

Ten Memories To Last An Olympic Lifetime

By Steve Milton

Out of a suitcase full of memories from covering eight Winter Olympic Games, Steve Milton selects 10 of the most indelible impressions.

1. Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean • Sarajevo, 1984

It was long before the internet, so even though non-Europeans had heard of the regal British ice dancers' superlative programs, it didn't really resonate until these true Outliers unleashed them in the first Winter Olympics held behind the Iron Curtain. Bolero, their single-themed, single-tuned, free dance was a masterpiece of interpretation, innovation and interconnection building to a musical and emotional crescendo. It was the culmination of their brilliant amateur careers, which would change the world of ice dancing forever (sometimes for the worse because few possessed even close to the athletic talent that Torvill and Dean used to amplify the theatrics). They received 6.0 for artistic merit across the board. A first.

2. Brian Orser • Sarajevo 1984

After Brian Orser finished seventh in the compulsory figures, cynical Canadian media paid no more attention to him. But anyone who understood the relatively new ranking system (few of whom were in the media) knew that he could still win a silver medal, which no other Canadian male singles skater had ever done at the Olympics. Orser then beat eventual gold medalist Scott Hamilton in both the short program and the free skate to claim the silver. His free skate was visually and technically arresting and he landed the first triple Axel in Games history. It was spine-tingling and it broke a seal. In 14 Games prior to Sarajevo, Canadian men tallied three medals, all bronze. In the eight Games since then, Canadian men have won four more silvers (including another by Orser) and a bronze, although that gold remains elusive.

3. Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan • Lillehammer, 1994

It's all (sort of) in the current movie "I,

Tonya," although Nancy Kerrigan's real rival in Hammer (where the Lillehammer skating was held), was actually reigning world champion Oksana Baiul, who won gold. It seems somewhat humorous now, but the cold reality is that someone assaulted an athlete with the intent of keeping her out of the Games. The competition didn't live up to advance billing: Kerrigan, commendably, managed to train enough to win silver, but Harding skated poorly and had a skate lace malfunction and both protagonist and antagonist were whining by the end. But when they skated by each other for the first time in pre-competition practice in front of a massive media crowd, the flash from the cameras was like a lightning strike. It was absolutely surreal.

4. Ross Rebagliati • Nagano 1998

OK, a little bias here from a Child of the Sixties. It was a tremendous, multilayered story to cover: the first men's snowboarding gold medalist ever and he tests positive for pot? You couldn't make up that kind of typecasting. His gold medal was restored on a technicality, but the controversy didn't detract from how magnetic his run was.

Snowboarding and its mountain-culture kin have re-calibrated the Games, although some 'pure' back-mountain legends refused to compete in the first Olympics to include boarding as a medal sport. Rebagliati's yes-no-yes victory prompted deep dives into whether THC is actually performance-enhancing. "Not unless there are brownies at the bottom of the hill," was the standard joke but, scientifically, it turns out it has some limited (relaxation) athletic benefits. It is now banned only during competition.

5. Steven Bradbury • Salt Lake City 2002

His win was so bizarre his name is used as a verb in his native Australia.

"To Bradbury" means to win against extreme odds, especially when unusual circumstances force favoured competitors out of the race. Bradbury captured Australia's first-ever Winter Olympics gold when all four men ahead of him in the short track speed skating's 1000 metres final fell on a crash at the very last corner, maybe 20 metres from the end. Bradbury, in fifth and last place 30 metres back, saw the opportunity and took a clear inside lane to the finish line as the other, more talented, quartet all slid to the boards. Both the silver and bronze medallists, American Apolo Anton Ohno and Canadian Mathieu Turcotte, actually crawled across the finish line. YouTube it: you won't be disappointed.

6. Daniele Sauvageau and Patrick Quinn • Salt Lake City, 2002

Two of the greatest coaching performances ever, as Canada — gold-medal-deprived for a half century of Olympic hockey — won two within three days, each time as underdog to the host country. Quinn's team started the tournament so poorly that general manager Wayne Gretzky had to make an Esposito-like appeal to stop everyone unloading on them. But the squad built toward the finish and with the 'help' of the Loonies under centre ice, Quinn's charges won 50 years, to the exact day, after the Edmonton Mercurys won Canada's last men's gold. Quinn, a big supporter of the women's game, credited Sauvageau's squad with providing the emotional inspiration. They had lost eight straight games to the U.S. and the brutal American referee had hit Canada for 13 penalties to five for the Americans, as both U.S. goals came on the power play. But, in what was the best single-game coaching achievement this corner has ever seen, Sauvageau kept her team cool, focused and confident enough to win 3-2.

7. Shaun White • Vancouver 2010

The Olympics, both Summer and Winter, began moving toward an edgy, X-Games dynamics in the late 1990s, and it was in full bloom by Vancouver with Shaun White, one of the two (figure skating's Kim Yu-Na was the other) most dominant, by far, athletes at the 2010 Games. The iconic snowboarder holds the record for most X-Games gold medals and he scored 46.8 points (out of 50) on his first Vancouver run, clearly enough to win, but on his second run did his famous Double McTwist 1260, nicknamed The Tomahawk — which had put some other boarders in the hospital — to win his second halfpipe gold medal in two

Olympics. His 48.4 score was a massive seven per cent higher than the runner-up.

8. Sidney Crosby • Vancouver 2010

Even some fans could hear Sidney Crosby yelling "Iggy, Iggy, Iggy" just before Jarome Iginla got him the puck to send him in alone on U.S. goalie Ryan Miller for the goal at 7:40 of overtime which gave Canada the gold medal in the very last second of competition at the Vancouver Games. With Canada's gold medal avalanche, only a Crosby goal, in overtime, to break the gold medal record could have made hockey stand out in that fortnight.

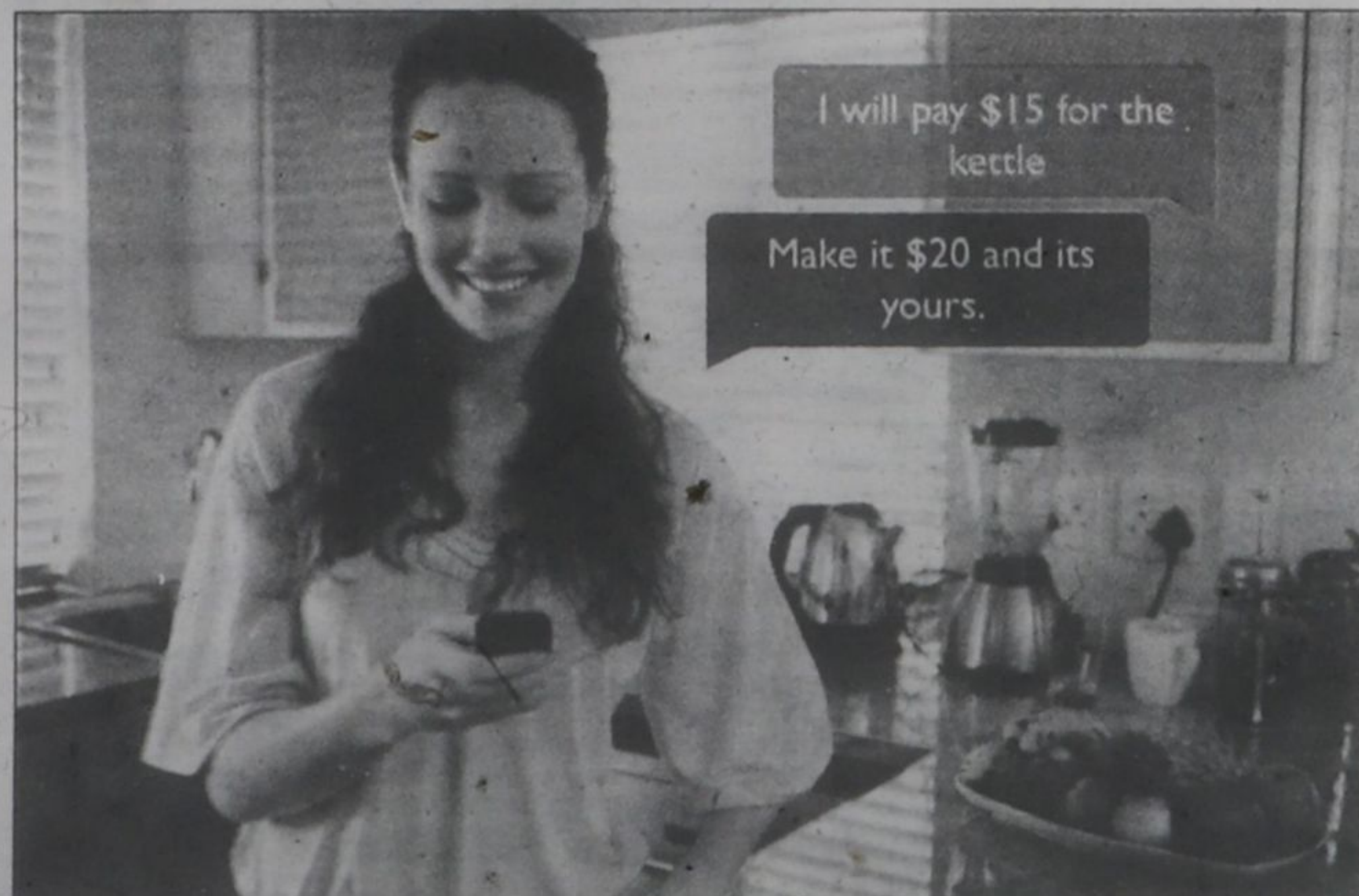
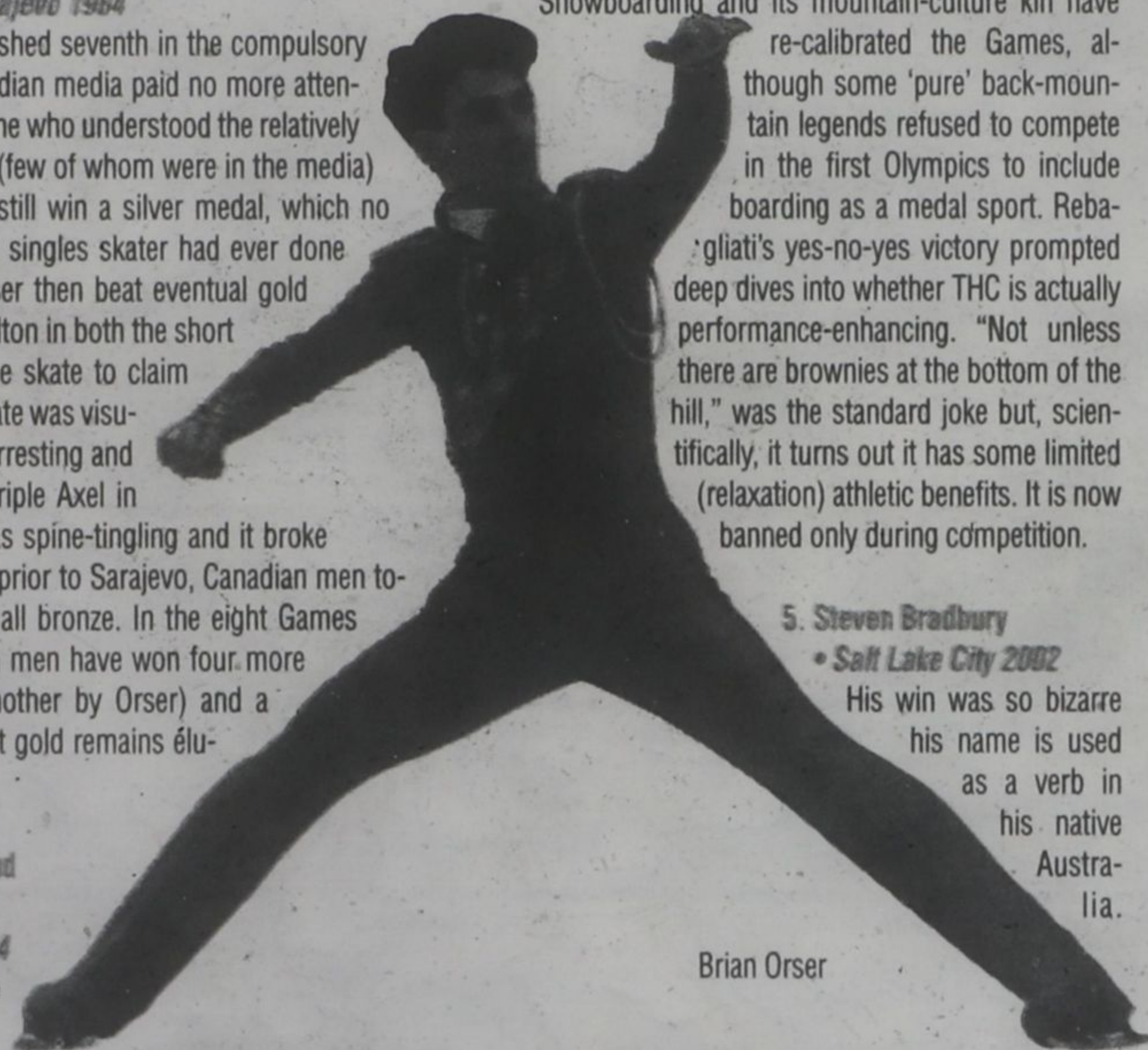
9. The Emotions • Vancouver 2010

It happens at every Olympics, but to Canadians the Vancouver Games, where Canada not only won its first Olympic gold medal on home soil but a record 14 of them, the release of quadrennial-long tension into the joy of victory was particularly poignant. Two of the most memorable were: Scott Moir, who'd just joined lifelong skating partner Tessa Virtue as the first North Americans to win the Olympic ice dancing title, finding his brothers Charlie and Danny in the audience and being hoisted almost into the stands; and Charles Hamelin, from the iconic short track speed skating family, ecstatically leaping a barrier after a close gold medal win to embrace his partner, Marianne St-Gelais, also a double-medalist in Vancouver. You could cry every time you watch either one.

10. Laura Fortino and Marie-Philip Poulin • Sochi 2014

In a game the Americans still can't believe they lost, Hamilton's Laura Fortino, an offensive player who had been asked to play more defensively all tournament, heard her teammates yelling at her to "shoot, shoot, shoot." But, she trusted her instincts, faked a shot and found the opportunistic Marie-Philip Poulin, who had sent the gold medal final into overtime, for the winning goal with just 55 seconds left before a shootout. It was one of the most dramatic games in history, with a long American clearing shot hitting the post of the empty Canadian net in the final minute of regulation, each team getting a penalty in overtime, and Hayley Wickenheiser being hauled down on a breakaway which gave Canada the power play which led to Fortino-to-Poulin.

—The Hamilton Spectator



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