

# Sour Grapes & Fine Wine

by John Farrow

The Olympics are over, leaving us with vivid memories, some good, some not. But somehow, I don't think that these Games will be remembered for the controversies, even though at one point it seemed like Oprah and Geraldo were trying to outdo each other sharing pain with the Russians and the Koreans and anyone else feeling discriminated against at the moment.

The Russians were unhappy and threatening to pick up their toys because their figure skating couple had to share a gold medal with a Canadian couple who got shafted by a French judge trading votes for some ice dancers and a player to be named later. And they were doubly unhappy when klutzy Irina Slutskaya didn't get to share a gold medal with anybody and was suffering from low self-esteem. They thought everyone in the figure skating competition should get a gold star because they were all special, just like in second grade.

And then the Lithuanian ice dancers were unhappy because they didn't get a medal despite everyone ahead of them falling on their read ends. Plus the French judge wouldn't return their phone calls.

But the Koreans topped them all by taking a page from their American hosts and simply retained an attorney who threatened a lawsuit to overturn what they viewed as unjust results. That's the American way - if you don't like the result, threaten a lawsuit.

None of this really matters much in the overall scheme of things. It never does. Nobody likes unhappy people.

What we will remember, however, are the expressions of true, heart-felt joy as athletes achieved what was once only a dream -- the Croatian skier who once lived out of a car and evaded snipers in Zagreb to win 4 medals (3 of them gold), 2 more than the entire US Alpine Ski Team; the high school junior from Long Island flying across the ice as beautifully and gracefully as forever to win an improbable gold medal; a Latino from East LA skating to 2 medals and a world record; Jim Shea, winning the men's skeleton with a photo of his grandfather in his

helmet.

Then there were the Canadian hockey teams (both of them), playing as if protecting their birthright to take the gold back to the land of the maple leaf. Say what you will, those Canucks know how to skate.

And there was Tristan Gale from Ruidoso, New Mexico, 21-years old going on 15, giggling and mugging for the camera before sliding her skeleton sled to a gold medal in falling snow, and the cowboy and former high-school football player from Del Rio, Texas, driving an American bobsled to a silver medal, the first bobsled medal of any kind in 46 years for the US and surely the first winter Olympics medal for anyone in South Texas.

Some of the accomplishments didn't involve medals but were no less noteworthy. Iranian skiers Bagher Kalhor and Seyed Mostafa Mirhashemi were lucky just to be in Salt Lake City. They received one of the louder ovations when announced at the opening ceremonies.

The Kenya Olympic Ski Team of world class runners Mike Boit and Richard Rono became the first East Africans to compete in a Winter Olympics, struggling to finish their cross-country race in an hour when most of the pack needed only half that time to complete the course.

And, of course, we cheered the Virgin Islands bobsleders even as they finished upside-down.

Yes, we will remember the 2002 Winter Olympics for all the right reasons, for athletes gathering peacefully to compete and rejoice in each other's accomplishments, whether it be a medal or a personal best or simply competing. That is the beauty of athletics. □

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