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Vancouver Feels Heat — Outside and In

It's not just the weather in Vancouver that has been heating up — it's also the relations with the international press.

At a press conference on Tuesday, reporters hurled one question after the other at spokespersons for the Vancouver organizing committee (Vanoc) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) about problems with Games operations. The issues range from bad weather to canceled spectator tickets to a broken ice resurfacing machine at the long-track speed skating venue.

Problems with Vancouver's Cypress mountain venue, already dubbed Vancouver's "special child" by one executive — got worse on Tuesday.

Organizers announced they were canceling all of the remaining standing room tickets for the venue, which hosts snowboard halfpipe, ski cross and giant slalom events. To date, Vanoc has had to cancel and refund 28,000 spectator tickets for the venue — costing them C\$1.5 million.

The problem is that Vanoc built the spectator area out of bales of hay, with snow on top. But as the snow has melted in the unseasonably warm weather and rain, they're worried that people could fall into the crevices of the hay. Said Vanoc's vice president of ticketing Caley Denton: "The snow has washed away to the point where people can punch through and potentially step in between two big straw bales and that becomes a pretty deep crack. We've had people go right down to



AFP/Getty Images

Something you won't be seeing today: Spectators lining the stands at Cypress Mountain.

their knees, or in some cases ever farther."

And then there's the problem with the ice-making machine, which has been delaying competition as it belches up fluid onto the ice. Organizers said they had essentially given up on the jumbo-sized Olympia ice resurfacer used for this particular venue, and are shipping in another Zamboni-brand one from Calgary, which will be put into service on Wednesday. "It's a little bit like lost luggage. It's not whether or not your luggage gets lost, it's how you deal with it," said Vanoc spokesman Renee Smith-Valade.

Given all of these mounting issues, one reporter asked: Is this the worst start to a Games ever? The British press, in particular, has been harsh on Vancouver. Witness this [headline from the Times of London](#): "London 2012 can't be worse than the Vancouver Games this winter."

Vanoc spokeswoman Smith-Valade said that the coverage by the British press "shocks" her. "Our assessment is that the competitions are excellent, the athletes are very satisfied. We can't do anything about the weather, all we can do is react properly to it. In our view, the reactions we are getting from spectators here and on television are that the Games are excellent, that Canadians are proud and that the Games are a great success."

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