

Dispatches from Vancouver, Vol. II: First impressions

Posted By [Ilya Shapiro](#) On February 17, 2010 @ 2:27 pm In [Opinion](#), [Opinion:Upper Section](#), [Sub4:Opinion](#) | [No Comments](#)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Ilya Shapiro is currently on the ground in Vancouver and will be sending dispatches throughout the Olympic Games, posted here at The Daily Caller

VANCOUVER—Today is my second day here, and so far my impressions can be summarized by paraphrasing the title of one of the movies I avoided on the flight over: cloudy with a chance of snafus. Indeed, with the overcast skies, periodic rain, and balmy temperatures—when not [too snowy](#) ^[1] in more remote venues—I keep thinking that I took a wrong turn somewhere and arrived at the Spring Olympics (synchronized gardening?) instead of the Winter. An English couple joked to me that it was warmer here than it would be in their London during its hosting of the 2012 Summer Games.

The locals traditionally pride themselves on being hipper, greener, and more cosmopolitan than either Canada's largest city, Toronto, or that land of concealed-carry and kids-dying-in-the-streets-from-lack-of-universal-health-care to the south. (In many ways, Vancouver is a colder, coastal Austin.) With these Games, Vancouverites hope their home town will forever be catapulted into the global first tier of must-visit cities, much as the 1992 Summer Games transformed Barcelona from a quirky proto-secessionist backwater into one of the most attractive tourist destinations.

Here I must confess my biases: I've had several memorable visits to Barcelona, and try to get there whenever I'm in south-central Europe. More importantly, I grew up in and around Toronto—where I reveled in Hogtown's "center of the universe" self-regard—and might still be living there if the great city weren't on the wrong side of the border. See, having fled Soviet Russia as a child, I have a certain aversion to socialism—though of late Canada has been doing [much better](#) ^[2] in terms of [economic freedom](#) ^[3] than the United States, where I've spent my entire adult life.

But perhaps my most relevant bias is that I love the Olympics. One of my earliest memories is watching Misha the Bear (in the form of audience placards) crying at the closing ceremonies of the 1980 Moscow Games—on the first color TV in my parents' circle of friends, for which I think they spent two years' salary on it. During the 1996 Atlanta Games I logged a total of 96 viewing hours (ah, college summers...). I even wrote about the Olympics for my master's thesis—expanding on many of the points I made in my opening [op-ed](#) ^[4] on this Web site.

Which is all to say that I hate the Olympic movement—that weird confluence of myth, political correctness, hypocrisy, and corruption, which holds itself out as an international institution of no less importance than the United Nations. (Come to think of it, the UN isn't important at all—and certainly has no relation to actual law or "reality-based" policy—so the IOC grandees might finally be on to something.) No, I don't go in for the "let's hold hands and sing Kumbaya" aspect of all this.

Just give me the sports: the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat, perhaps a little Bob Costas snark. That's why I'm particularly frustrated by the technical problems the current games have been having: funky mechanical arms aside, if a Winter Olympics can't guarantee proper snow and ice, it's on, um, pretty thin ice. (Watch for how the summer resort town of Sochi, Russia, pulls off the 2014 Winter Games—Vladimir Putin would be putting the organizing committee in jail if he saw some of the issues Vancouver has experienced.)

And so, as I set off for athletic competitions that are [pregnant](#) ^[5] with possibility, I'll try to keep my wits (and [wallet](#) ^[6]) about me and pass along some juicy tidbits.

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. He is filing periodic dispatches for The Daily Caller from and about the 2010 Winter Games.

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[1] too snowy: **<http://dailycaller.com..//2010/02/16/more-olympic-weather-woes-hockey-curling-start>**

[2] much better: **http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10208**

[3] economic freedom: **<http://danieljmitchell.wordpress.com/2010/01/22/america-is-less-free-than-canada>**

[4] op-ed: **<http://dailycaller.com..//2010/02/17/a-myth-of-olympic-proportions/>**

[5] pregnant:

http://sports.yahoo.com/olympics/vancouver/blog/fourth_place_medal/post/Canadian-curler-is-five-months-pregnant?urn=oly,219941

[6] wallet:

http://sports.yahoo.com/olympics/vancouver/blog/fourth_place_medal/post/The-1-199-jacket-and-other-extravagant-Olympic-?urn=oly,219883

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