

The Vancouver 2010 Olympics



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The Vancouver 2010 Olympics were full of moments, like any Olympics are; inspiring moments, thought-provoking moments, and even sad moments. They all help to tell the story of the city, and how the Olympics are changing as a whole. I have chosen the five moments that I think best tell the story, and affect the legacy, of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics.



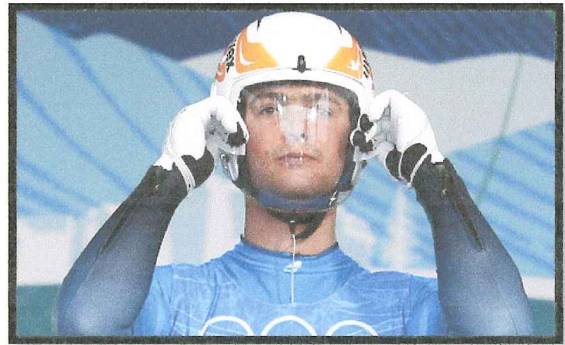
Georgian Luger Dies on a Training Run

When aspiring Olympian Nodar Kumaritaschwili died during training run at Whistler Sliding Centre, it was not only tragic, but hugely controversial. Blame was passed from the track, to the Olympic Committee, to the luger himself.

It all began when Nodar was born and raised in a small ski resort town near the capitol of Georgia called Bakuriani, a place much like Whistler itself. It was there that his dreams of being an Olympian grew. His family was very supportive of him, feeding his passion even more. As he got older, he became quite a skilled luger; after all, he lived right near a sliding center. At 21 years old, ranked at #44 in the world, it seemed as if his Olympic dream might come true. And it almost did. After being placed on the Georgian team for luge in 2010, he was on his way to his first Olympics.

People were constantly raving about the new Sliding Center; it was the fastest one yet. A faster track meant faster speeds which lead to world records and worldwide fame. It seemed like everyone was excited about the track; everyone except Nodar Kumaritaschwili. After his death, Nodar's father told the press that his son had told him that he was scared of the speeds he reached on the track. The last turn before the finish was too fast for him to control himself. He was definitely scared, but not scared enough to do anything about it. His dream was too close; he could practically reach out and grab it. Until almost instantly it slipped away.

When he crashed, it was later said he reached speeds of 90 miles an hour. It was on the final turn of the run- the exact turn he thought was too fast. He lost control and crashed into a steel pillar on the side of the track. Medics were almost immediately on scene doing CPR, but the blow was just too powerful. He was airlifted in a helicopter headed for the hospital, but there he was pronounced dead.



As soon as the event became public a sort of sad haze set over the city. A city that should have been ecstatic, waiting for the Olympics to begin, was already mourning a death. Almost immediately blame was assigned to the track. It was *too* fast. Even the track designers agreed they'd made a mistake. The track turned out to be 10 miles an hour faster than planned. Because of the accident, safety measures were taken on the track. Extra padding was added to the pole on the final corner, and the track was slowed down slightly. After all that, though, the Olympic Officials still couldn't admit it was their fault; it would ruin the whole Olympics. No one using the track would feel safe anymore. So, they said that it was Nodar's fault. He didn't make the turn properly so he wiped out. This is at least partially true; other lugers had been training on the track earlier with no problems at all. Still, is that any way to honour the dead; to say that their death occurred of their own fault? Who is to blame for this tragedy?

After all this controversy, the answer is still unclear. Perhaps it doesn't matter. After all, the damage is done. As years pass by, Nodar Kumaritaschwili's death will remain to be seen as a tragic event that will forever cast a dark shadow on the overall bright success of the 2010 Olympic Games.

The Opening Ceremonies

The Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Opening Ceremonies were overall very successful, but there were a few flaws and malfunctions.

Some of the problems started long before the ceremonies aired on TV. Since the roof of BC Place is controlled from a center point, which is held up only by wires, if too much weight is hung from the central point, the roof will sag. That made it extremely hard to hang any heavy objects from the roof. Also, since the roof is like a giant tent, it is important that the air pressure in the stadium is sustained. That meant no large props that would displace large amounts of air. This restricted the set designers' and performance planners' ideas a lot. The conclusion that they came to was to make the wow factor of the ceremonies entirely out of lighting shows instead of intricate and large sets. They used lights to project mountains, clouds, maple leaves and more. Even the people watching in



the stands were part of the show. They were all wearing special white shirts that light could be projected onto to match the theme of the current presentation. Their solution to this problem worked more than effectively. I'd say the show was better than it would've been with over the top sets; sometimes all you need is some lights and white sheets and you can create anything you want.

One of the larger and more publicly recognized problems was one that occurred during the lighting of the Olympic cauldron. The Olympic torch had been passed relay-style across Canada for a record 106 days before the opening ceremonies. It had travelled through thousands of communities in every province and was passed on to many significant Canadians. It had certainly come a long way, but didn't even get to fully complete its journey.

Canada's idea for the lighting of the Olympic cauldron was different than that of any other Olympics. Instead of being lit by one Canadian icon, there were instead four separate columns to the cauldron each to be lit by a different person. This showcased Canada's teamwork, working together instead of alone. It started off when Rick Hansen wheeled the torch in from its final leg. He then used it to light four other torches, the ones to light the cauldron with. The honour of lighting the Olympic cauldron was given to skier Nancy Greene, hockey player Wayne Gretsky, speed skater Catrina Le May Doan, and basketball player Steve Nash. Unfortunately, one of the columns didn't rise up from the ground like the other three. Catrina Le May Doan was forced to stand there smiling and waving as the other three columns were lit, pretending like it was supposed to happen. But there was obviously an empty place where the last column was supposed to be, to officially complete the journey of the Olympic torch. Sadly, the column, along with Catrina Le May Doan's once in a lifetime moment, never showed up.



Alexandre Bilodeau Wins Men's Moguls Gold

Alexandre Bilodeau's gold is seen as the gold that put the Olympics back on track. It turned around all of the negatives of an early death, and an amazing but flawed opening ceremony,

Canadian Moguls skier Jennifer Heil was the favourite to win gold in her event the day before Bilodeau's, but was beaten by American Hanna Kearney. Her gold would have been the first Canadian gold on home soil in 36 years, since at the 1976 games in Montreal and the 1988 Calgary games Canada couldn't muster a gold medal. This was especially disappointing for her since she planned to retire after 2010. She had hoped for a gold medal to end her career, but sadly that didn't happen.

At his event the next day, Alexandre Bilodeau won gold instead, and the honour of the first Canadian gold on home soil. His Canadian gold eventually set the stage for 13 more, which is astonishing considering Canada couldn't even manage *one* in Calgary and Montreal.

Alexandre says that he has his brother, Frederic, to thank for everything. Frederic has supported him every step of the way. He wouldn't have even gotten into skiing if it wasn't for his brother. Alex used to play hockey, but switched to skiing since it was something they could do together, because Frederic has cerebral palsy. Alex says that Frederic always helps him look at the bright side of things. When he messed up during a run in the Turin 2006 Olympics and was getting upset with himself, Frederic reminded him he was at the *Olympics*, and that was a huge achievement in itself.



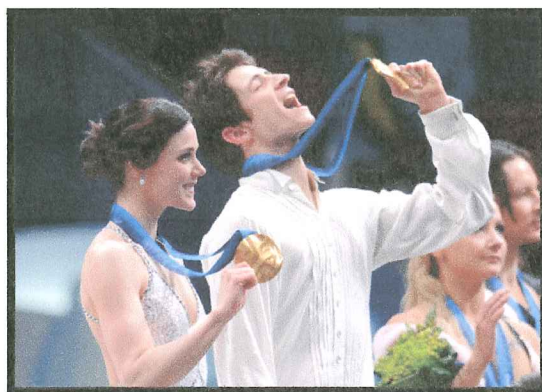
Alexandre's achievement set off a domino effect for team Canada. They started to get gold after gold after gold medals. Canada's athletes were setting a great example for the rest of the world not only for being a good sport, but for excelling in their events. Things kept getting better and better. Canada was starting to look like a good contender for the honour of most medals at that Olympics, or even eventually did win the most gold medals. Because of Alexandre Bilodeau, a world of possibilities was unlocked.

Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir Win Figure Skating Gold

During the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir won the first Olympic ice dancing gold by a North American country. It couldn't have been timed better, either. It seemed as if all of Canada was down in the dumps after their loss to the USA in Men's hockey on Sunday (little did we know that it would turn out just fine).

When Virtue and Moir beat American rivals/friends Meryl Davis and Charlie White it gave everybody a good dose of Canadian spirit. As soon as they finished their final skate the whole arena was chanting Canada with pride.

The two pairs trained together and shared the same skating coach. They say that they are very good friends and didn't find it weird at all to have to compete against each other. Even their coach Marina



Zoueva doesn't think of it as a conflict of interest—she treats both teams equally. Since she is from Russia this is even easier for her because even if she has the instinct to root for her own country it doesn't make a difference with her coaching. I can't help but mention how great things turned for Marina. The two teams she coached took silver and gold and her home country, Russia, took bronze. How perfect is that?

Unfortunately that's where the luck ends for figure skating in Russia. Their figure skating association has seen a slow decline over the years. The Russians, who used to dominate figure skating at the Olympics, only received 2 figure skating medals in 2010, none of them gold. It will definitely be a struggle for Russia to regain their former glory at the upcoming Sochi Olympics. One reason that this problem is even occurring is because many great Russian coaches are leaving the country to coach other teams, not leaving much behind. That's exactly what Marina Zoueva did.

So, the same thing that is declining the quality of current skating in Russia is what is making skating in Canada and the US even better, and this moment in the Olympics is a perfect example; Canada and the US at the top, and Russia, still on the podium, but falling slightly behind.

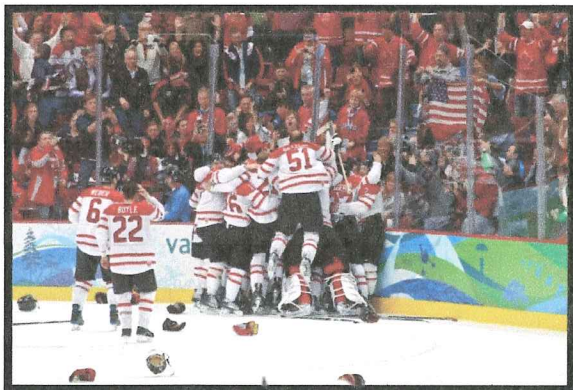
Canada Wins Men's Ice Hockey Gold

The Canada vs USA Gold medal game was the only event in the Vancouver Olympics that everyone in Canada was watching; that everyone in Canada wanted to see who will win. It was the ultimate rivalry under unique circumstances. It was the game with the storybook ending.

There was a lot at stake for the game, too. For Canada, winning meant redeeming themselves as defending champions, breaking the world record for most gold medals for a country at one Olympics, and most importantly, showing the rest of the world who they are.

The game started off great for Canada. Thanks to goals from Jonathan Toews and Corey Perry they were up by two points only 2 minutes into the first period! After that, though, the Americans had started to wake up. Eventually they got back the two points, the last one with only one minute and twenty seven seconds left in the game.

By then it became obvious, they were going to go into overtime. It was definitely shaping up to be Gold-Medal-Game Worthy. At that point I'm sure that everyone in the country that owned a TV was watching, and if they didn't they were crammed into bars or on Downtown Vancouver's streets where the game was streaming live. I wasn't in Vancouver myself when the game was on, but the shots on TV showed a sea of red and white, where personal space didn't exist. The energy looked very positive, and more or less responsible, unlike the streets after the Stanley Cup game in 2011. Everybody knew that their city, their country, was on display for the rest of the world. If they were to do anything other than sportsmanlike pride, it would blemish the image of not only their country, but more specifically, the people actually playing the game; the people that had trained their whole lives for that moment. And truly, that's what the Olympics are all about. Not the glitz and the glam of the opening and closing ceremonies, not the mascots and the merchandising, but the athletes, and the pride of the countries that support them.



When Sidney Crosby scored his goal seven minutes and forty seconds into the overtime, winning Canada the gold medal, there was more of that now famous Canadian pride than I think anybody has seen in a very long time.

Legacy of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics

According to many people, Vancouver is a boring city. It has horrible night life, a boring downtown area, and is just plain lame. I'm sure that the city board has made many attempts to make things more fun, but with apparently little result. There was no avoiding it, Vancouver was boring. Not during the Olympics, though. During the Olympics Vancouver was the place to be. The city was packed with tourists and citizens alike, all taking in the amazing scene. The atmosphere was so ecstatic and alive; you wouldn't believe it was the same old Vancouver. To me, that's what the Olympics do; it takes an ordinary city and makes it extraordinary. Vancouver was definitely no exception.

Canada seemingly dominated during the Olympics. With the first Canadian gold on home soil in almost 40 years, North America's first ice dance gold, and of course, the ice hockey gold, it was overall a great games for team Canada. They didn't have the honour of winning the most medals at the Olympics like they'd hoped, but they did win the most gold medals by a country at any winter games. Because of the Olympics, Canadian spirit was higher than ever.

But what happens when the Olympics end? Does everything continue on as though it never happened at all, or is a legacy created that continues long after the closing ceremonies? It's hard to tell. Is Vancouver different? It seems the same to me. Perhaps the legacy still remains, but in a more subtle way.

The Olympic cauldron, for instance. It still sits outside of the Vancouver Convention center like it has for four years. It serves as a constant reminder of the games, and what they've accomplished. Even the convention centre itself was changed by the Olympics. It got a major facelift so that it could handle being the worldwide media centre. That facelift continues to benefit the city even after the Olympics have ended. Now the convention centre is overall a more smoothly run facility.

The convention centre isn't the only Olympic development that continues to give back. Vancouver's infrastructure also got some new editions. The Sea to Sky Highway was refinished and expanded in some places for an overall smoother ride. It may have been intended for athletes, media, and fans to get to Whistler more efficiently, but now it takes vacationers, adventurers, and anyone in between there, too. Obviously, there was a price to this; but don't go and blame the Olympics for the city's financial problems just yet. The sea to sky highway had been scheduled to be redone anyways, but the Olympics just bumped the construction ahead a few years.

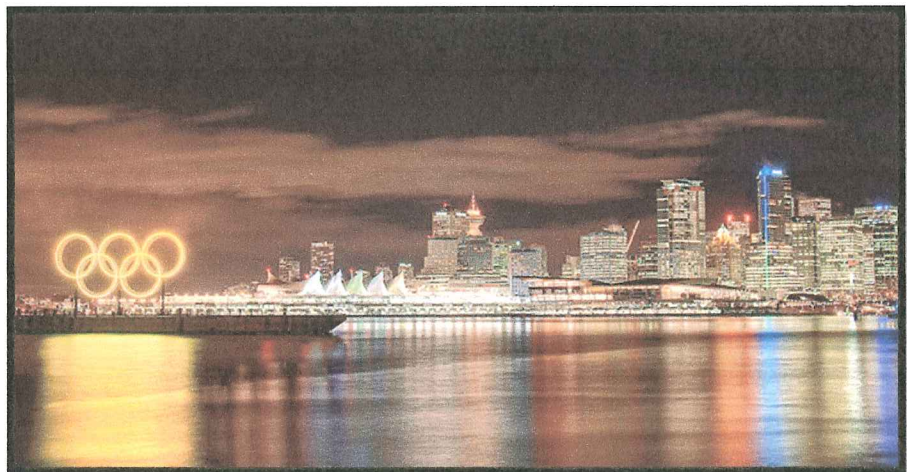
Other developments in transportation include new eco- friendly buses, the Canada line, a system that takes people from the airport to downtown Vancouver, and even some new sea buses. Those are also things that continue to give back; they are used every day.



As for the cost of all these developments, it was not as bad as you would think. There have been Olympic horror stories of Quebec being in debt until almost 40 years after their Montreal Olympics, about China spending hundreds of billions on theirs. Vancouver's costs were actually quite modest, and there is no Olympic debt. The total costs were about 6 billion dollars, but only half of that, 3 billion dollars, was invested by the government of BC. The other half was funding from the Olympic committee. A good portion of those 3 billion dollars from BC went towards infrastructure developments like the sea to sky highway, which would've been rebuilt anyways.

Another reason the Olympics weren't as costly as, say Sochi's, is because Vancouver already had most of the major facilities needed to host an Olympics; BC Place for the Ceremonies and some skating events, Whistler Mountain and other local mountains for the skiing and snowboarding events. The only things that were built from scratch were the Richmond Olympic oval, the athlete's village, and parts of Whistler Village. Comparing that to Sochi, where *everything* had to be built, it is understandable that the costs are substantially lower.

VANOC also saved money by turning down some of the more costly Olympic ideas. There were originally plans to plaster BC Place and much of the city with the Vancouver 2010 green, blue, and white colours. There would be Olympic flags hanging off lampposts, crosswalks with Olympic designs painted on them, billboards featuring the famous Olympic mascots, and much more. Ultimately, the committee decided that it would cause unnecessary costs and be pretty excessive. Similar ruling was given to the idea of placing multiple large sets of Olympic rings in places around the city, such as on top of mountains or in the harbor by BC Place. It would've been beautiful, but the rings were rumoured to cost about one million dollars apiece. These cancelled ideas show that Vancouver's lack of Olympic debt is not entirely because they already had many major facilities in place, but also because they showed restraint and didn't go over the top.



Luckily, most of their choices paid off. The Olympics were very successful, and nobody commented on lack of city colours or Olympic rings. Where there was some problem was with the athletes village. VANOC offered the condos in the athlete's village, the place where Olympic athletes stayed, for sale after the Olympics. There were not as many buyers for them as was expected. They had many empty condos that they couldn't do anything with.

The lack of buzz didn't just apply to the condos. VANOC was preparing for a huge influx of tourists post-Olympics, which never arrived. They couldn't understand why nobody wanted to visit this amazing Olympic site. Had the legacy already left? Was Vancouver back to its no fun city title already?

My guess is probably not. The most likely reason is because of the expense. The economy wasn't great around the world at that time, so many people who may have been able to afford the trip at one time, no longer could.

The lack of tourism definitely affected Vancouver, but it wasn't a huge problem. In my opinion, the legacy still lives on. People still say "remember that time at the Olympics when..." and "Yeah that was so amazing!" People still remember that time when the Olympics came to town. People around the world remember the Vancouver Olympics as beautiful and uniting. I'm sure that seeing the Olympics on TV encouraged many kids to get off the couch and try a new sport. Yes, there may have been some negatives, too, but they were handled in a way that didn't take away from the overall picture. Though at times it may be hard to see, the Vancouver 2010 Olympics changed this city for the better. Its legacy continues to live on through every person that felt the patriotic, passionate, famous, Canadian energy.



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