

World doesn't care for our new attitude

Apparently it's OK if Canada kicks butt, we just can't talk about it

BY CLEVE DHEENSAW, TIMES COLONIST FEBRUARY 17, 2010



Canadian fans celebrate during the men's curling round robin game on day 5 of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics at Vancouver Olympic Centre on February 16, 2010 in Vancouver, Canada.

Photograph by: Cameron Spencer, Getty Images

The world has seen the new Canada. It likes the old one better.

The early reviews of British Columbia's and Canada's 2010 Winter Olympics are in and many of them are scathing.

Taxpayers from Duncan to Dawson Creek may have paid \$7 billion for a PR disaster. Visiting media don't seem to like that the former quiet pride Canadians took in their achievements has been replaced by something more bellicose and jingoistic.

"Their highly unpleasant Own the Podium program ... has alienated the world they are supposed to play host to. Getting ugly about it is neither necessary nor appropriate," wrote the Times of London.

Canada is accused not only of excessive chest-thumping but also hogging the training time at venues, limiting access to foreign athletes, leading to a sensational headline in the Daily Mail:

"Canada's lust for glory is to blame for this senseless tragedy," referring to the death of Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili.

The British press -- as we discovered during the 1994 Victoria Commonwealth Games and 2001 Edmonton world track and field championships -- can be dour, critical and toxically cynical. How is it that Britain, which is hardly a Winter Olympics power and largely irrelevant in Vancouver athletically, is creating such a negative stir?

Unless things go perfectly in 2012, they are setting themselves for a comeuppance at the next Summer Games in London.

Complaints, however, about our handling of the 2010 Winter Games have also come from south of the line.

Jay Mariotti, national columnist for FanHouse, wrote under the headline "Canada Shaming Itself At Stormy Olympics": "Ohhhhhhhh, Canada. What have you done to yourself? You've sacrificed your sound sensibilities, your lighthearted ways and your minimum-stress comfort zone to become, well, a pocket version of the United States. We used to drink your Labatt's, laugh at your comedians, melt in your terrifically diverse cities and admire your peace and tranquility. Now, we're wondering what the hell is wrong with you. Have you taken mass quantities of hubris pills? You seem unfit to host the Games, much less Own The Podium."

But Alex Bilodeau, the moguls skier who in Vancouver became the first Canadian to win a gold medal at a home Olympics, during a telephone interview with the Times Colonist shot back at critics of the brasher Canadian approach: "The Germans and others aren't here to finish second. That's the way sports is. It's competition. Own the Podium brings the best out of athletes."

Perhaps beneath the new bravado, Canadians are still basically insecure and unsure of our place and trying to mask that insecurity. The British sense that. They always have and know how to press the right buttons, like the time one of their sportswriters caused mass consternation across northern Alberta by ripping Edmonton as "Deadmonton" during the 2001 world track and field championships.

Yet the arrogance of Vanoc in putting snow events into Cypress, and various other technical glitches, have come back to bite. So the pummeling of Vancouver 2010 continues, with Europeans expressing shock that attendance for Monday's much-delayed men's Olympic downhill in Whistler was only 6,210 when it would have attracted 100,000 in Europe.

Even the usually staid Associated Press referred to Vancouver 2010 as the "Glitch Games."

Under the headline, "Vancouver Games Continue Downhill Slide From Disaster to Calamity," Lawrence Donegan of the Guardian writes: "[Unfolding events are] threatening to make these Games the worst in Olympic history. It is hard to believe anything will surpass the organizational chaos and

naked commercial greed of the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta or the financial disaster of the 1976 Summer Games, which bankrupted Montreal, yet with every passing day the sense of drift and nervousness about the Vancouver Games grows ever more noticeable."

Worst Games ever? Is this what we signed up for -- to be beaten over the head with our own tax dollars by foreign scribes?

Well, at least men's hockey has started. It's the one sport in which we are allowed to unapologetically kick butt and brag about it.

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