

LETTERS

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Re: 1+1+1+1+1...

To the Editor:

I usually skim Trish Bell's weekly editorial before abandoning it. The bent of each piece usually goes a little too far right for my taste, but I appreciate reading the perspective and being aware of different views that contribute to our civic dialogue. However, her last piece was one that I read through primarily because I completely agreed with her on

the duplication of services and the waste created by having multiple public boards of education offering the same service to the province.

The existence of these boards and the schools within them is completely dependent on the students in the system and so we have seen the proliferation of marketing strategies aimed at attracting students to one board over another. AP,

IB, IBT, regional arts and the list goes on—specialized regional programs started in schools that see declining student populations but provide them with a lifeline to ensure they survive by pulling students from local community schools. Grade eight information nights and course selection that start earlier and earlier each year in order to snag the students as early as possible. And most recently, the Halton Catholic District School Board is asking for the

payment of the activity fee for the following school year as a condition for selecting courses. Although the fee may be nominal, the strategy is cynical. In a board that takes public dollars, insisting that parents pay the activity fee before they accept course selection sheets by students seems like some strategy to ensure that the students don't go drifting anywhere else.

I think the time has come for a public servant with courage to ask why we still have a sys-

tem of education that enforces what are arbitrary divisions between schools. Although the process to remove those divisions are onerous and would open up the Pandora's box of constitutional reform, the time has long past that we do the job that needs to be done. Unify the systems of education so that our public education dollars are efficiently spent to support all students in the province.

Paul Alves
Acton

SPORTS TALK

The next generation of Olympians

I have always been fascinated with the process of identifying and developing

By **Michael Oke**

detailed plan to recognize and cultivate future Olympians.

It starts with providing a "catch them young" approach to sports and removing any barriers that may prevent children from accessing and playing sports. Take the almost fairytale like story of Tessa Virtue and Scott Muir for instance. Canada's 2018 Olympic double gold medalists in figure skating have a total of ten Olympic medals between them, stretching back to the Vancouver games in 2010, as well as many other local and international awards and titles. The interesting fact to me is that they started training together at age seven and nine, respectively after being introduced by Muir's aunt in Ilderton, Ontario.

My personal opinion is that Canada is still a long way off from this. The sports programs in elementary schools are very limited, physical education is a subject that needs to be about much more than kids running around in the gym. Someone once suggested life skills like swimming should be compulsory like it is in some other countries.

Registering for any of the non-traditional sports should be easier, so one doesn't have to spend hours searching the internet for information. Will every child become a world champion or an Olympian? Most likely not. However, the lessons and discipline gained from early participation in sports will be useful throughout their lives.

All in all, a fine outing by the Canadian Olympic team in PyeongChang with a record haul of 29 medals. Virtue and Muir captured the hearts of millions around the world. The journey to Beijing 2022 has already started.

Any country serious about doing well in international competitions must have a

JUST A THOUGHT

One step back



By **Trish Bell**

With our global domination of winter sports secure, Canada's Olympic team returned home this week to throngs of proud Canadians welcoming them as heroes. Whether their necks bore a medal or not, they should each be proud, changed by the sheer opportunity they have been granted: to travel to another country and represent their own, competing on sports' most prestigious global stage. Every competitor—heck if we are being honest, every one of us—has dreamt of such prospects, so, it is no wonder that every four years, we all take pause from our busy lives to cheer them on. We inch closer to the edge of our seats with each jump, each landing, each goal. Yet, while we praise our national sporting heroes for their record-breaking performance of 29 medals, we choose to overlook the losses, the failures, the good but wasn't good enough. I wonder would we be at those airports singing O'Canada for Tessa and Scott had they come up short? Was the showiness there for our national hockey teams—perhaps not golden, but both still Olympic medal winners? Will we treat our Paralympians—sporting heroes who overcome some of the most incredible of adversity—to the same fanfare?

While we all feel sure of it, deep down inside—if you are honest—you might be surprised. Because while we all love winners, our self-preservation seems to shy away from people when things aren't so good. And it isn't just sports that have us heads

down crossing the sidewalk. Take for example marriage. We are all more than ready to celebrate happy times. We excitedly support our friends and families in the whirlwind of parties and traditions that girdle a wedding proposal. We are committed to them, as though their magical journey is our joint venture. When they have their first fights, we are there to help them put Band-Aids on bruised egos and assure them that all is well with the cosmos. Yet, sometimes things sour, and marriages—for whatever reason—end, and suddenly we are not the upstanding supportive friends we once were. We may think we act no different but it is written across our faces as if we had caught Santa in the act. Suddenly, it's as if we know something we wish we could go back and un-know. Flopping like a fish out of water, we stumble over our words and frantically avoid eye contact for fear of having to commit one way or another. Rapidly, we become too busy to visit, too pacifist to commit and too self-centered to see this moment as anything other than affecting us. Stings to hear it, I know, but there is a host of data to back it up.

A study at Brown University found that divorced study participants tended to become less popular, for a host of reasons. Obviously, losing their spouse's social and

familial networks did play a part, but what surprised the researchers was the way perceived notions also played a role. There was evidence that people believed that newly single people might "poach" from their married friends. It's as if we unfairly see divorce as failure instead, as poet John Milton argued in his 17th century defense of divorce, "as a joyful companionship; whereas a fraught union violates the point." But marriages aren't the only way we turn our backs sometimes. Think about friends who've been let go from a job, suffered an illness, or lost a child. Neighbours who've had an accident, lost a spouse, or had a fire. We all might want to do the right thing, but what is that? So, instead of just asking, we slowly slink out of the picture; perhaps not because we don't care, but because it is hard to untangle such massive change from the person before us. They are no longer the same and, in some crude, selfish way, we seem to resist this change, as if our identities could somehow be threatened too. Yet, it is in these moments of tremendous need, that we should instead lavish our friends and neighbours with normalcy. Their anguish, anxiety and ache should not be theirs alone. Sometimes they just need to know that the world is still turning, just as it did before. And it is in such moments—like at our airports—that we all need to remind ourselves that instead of singing for the Tessas and Scotts, it was the last place finishes that really needed our support.

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