

# The Canadian Crescendo

*The 2010 Olympic Winter Games were a tale of two weeks, beginning with tragedy but ending with inspiration*



BOB LATHAM

**T**he Olympics continue to amaze me. Although all sorts of story lines are plotted out before an Olympics begin, the Games always seem to write their own lasting narratives. At the same time, they have a unique ability to reflect the spirit and the culture of their hosts. The Vancouver Olympics were no exception.

**Canada takes a while to know and appreciate.** It does not hit you with the bombast of some countries or the overt richness of some cultures, but after a while you embrace the spirit of its people. Similarly, the 2010 Olympic Winter Games were a tale of two weeks—from humble and tragic beginnings to redemption, joy and inspiration. All the while, though, the Games presented a colorful cast of characters.

**One of the most remarkable athletes** on the planet has to be Shaun White for his ability to consistently deliver groundbreaking athletic performances while channeling Jeff Spicoli from “Fast Times at Ridgemoor High.” White’s interview with Bob Costas after his gold-medal performance in the halfpipe was particularly noteworthy for its Spicoli influences, as White accepted Costas’ invitation to make a plea for a White House visit, turning to the camera to say, “Obama, if you’re watching and would like to have me over for some tea or something, I would be most inclined.” And speaking of Spicoli, U.S. halfpipe silver medalist Hannah Teter could easily play his daughter in any remake of the movie.

**On the ice, the Edward Scissorhands look** in male figure skating proved popular this year, while U.S. gold medalist Evan Lysacek put on a clinic on how to stay above the fray when your rival (in this case Evgeni Plushenko of Russia, aided by Vladimir Putin himself) offers up something less than grace in defeat. Apolo Anton Ohno and his Korean opponents continue to have a star-crossed relationship, which is unfortunate given Ohno’s phenomenal consistency in a chaotic sport that is extremely popular in South Korea. However, at this point Ohno would be about as welcome in South Korea as Simon Cowell would be at an Up With People convention.

**In the “what were they thinking?” department,** Russian ice dancers Oksana Domnina and Maxim Shabalin wore

clichéd and hackneyed Aboriginal costumes for “folk dancing” night. It was like “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” being performed as a Siamese dance in “The King and I.” Their bad judgment may have cost them a higher podium finish.

**But the Olympics are not just about the competitors.** They are also about the hosts. And the Canadians showed their resiliency. In the first week, the death of Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili, a major malfunction during the torch-lighting ceremony, significant problems with the speedskating ice and the first loss to the U.S. by a Canadian Olympic hockey team in 50 years (featuring the best empty-net goal I’ve ever seen, a game-clincher by Ryan Kesler of the United States) provided a lot to overcome.

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**But the spirit of Canada** began to shine through, perhaps best personified by Canadian figure skater Joannie Rochette, who either put the whole country on her back or vice

versa as she skated courageously two days after the death of her mother. If you had a dry eye after that—which commentator Scott Hamilton certainly did not—check your vital signs. Other members of the Canadian team began to collect gold medals at an impressive rate in the last five days of the Olympics, leading to perhaps the greatest concluding event of any Olympics anytime, anywhere: the U.S.–Canada gold medal hockey game that went into overtime and made Sidney Crosby the national hero he always seemed destined to be. So often, the big-time player is the one to make the big-time play—which was true on the American side as well with Ryan Miller’s brilliant goaltending and Zach Parise’s Mike Eruzione-like tying goal in the final seconds of regulation.

**The rousing version of “O Canada,”** one of the world’s most user-friendly national anthems, at the end of that match was a fitting punctuation mark on a memorable 16 days that revealed all the human drama and emotion that characterizes the Olympics and provided a well-deserved group celebration for a host country that leaves an equally lasting impression. ■

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