

Dispatches from Vancouver, Vol. VI: Requiem for a games

Posted By [Ilya Shapiro](#) On Tuesday, March 2nd, 2010 @ 5:43 PM In [Feature:Opinion](#), [Opinion](#), [Opinion:Upper Section](#) | [No Comments](#)

The last few days of the Olympics passed by in a blur as I finished a three-week business trip that ended up taking me to four climates and nine different overnight locations, all without checking bags. And my gallivanting around the West paralleled the North American tour de force that the games became.

After starting slowly, Canada ended up with the most gold medals, setting a Winter Games record with 14 and muting criticisms—including mine—of its “Own the Podium” program. (This after never before having an athlete climb to the podium’s top step at either of the two Olympics it had hosted.) And despite being the only contending nation with no government sports sponsorship—more likely, because of it—the United States finished atop of the Winter medal standings for the first time since Lake Placid in 1932, winning a record 37.

The U.S. also won its first-ever Nordic combined (ski jumping and cross-country skiing) medals—even going 1-2 in one event—and its first bobsled gold since 1948. Canada went wire-to-wire in the curling spiel—finally gaining Olympic gold for the bald-pated “Michael Jordan of curling,” Kevin Martin. The North Americans also squared off in both the men’s and women’s hockey finals (on which more later) but also in the men’s “team pursuit”—speed skating’s equivalent of a relay race.

The Russians, on the other hand, had their biggest flop since the Soviet Union started participating in international competition in the 1950s—15 total medals (also behind Germany, Norway, and little Austria) and only three gold (behind 10 countries). ~~Puppetmaster~~ Prime Minister Vladimir Putin tried his hand at damage control, advising his countrymen not to “[wear a sackcloth and ashes or beat ourselves with chains](#)”^[1]. ~~Puppet~~ President Dmitri Medvedev, meanwhile, personally boycotted the closing ceremonies indicated that heads would roll among the “[fat cat](#)” sports bureaucrats^[2]. He should be even more concerned about the Sochi Games four years from now: the athletic performances may well improve, but holding the Winter Olympics in a summer resort town (where temperatures hit 73°F last week) may throw a harsh spotlight at the IOC’s site selection procedures.

Perhaps the greatest competitive controversy at these games intersected the fortunes of the resurgent, corporate-funded North Americans and the last-gap-of-the-Soviet-Machine Russians came in men’s figure skating. (Yes, this column is supposed to be sports-related, but since so many people watch figure skating, I thought it worth a mention too.) Evan Lysacek performed an elegant final program that unexpectedly snatched gold from the hands of the underwhelming former champion Evgeni Plushenko. Plushenko—whose personal website apparently said that he had won silver, gold, and “platinum” Olympic medals—then had Putin complaining about unfair scoring, while Lysacek scored a spot on the next season of “Dancing with the Stars.”

The Russians were also upstaged in hockey; Canada destroyed Alex Ovechkin and crew in the quarterfinals—scoring six goals in the first period—while their women didn’t really belong in the tournament. Canada’s women won a spirited final against their neighbors to the south and proceeded to celebrate with cigars and booze on ice. (Who says there’s no equality?) Canada’s men, meanwhile, prevented another American “miracle on ice,” scoring on tournament MVP Ryan Miller in overtime to end an epic final.

I had mixed emotions about this outcome—and not just because game-winning goal-scorer Sidney Crosby plays for the hated Pittsburgh Penguins. [As I pointed out previously](#)^[3], my allegiances are split as far as hockey was concerned: When asked whom I was cheering for, my answer was always, the North Americans. I guess it was a win-win scenario; had the result been reversed, I would have felt equally good.

And so, as Vancouver Organizing Committee chairman John Furlong proclaimed “the right of

the children to play” and head IOC grandee Jacques Rogge proclaimed “[an excellent and friendly games](#)”^[4]—such speeches often sound like State of the Union pabulum—it was time to bid the Olympics adieu. With the victory of North America and the free market system secure, I can now turn my attention to fighting the subversion of the free market in North America.

Ilya Shapiro, a senior fellow in constitutional studies at the Cato Institute, wrote his master's thesis at the London School of Economics on the transformation of the Olympics in the post-Cold War era. Over the last two weeks, he filed periodic dispatches for the Daily Caller from and about the 2010 Winter Games.

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URLs in this post:

[1] wear a sackcloth and ashes or beat ourselves with chains:

<http://www.nationalpost.com/related/links/story.html?id=2620439>

[2] “fat cat” sports bureaucrats: **<http://www.newser.com/story/82172/medvedev-blames-bureaucrats-for-olympic-flop.html>**

[3] As I pointed out previously: **<http://dailycaller.com..2010/02/24/dispatches-from-vancouver-vol-v-a-tale-of-two-hockeys>**

[4] an excellent and friendly games: **<http://www.nbcolympics.com/news-features/news/newsid=453954.html>**

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