Better than 3 Musketeers!

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