

Can Canadians retain a piece of the podium?

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say in the matter.

Hey, all those foreign athletes didn't travel here simply for the scenery.

One thing OTP, with its bold pre-Games enthusiasm, cannot predict is actual game-day intangibles. It can't foresee the athlete stricken with a cold or flu. It cannot predict a skier travelling at breakneck speed down the side of a mountain locating a rut left

by another's ski. A technical glitch. Or the death of an athlete — Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritahsvili, RIP — altering mindsets, courage and even track layouts.

And also forgotten, it seems, is any number of athletes on any given day are quite capable and certainly bidding for the same prize. Only one winner is allowed per event. It's not always a Canadian. Or an American. Or Swiss. Or Austrian. And so on. It is inevitably the individual for whom everything breaks perfectly on the day of competition.

Athletes don't strive for 35th place. Or even fourth or third or second place. The whole point is to strive to be the best and that has been the role of OTP all along — to help Canadian athletes be in position to compete through more than \$100-million in funding generated by the Vancouver Olympic Committee, its sponsors and various levels of government.

As Sharon's Veronica Brenner, a former silver medallist in ski aerials noted prior to the Games, OTP provided Canadian athletes with everything they could possibly need for the Olympics ... except an excuse for not winning.

In the end, it comes down to the athlete who seizes the opportunity at the precise moment. It is, obviously, much easier said — and predicted — than done.

Ms Brenner, herself, is aware of that truth, nailing the jump she needed on a mountainside in Salt Lake City, Utah in 2002 to capture silver.

Somewhere in the world, another athlete was disappointed. Four years earlier, in Nagano, she was ninth and very much agitated with herself.

But as she pointed out so succinctly during her TV analysis earlier in these Games, often there is no second chance, no seven-game series. Sometimes it is a split-second result.

As these Games wind down, the concern soon becomes for the future. Will OTP be

dismantled as a source of funding for future athletes? Let's hope not.

Yet it may indeed be naive to expect government funding to continue to support amateur sports in future years without a homeland Olympics to feed.

Surely the federal government can understand young Canadians will be inspired to take up some of these sports, thereby becoming active and getting off the couch.

Surely, some funds will be diverted to the 2015 Pan Am Games in Ontario, a summer enterprise, but that remains to be seen. OTP's website claims it has a vision in mind for the 2012 Games in London, so that's good.

But consider this: what would be so illogical with continued funding for the sports Canadians are watching in record-setting numbers on TV. Surely the federal government can understand young Canadians will be inspired to take up some of these sports, thereby becoming active and getting off the couch. A healthier generation of Canadians would seem a worthwhile investment.

Maybe we can at least retain a portion of the podium, too.

public information centres invitation



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