

COMMENTARY

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Editorial

Curling, aeri-als, skeleton — best of the Olympics

Every four years, the Winter Olympic Games delight and wow sports fans across the world. The Games are only able to put on a fixed number of events, and after watching the Salt Lake City 2002 Olympics for two straight weeks, the Emerald editorial board voted* for the top five events we think should be included in future Games.

* Disclaimer: Vote trading, bribery, intimidation and hanging chads were not part of the editorial board's voting process.

Our top choice was a tie: figure skating and curling. Figure skating is a popular favorite, mainly because it combines artistry and athleticism in an entertaining way. Plus, audiences can always count on figure skating for a good scandal. From Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan, to this year's placement conspiracy — more popularly known as "Skategate," or the "axel of evil" — the sport keeps viewers engrossed as the soap operas unfold.

Curling is simply fun to watch, and it presents a peculiar intensity. The athletes slide their "stones" down the ice as teammates rush in front of it with push brooms, the stone handler usually barking instructions the whole way. Curling is an acquired taste, but this year's competition has drawn more interest, if only from those wondering what's so exciting about stones and brooms on ice.

Skeleton was another notable sport, especially since it debuted into the Salt Lake City Olympics after a 54-year hiatus. We hope the skeleton competition will continue in the future — what other sport has humans sliding head-first, 2 inches away from a slick track of ice and going upwards of 80 mph?

Half-pipe snowboarding was celebrated this year, not only because four Americans took medals, but because of the joy in watching the talking heads on NBC try to incorporate snowboarder lingo into the winner interviews.

Aerials was another sport where the athletes faced certain death after launching themselves more than 50 feet in the air, twisting and turning and then landing on a steep hill. Although all of the Olympic sports are infinitely dangerous, aerials are particularly exciting to watch because of the apparent insanity of the athletes.

We hope the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy, will be as exciting event-wise as the Salt Lake City Games.

Editorial Policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Please include contact information.

The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

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De-commercializing the Olympic\$

The Olympic Games came to a close Sunday. The years of planning, building, gathering money, training, sacrificing and dreaming are over after being displayed for the world in a brief, two-week showcase. I used to wonder why anyone would want to devote his or her entire life to becoming an Olympian. It never seemed worth it to me. I certainly wouldn't want to spend every ounce of my free time training and have my coach and parents be the center of my social life.

At least, that's what I thought before I traveled home to Utah a few weekends ago. I had the opportunity to attend the Feb. 15 Medals Ceremony in Salt Lake City, where I observed the amazing looks on the faces of the medallists as they watched their flags being raised. With the torch burning, the crowd screaming and the national anthems being played, it was quite a moment to be remembered. I then realized that to have that moment, representing my country with the world watching, would probably make it all worth it.

But would it be worth the effort when most of the attention is taken off your achievement and concentrated on some sort of Olympic scandal? Unfortunately, the word "scandal" seems to be as popular in Olympic reporting as the words "gold medallist." And it's not just a problem with athletes. Even judges are in on the conspiracy. Is national honor important enough that

judges would work together to make their respective countries win? I think there's something else projecting its influence here.

The Olympics have become a giant means for making money. If you become the gold medallist, you don't just receive the honor of being the best, you are also offered thousands, or millions, of dollars from companies for advertising campaigns and contracts with various production shows. An Olympic winner has the chance to become as well known as the stars in Hollywood, and that's unfortunate. For some judges and athletes, the love of the sport is just not enough — it has to be about money.

Now the Olympic committee claims it is going to change the judging process, at least for the ice-skating competition. But will this really prevent scandals in future Olympic Games? It is unfortunate that of all the things the 2002 Winter Olympics could be remembered for, "Skategate" will be going down as one of the top stories.

And such is the fate of capitalism,

right? Perhaps, but I don't think we should just sit back and accept it; things can and ought to be reformed.

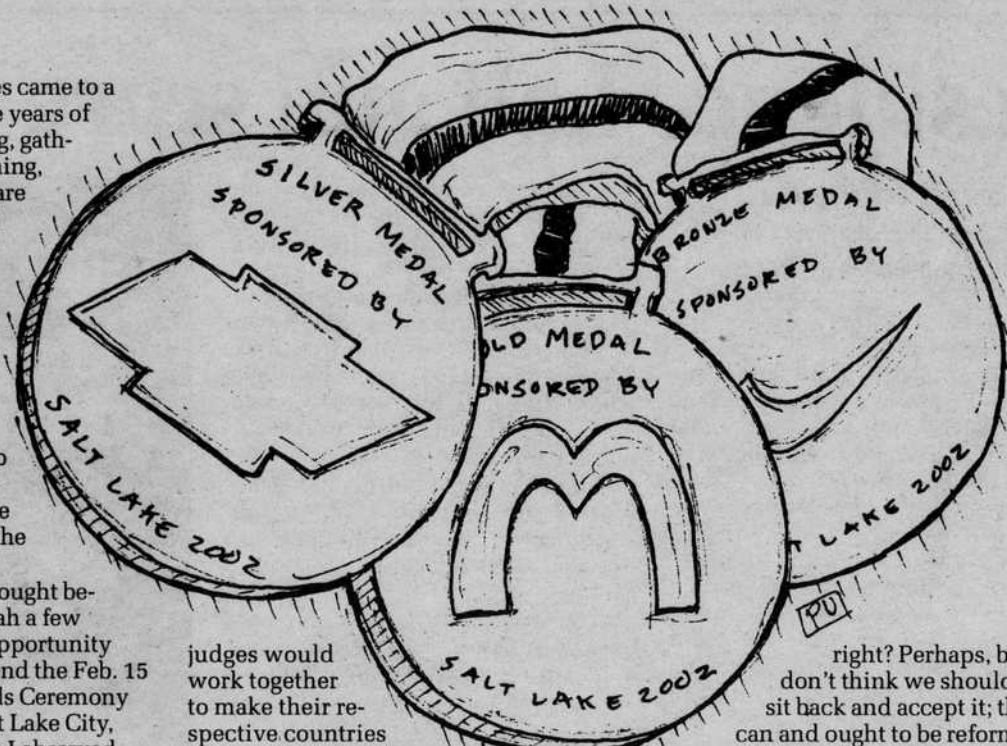
Governments could be more involved so that the Olympics would be funded less by companies so athletes could sign a contract promising not to accept any offerings from advertising agencies until a year or so after the Olympics — giving the commotion surrounding winning enough time to subsidize. These are ideas that might be difficult to implement, but that doesn't mean the ultimate goal can't be reached.

Sadly enough, people don't always place a high value on their personal integrity, but perhaps by reforming the commercialization of the Olympics a little, we could at least limit the benefits of sacrificing that integrity. With all the time and energy put into making the Olympics a memorable and worldwide "coming together," they ought to be remembered for the athletes' achievements and not the risqué behavior behind the scenes.

E-mail columnist Tara Debenham at taradebenham@dailyemerald.com. Her views do not necessarily reflect those of the Emerald.



Tara Debenham
 Columnist



Poll Results:

Every week, the Emerald prints the results of our online poll and the poll question for next week. The poll can be accessed from the main page of our Web site, www.dailyemerald.com. We encourage you to send us feedback about the poll questions and results.

Last week's poll question:
 What is your favorite Winter Olympics scandal?

Results: 84 total votes

- French pairs figure skating judge/double gold-medal controversy in 2002 — 9.3 percent, or 8 votes
- Apolo Anton Ohno's gold-medal loss to Australia's Steven Bradbury because of a fall in 2002 — 7 percent, or 6 votes
- Canadian snowboarder Ross Rebagliati being stripped of the gold medal in 1998 — 10.5 percent, or 9 votes
- Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan debacle in 1994 — 67.4 percent, or 58 votes
- Don't know — 5.8 percent, or 5 votes

This week's poll question: What is your favorite vice?

The choices:

- Drinking
- Online porn
- Comfort foods
- Caffeine
- Don't know
- Don't care

Letter to the editor

Police Commission seeks feedback

Thanks to the Emerald editorial board for printing a follow-up to the Community Policing Workshop held at the law school Feb. 14. A few clarifications are needed though.

In both articles on Feb. 14 advancing the workshop and the Feb. 18 commentary, the Police Commission and Eugene Police Department were used interchangeably, when these are two separate entities. The Police Commission is a group of 12 citizen volunteers to make recommendations to better align police policies and resource priorities with community values. The commission reports to the chief of police, city council and city manager.

The Police Commission isn't a public outreach service of the police department, but is charged by city ordinance to help increase communication between police and the community. That's what the group was trying to do Feb. 14. Whether Valentine's Day or lack of student interest in police issues was to blame for low attendance, I'm not sure. We were assured by the few students who attended the workshop that given more opportunities, the campus community would share its opinions and concerns about policing issues with the commission.

Invite those who had Valentine's Day plans, or the many other priorities that we all juggle, to take the time to fill out a community policing feedback form electronically. Your input will help the commission represent your interests when recommendations for the future direction of police services are developed. The forms, and other information on the commission's work, are located at www.ci.eugene.or.us/policecomm/index.htm.

John H. Brown
 Eugene Police Commission