

Spectator's Olympics

Dream big and pass the ketchup

- I love a lot of things about the Olympic Games, but topping the list must be the blithe embrace of irony. For instance, all that public weeping and roaring for people you'll never meet, nor care about in just a few weeks' time. That is, until another 47 months have passed and you realize you've actually heard the name Alexandre Despatie before—indeed, cared for him deeply. And you feel a pang of guilt, like you'd misplaced the email address of an old friend, years ago, and didn't Google hard enough to find it.

I skipped the Vancouver 2010 Olympics—a decision I'll regret to my dying day—so when the chance came to go to London 2012, it was a no-brainer. Shell out £100 for swim heats, no medals? Who cares! Plenty of beautiful bodies, wet, in tight clothes? Sign me up!

We watched Michael Phelps squeak through to the finals in the first swimming event of the games, cheering ourselves hoarse for no one in particular. We saw the Chinese phenom Ye Shiwen blow away the competition in the women's 400 medley before anyone started questioning her record-breaking times. Like everyone else, we were too busy screaming to think it all through.

In fact, for those of us who are spectators, a certain all-heart/no-brain approach to the Olympics is part of its charm. We care abruptly and profoundly, without taking the time to question the flood of emotion or its authenticity. This is why corporations like Coke and McDonalds get away with being the chief sponsors of an event that epitomizes sport at its highest level. Rational thinking has no place here, otherwise skeet shooting would have gone the way of the tug-of-war years ago. I'm pretty sure the nutritionist for the athletes wasn't urging them to carbo-load on Sausage McGriddles, but those of us glamming around the Olympic village in our red-and-white face paint and maple-leaf T-shirts can turn a blind eye to these kinds of petty contradictions. Heck, if "everything in moderation" was going to make it as a motto, Phelps didn't get the memo.

Watching the Olympics affects people in one of two ways: some feel overcome by a powerful inertia, leading them to park in front of their flat-screen TVs and call in sick for two weeks straight. It's a quintessential irony of the games that most

people will skip boot-camp so as not to miss the men's eight-with-coxswain. The rest, and I count myself in this camp, start scanning the Olympic program for sports in which we, ourselves, might yet have the chance to medal. For the winter games, I've always fancied I might at least make the podium for curling, never mind I've never once thrown a stone. These seem to be older folks who are good at vigorous cleaning. I could do that.

For the summer games, I'm thinking sailing. That looks sort of peaceful. And I used to know how to rig a Laser II.

Riding the tube into central London after our swim event was over, high on emotion and stiff from leaping from our seats, we kept watch for fellow Canadians.

I wore my Hudson's Bay Olympic-issue garb, greeting my countrymen and women with the sort of bonhomie usually reserved for the pub on New Year's. In the heady afterglow of our unabashed patriotism, anything was possible.

My husband, seeing me cast a surreptitious glimpse at my own flexed bicep in the subway car window, leaned in and whispered: Do you think people are wondering if we are a part of Team Canada?

It's certainly conceivable, I figured, delving deeper into my Rolo McFlurry. You can dream big at the Olympics. Others have, clearly, and it's worked out for them. **OL**