

Editorial

Olympic athletes, fans lost perspective

It's a little sad to see the Olympics end. Frankly it's going to be hard to give up all that hype and hysteria cold turkey. As commentator Jim McKay might say in a blather of patriotic sentiment, "Gee, there's just nothing like catching that Olympic spirit." Ain't it the truth.

The Olympic spirit, loosely defined, is that bull-headed stubbornness that pushes the athlete to new heights of greatness. For the fan, Olympic spirit is that chest-puffing, button-busting, all-out yahooing pride in one's country.

Now the Olympics are over and the mythical Olympic spirit will be put back into its box for another four years. Strange thing this Olympic spirit. It's often inspiring and always exciting. It's been responsible for some absolutely fantastic accomplishments. But it turns dangerous and ugly when it's allowed to triumph over common sense.

It's great to talk about the Olympic spirit that finally pushed punch-drunk Gabriella Andersen-Schiess over the finish line to place 37th in the women's marathon, all but unconscious from exhaustion. It's great, that is, only after she had been declared okay by the local Olympic hospital. That's just so much Olympic 20/20 hindsight. She should have been stopped.

I'll never forget the sight as she almost incoherently teetered her way into the stadium. She was lost, exhausted, confused, emotionally naked in front of millions of people. Track officials were confused as well but refrained from giving her the help she so desperately needed.

She continued to sway, stumble and stagger around the track, seemingly oblivious to her peril but proclaiming it louder with each rubbery, grotesque step. And still the officials did nothing. That's not perpetuating the Olympic spirit as much as it is abusing common sense.

Push your body to the limits of its capabilities. Fine. But this woman was way out of her league and her body knew it. She was on automatic pilot with no gas left. The warning signs were obvious — and ignored.

The fact that she by some miracle happened to be all right after the race hardly diminishes the argument. What would they have told her family if she had sustained permanent brain damage? "Sorry, we just wanted to see her make it?" "She was a brave little competitor?" "At least she finished?" Hardly consolation. She should have been stopped.

The gutty, potentially dangerous effort put out by Andersen-Schiess makes me think of Jim Fixx, the man credited with starting the jogging craze with "The Complete Book of Running." He wrote once in



WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME, DOC? NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY I JUST DON'T CARE THAT THE SAUDIS HAVE A NEW SOCCER TEAM

the book, "The qualities and capacities that are important in running — such factors as willpower, the ability to apply effort during extreme fatigue and acceptance of pain — have a radiating power that subtly influences one's life." It not so subtly influenced Fixx right into his grave. Fixx died of a heart attack while jogging through a rural village in northern Vermont. I wonder if he just might like to put an asterisk by that passage now?

Don't miss my point. The Olympic spirit is glorious if tempered with reason. But at times it simply gets out of hand. That goes for the fans as well as for the

athletes.

Recently, as I listened to the incessant chants of U-S-A, U-S-A, for the umpteenth time, it seemed to me that this, too, was Olympic spirit run amok.

Be proud of your country, sure. But to the point that the Olympic spirit turns even the most sensible among us into jingoistic automatons, rooting for anything with a USA on its shirt, no.

Let's keep the Olympic spirit — let's keep it in proper perspective.

James A. Fussell

Tax increases coming despite 2,478 ideas

If you have tears, prepare to shed them for one of President Reagan's 2,478 favorite ideas.

He got these ideas from Peter Grace. When conservatives say "Let Reagan be Reagan," they mean "Let Reagan be Grace." One of the most radical fellows in or around government, Grace, a businessman, chaired the commission that recently rendered 2,478 recommendations for "cost control" in government.

Reagan has seized upon these recom-

mendations as a refutation of the notion that a tax increase will be required to reduce the deficit to manageable proportions. Vowing at a press conference to rely instead on spending

George Will

cuts, Reagan said, "We have a task force working on 2,478 recommendations... of ways in which government can be made more economic and efficient by simply turning to modern business practices."

Reagan has not read the 10-foot-high stack of documentation for the 47 Grace volumes, so he can be forgiven for not knowing that they involve a lot more than "modern business practices." Brigades of public-spirited persons donated their time to the commission, and identified hundreds of possible efficiencies that could indeed save billions of dollars. But most of the large sums pertain not to more efficient administration of policies — not with diminishing "waste, fraud and abuse" — but with changing policies.

For example, the report proposes cutting federal pensions for more than 5 million federal workers, and their spouses. Were Reagan to endorse all 2,478 ideas, he would lose 50 states.

He and other conservatives who use the Grace report to suppress talk of tax increases are, shall we say, selective in their enthusiasm for the particular recommendations. This was shown when Congress recently tumbled over itself in antic haste to send to Reagan a

bill that does the opposite of the Grace proposal concerning federal sales of hydroelectric power.

The proposal was that federal power-marketing administrations charge for their electricity something more than mere cost-recovery rates, if not the full rate the market would bear. Congressional conservatives recently had a chance to stop praising and start implementing the Grace recommendations with respect to the Hoover Dam.

Since 1937 the dam has been generating electricity under a contract that guarantees cheap power to parts of Nevada, Arizona and southern California for 50 years. Although the contract still has three years to run; although Congress has so much work and so little time that it can not pass even appropriation bills in a timely manner; although the Depression-era Hoover rates are from one-fourth to one-fourteenth those that unsubsidized Americans pay — nevertheless, Congress has rushed to extend for 30 years, until 2017, the cheap sale of this federal resource.

The vote in the Republican controlled Senate was 64-34, with every senator from west of Missouri voting to continue the subsidy. That is Reagan country, pardner, but it also is where there are other cheap federal power arrangements.

Furthermore, conservative cowboys can spot trouble coming across a far mesa and they saw a slew of troubles in the suggestion that federal resources should be sold at something approaching market rates. Suppose that obnoxious principle were applied to water, or grazing, fees. All those folks whose church-going clothes include cowboy boots and Adam Smith neckties wor-

ship at the altar of the GFM (Glorious Free Market), but this is hitting close to home.

Conservative Republican senators said (hang on tight — this argument can give you ideological whiplash) it would be "laissez-faire economics — the public be damned" to end federally subsidized rates. They said it is good conservative government-bashing policy to continue this subsidy. Why? Because it is "consumer protection" to prevent big government from charging big (market) rates. Anyway, they said, it is sound anti-government policy to prevent government from going "into business to make a profit." (What happened to Reagan's sound business practices? Hush.) Besides, subsidized power is — stand up and salute, conservatives — a "tradition."

As Mark Twain said, get the facts first — you can distort them later. The fact is that the Congress has again demonstrated the real conservatism of modern government, which labors to protect people from disagreeable change.

Twain also said that thunder is impressive, but lightning does the work. The Grace report is thunderous, but Congress must do the work. Will Reagan, who praises the Grace approach, veto the bill by which Congress shreds a Grace idea? No.

Reagan now says he will veto any increase in "personal" income taxes. The adjective is a modifier, modifying his opposition to taxes. His pledge leaves — as it should — lots of kinds of taxes unmentioned. The Hoover Dam vote illustrates why today's 2,478th idea — that tax increases are coming — will not go away.

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