

Drama and Tears at the Olympics: An Examination of the Role of Ideology in the Media Coverage of the Figure Skating Final at the 2002 Winter Olympic Games

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Abstract

This paper examined the metaphors and language that U.S. media used in their coverage of the 2002 Olympic scandal for the gold medal during the pairs figure skating final. Through a discussion of the historical aspects of the Olympic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and a qualitative examination of the media coverage of the skating scandal, this paper argued that the ideological confrontation between the East and the West found a clear manifestation in the language in which the scandal was reported in the American media outlets as well as helped to further commercialize and sensationalize the sport of figure skating.

Keywords: Olympics Games, media coverage, Cold War stereotypes, ideology

Rivalry in sports has the potential to encourage fierce competition, but also to engender the spirit of cooperation among competing nations. This statement holds particularly true for the Olympic Games, the world's largest sporting events, which from their very inception, were considered to be a unique global institution, celebrating certain values and aspirations with universal currency and power. According to the Olympic Charter, the aim of the modern Olympic Games is to deepen understanding and friendship among nations and to bring peace to the world (cf. Heinila, 1985). In ancient Greece, the Olympic Games symbolized the fair and inspiring demonstration of strength, endurance and athletic abilities, founded upon the classical ideal of "a sound mind in a sound body" and meant to obliterate ethnic, national or religious differences among the competitors. Moreover, the ancient Olympics were the ultimate demonstration of personal growth and achievement--qualities which do not discriminate on the basis of race or nationality. However, despite the uplifting spirit of sportsmanship and noble competition, the Olympic Games also present an arena for fierce competition for medals, recognition, and glory, and often may assume a look of nationalistic "war" without the presence of arms, fostering in the mind of the athletes and the spectator nations animosity and hatred against other nationalities (Sakamoto, Murata and Takaki, 1999). Thus, it is important to note, as Dordrecht (2002) observed, that the modern Olympic Games are based upon an anachronism. "Originating in the late 19th century, they are enveloped in ideology, which not only distorts history, but also misrepresent contemporary reality" (p. 133), to the extent where the modern Olympic

Games have transformed the spirit of "amateur sportsmanship" into a commercially driven and profit-generating, globally televised event.

The commercialization of the Olympic ideal is only one development, which has distorted the original intent of the Olympics. For the United States and the Soviet bloc, the Olympic Games presented an excellent opportunity to measure not only the physical abilities of their top athletes, but also to achieve ideological victory in a metaphorical battle with a much ostracized opponent. In this connection, it comes as no surprise that because of the ideological schism between the Soviet Union and the United States, the Soviets did not take part in the Olympic Games immediately after the end of World War II. Soviet athletes only joined the international sporting event in 1952 to participate in the Helsinki Olympics after a long period of anticipation and speculation in the West. This Soviet decision was among one of the closely followed developments of that year, provoking a number of commentaries and criticisms. Since then and for the duration of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union were seen locked in a constant struggle for domination in the form of athletic superiority, the ultimate expression of which was Olympic triumph.

Despite the tremendous shift in the geopolitical configuration after the collapse of the communist regimes in the East, Western sentiments towards the old foe have not disappeared completely and the 2002 Winter Olympic Games provided a venue for rekindling old struggles and confrontations. In the wake of the tragedy of September 11, the Olympics acquired a special meaning for the host country, the United States. The patriotic theme and national pride could be sensed in every formal routine, including the opening ceremony, meant to be "the ultimate global ritual, a media spectacle, an entertaining show, a prelude to a sports event, and much more" (Moragas Spa, Rivenburgh, and Larson, 1995, p. 83). In fact, as Hogan (2003) argued, "most strikingly, in the case of Salt Lake City, the avowedly apolitical, compulsory rituals of the opening ceremony were transformed into endorsements of U.S. military and police action against selected targets both within the nation and abroad" (p. 108).

The 2002 Winter Olympics presented a unique opportunity for the United States to not only assert its resolute determination to wage a war on the terrorists who attacked on September 11, but also to demonstrate a symbolic victory against a new "enemy." As Hogan (2003) contended, the United States invested a particularly strong symbolic effort in contextualizing the opening ceremony at Salt Lake City, which carried strong ideological overtones virtually in every visual and symbolic selection, including the choice of the Olympic torch carriers. Towards the culmination of the opening ceremony, the torch, Hogan pointed out, was passed on to Mike Erazione, the captain of the 1980 Olympics men's ice hockey team, who was also joined at the platform by the rest of his teammates. The choice of the 1980s hockey team was deeply emblematic—reflected through the prism of September 11 and the war on terror in Afghanistan, the United States sent a clear message—just like the 1980's U.S. hockey team was able to win the gold at

the Olympics against the top contender and arch enemy, the Soviet Union, so will the new American willpower, as demonstrated by its athletes' triumph over prior and future "evil empires." "In 2002, the appearance of the team at the climatic moment of the ceremony evoked these Cold War triumphs. The moment served as a symbolic assertion of American power, a promise to once again defeat its enemies in the 'war on terror'" (p. 108).

However, the unusual opening ceremony at the 2002 Winter Olympics was not the only event that made these Olympic Games different and definitely memorable. One of the most spectacular and popular athletic competitions of the Winter Olympics is the figure-skating competition. Throughout the years of the Cold War, figure skating was also the sport where politics played most crudely (Begley, et. al., 2002), causing a number of scandals and confrontations, and ultimately, a build-up in tension and animosity between the Western and the Soviet traditions in figure skating.

The 2002 Winter Olympics added yet another incident to the line of Olympic skating scandals, what some reporters called "the biggest figure skating scandal since Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan," referring to the 1994 incident in which figure skater Tonya Harding was implicated and eventually found guilty for physically attacking her Olympic teammate and fellow figure skating competitor Nancy Kerrigan.¹ During the 2002 Olympics, the competition for the gold medal came down to a confrontation between the Canadian skating champions, Jamie Sale and David Pelletier, and the Russian pair, Elena Berezhnaya and Anton Sikharulidze. The gold medal was awarded to the Russian couple, surprising audience and commentators alike, who believed that the Canadians deserved the gold with their flawless performance in the long program. The judges argued that the Russians skated a much more sophisticated routine and defended their decision. Ultimately, the International Olympic Committee requested an investigation into the controversy, which led to the investigation of the only Western judge who voted for the Russians with the assumption that she was pressured to do so. In a dramatic sequence of events, however, Marie Reine Le Gougne indeed admitted that she was pressured to vote in favor of the Canadian couple, not the Russian. Yet amidst public pressure a second gold medal was awarded to the Canadian pair at a special "encore" ceremony.

This paper examines the metaphors and language that American media used in their coverage of the 2002 Olympic scandal for the gold medal during the figure skating final. Through a discussion of the historical aspects of the Olympic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and a qualitative close reading of the media coverage of the skating scandal, this paper argues that the ideological confrontation between the East and the West found a clear manifestation in the language in which the scandal was reported in the U.S. media outlets as well as helped to further commercialize and sensationalize the sport

¹ For a timeline of the events surrounding the Harding-Kerrigan scandal, please see "Looking back on Tonya and Nancy," available online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/sports/longterm/olympics1998/history.htm>.

of figure skating. While it must be noted the actual contestation of the gold medal was between Canada and Russia and therefore, did not directly involve U.S. athletes, because this paper explores the revival of the long-standing Cold War ideological as expressed through the East-West dichotomy, it views the Canadian athletes as representatives of the West and therefore, as discursively "American" in the ideological tone and treatment of the U.S. media.

Method

This study examines the portrayals of the skating scandal in the networks of news and entertainment. To accomplish this task, the study applies a textual analysis of the press coverage of the pairs figure skating scandal following the methods of Stuart Hall (1975, 1978), in which a subject or a theme is identified, a text is defined, and the text is then analyzed with little reference to issues of production, author intentions, or audience readings. A similar approach to the coverage of the Olympic Games was utilized by Lester-Roushazmir and Raman (1999), who examined the textual messages of the Olympic news coverage for children during the 1996 Summer Olympics held in Atlanta. In their study as well as in other examinations of media content conducted in the tradition of the cultural structuralism, text is understood, as Corner (1983) explained, as what is published or broadcast. The text is a symbolic construction, arrangement or perhaps, performance, "which is the product of media skills and technical and cultural practices" (p. 267). Thus, in the tradition of cultural studies, the text is the unit of analysis, but the findings of the textual analysis were resituated into the social formation in order to decipher the role of the media in the process of structuring social experience and human existence.

In order to conduct a close textual reading of the manner in which the Soviet and Canadian skating couples, as well as the judging scandal itself, were reported in the media, this study looked at a sample of mainstream news and entertainment media outlets, including newspapers, sports news outlets, popular magazines, e-zines, including publications such as the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Slate*, to name a few. In order to locate the reports that covered the skating scandal, a keyword search was performed, including the words figure skating, the names of the athletic couples, skating scandal, judging controversy. After the articles were located, they were carefully examined by both authors, reading for thematic frames indicating the tone, metaphors, discursive techniques as well as other qualitative characteristics of the language used to report on the skating controversy. Thus, the authors try to reveal "the subversion, suppression, and hierarchical power struggles that bubbles underneath the message" (Stern, 1996, p. 67).

More importantly, because textual analysis allows for in-depth look into the latent meanings of news narratives, it reveals cultural forms "understood as myths, the news presents a mixture of the historical and

ideological traces of culture writ large since those same myths are also present in other context" (Acosta-Alzuru & Roushanzamir, 2000, p. 315). Therefore, news become ideological representatives that help us understand how news events fit into pre-existing mythical cultural constructs. This approach is particularly helpful in the current study as the Cold War framework can serve as the underlying myth defining the cultural mould in which news of Olympic rivalry between East and West fit best.

The Modern Olympic Games—Nationalism or Unity?

The Olympic Games have for a long time demonstrated the struggle of an ideal to become a reality. This ideal was reintroduced in the glossary of modern international cooperation by Baron de Coubertin in 1896 after a gap of a nearly 1,500 years (Espy, 1979). De Coubertin sought to adapt the concept of the ancient Olympic Games to modern conditions, providing an opportunity to revive and instill in the youth of the world through physical exercise and competition the "virtues" of fair play and soundness of mind and body. "De Coubertin's ideal was to reestablish among men, as the basis for world peace and understanding, those virtues which in his eyes have been lost or were rapidly dying out" (p. vii). The modern Games, however, have been valued not so much for fair play, peace and understanding as for the advancement of national self-interest, survival and pride. In spite of the fact that modern Olympics rest on noble and inspiring principles, fair competition and peaceful coexistence, recent developments show that the spirit of competition has been reduced to an ideological, political and cultural rivalry.

In this connection, it comes as no surprise that sports is frequently used as a tool of diplomacy. By sending delegations of athletes abroad, states can establish a first basis for diplomatic relations or can be more effective in maintaining such relations. Correspondingly, the cancellation of a proposed sports visit to another nation can be used by a state as a sign of voicing displeasure with the country's policies or ideological system.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of sports transformed in ideological propaganda in modern Olympics history comes from the years of the Cold War. The Soviet Union placed a special emphasis on athletic achievement as a means of achieving political goals. Similarly, the United States maintained considerable sporting ties with many countries and financed large commitments in the sphere of athletic achievements (Espy, 1979). Although in the current capitalist version of Olympic competition, the United States are more interested in corporate sponsorship and profit driven enterprise than in defending a political stand, for the superpowers from the old Cold War era, the Olympics remain the arena of contention of not only physical strength and superiority, but also of ideological might. "As prominent leaders of the Eastern and Western blocs, the Soviet Union and the United States attached particular significance to athletic confrontations and

their respective rival ideologies. Athletic relationships between the two superpowers since World War II reflected the general tone of the international relations between the United States and the Soviet Union: sometimes antagonistic, sometimes more genial, but always rivals" (Begly, 1988, p. 258).

One such example of fierce athletic battles acquiring political meaning beyond the metaphor of competition was the U.S.A.-U.S.S.R basketball game at the 1972 Munich Olympics. According to Begly (1988), the Munich Olympic Games brought a heavy disappointment with the overall performance of the American athletes, but because basketball has always been America's national sport in the Olympics, the loss of the American basketball team to the Soviet players was particularly heart-felt among the American public, prompting a tremendous reactionary coverage in the press. Journalists called the defeat the "most frustrating and humiliating in history," "the great gold robbery" and "the bitterest pill to swallow" (p. 258), presenting the ideological aspect of sports and the role of the mass media in transmitting this clash in ideology and physical strength to the public.

Similarly, MacAloon (1988) contended that the Olympics project a meaning beyond the measure of athletic abilities and endurance. Most of all, he argued, the modern Olympics have become a symbolic event, one that aims at unity but delivers distance, and often, enmity among rival nations:

No country watches only its athletes. We construct and test images of our rivals and of the exotic strangers with whom we are increasingly conscious of sharing the world. If athletics are the people's art, then the Olympics are the people's ethnography and diplomacy. In this feast of interpretation, this international Rorschach test, we measure who we think we are by who we think the others are and are measured by them in turn (p. 290).

The political tension involved in Olympic rivalry has been perhaps most evident in the boycotts of the Olympic Games by the United States in 1980 and the Soviet Union in 1984. Rose (1988) observed that because the organizations represented by Olympic teams are nations, the Games are by definition very political. The tension between the United States and the Soviet Union as host nations for the Olympics grew so intense that it led to one of the most vehement ideological confrontations of the Cold War era. In 1980, the United States boycotted the Moscow Olympiad, claiming that the event will be used as a political platform for communist propaganda, and that the Soviet Union had once again expressed their politics of aggression by invading sovereign Afghanistan. In the 1984 Olympiad, the Soviets boycotted the games to be staged in Los Angeles in retaliation to the U.S. boycott in the previous Olympics. Officially, they cited smog and safety concerns for their athletes as the reasons for non-attendance, however, the chance to inflict an embarrassment of a global scale on the hosting nation, similar to the one they had experienced, was certainly on the Soviet agenda (Toohey and Veal, 2001).

The nexus between political ideologies and sport exists on many levels and makes it possible for governments to use the Olympic Games as an arena for protests or a tool for punishing or embarrassing political opponents. Ultimately, it appears that despite the effort to make the Olympics a place of peaceful and constructive competition, the Games are transformed by nationalistic or governmental forces into an arena where political and ideological superiority is highlighted through the means of mass communication and propaganda.

Salt Lake City 2002: East vs. West on the Ice

One of the most controversial events of the 2002 Winter Olympics was the pairs figure skating competition. The figure skating competition is not only the most watched discipline among the winter sports, but also the sport that brought political confrontation Cold War-style back on the television screen and on the pages of the newspapers.

The Canadian skating couple Jamie Sale and David Pelletier entered the Winter Olympics as reigning world champions and co-favorites with Russians Yelena Berezhnaya and Anton Sikharulidze. At the finals, when the 5-4 vote went up for the Russian couple, the crowd—and the live NBC commentators—exploded with indignation. Everyone seemed to agree that the Canadians had performed a flawless program and won the sympathy of the audience, while the Russians committed a number of minor mistakes, in a nevertheless unique and extremely elaborate skating program.

The attention of the media was immediately drawn to the judges. "The fact that the Polish, Chinese, and Ukrainian judges have joined the Russian judge in voting for the Russian pair prompted dark memories of an era in which the East stopped at nothing to harvest medals, sending armies of chemically enhanced professionals to the Games to prove the superiority of its ideology. Never mind that the Poles are in NATO now and have little love left for their former occupiers," Serge Schmemmann (2002) wrote conveying the public resentment towards the judges' decision and particularly, the ideological divide that found its way into the Games.

Incidentally, it is precisely at the judges' table where the first Cold War sentiments started to show. The immediate discourse in media outlets focused almost exclusively on the "geopolitics" of the judging panel, without shying away from evoking Cold War-inspired metaphors. By implying—both directly and indirectly—that the judges on the panel cast their vote based on their prior political and ideological alignment with the Russians rather than based on an objective evaluation of the merit of each of the pairs' performances, the accusations were directed almost exclusively to the Eastern European members of the jury, ignoring and perhaps, deliberately leaving out, the opposition vote, which too, was informed by similar cultural and

ideological alliances. However, because the final decision was reached by such a narrow margin, the media continued to call attention both to what they deemed to be a clear violation of the rules of objectivity in judging the finals while at the same time, fueling up the "ice-battle" of ideological tensions and long-standing rivalry between the East and the West.

To resolve the tension, the International Olympic Committee initiated an investigation into the judging procedure and amidst the already intense media scandal, the report of the investigation stated that French judge Marie Reine Le Gougne, the only Westerner on the panel to actually vote for the Russian couple, had been pressured to vote in favor of the Russians against her will. The International Skating Union acted swiftly and decisively, suspending Le Gougne for not reporting the pressure. Le Gougne, however, asserted that there has been a campaign to promote the Canadians since 2000, and that eventually she voted according to her conscience (Roberts, 2002). Ultimately, the Canadians were given a share of the gold at an unprecedented award ceremony, where Sale and Pelletier stood shoulder to shoulder to Berezhnaya and Sikharulidze and shared, for the first time in modern Olympic history, a gold medal which has been already awarded. As a result of the International Olympic Committee investigation, Le Gougne and Didier Gailhaguet, the president of the French Skating Federation, were both suspended from the International Skating Union for three years and banned from the 2006 Winter Olympics.

The dramatic award ceremony, however, was not the end of this international confrontation. Soon after, the U.S. authorities charged the Uzbek-born Alimzhan Tokhatakhounov, a reputed gang leader with strong connection to the Russian mafia, with actually fixing the ice dancing and the pairs skating competitions. In an article entitled "Skating with the Mob," Sheppard (2002), claimed that the plan was a quid pro quo and may have involved as many as six judges. The U.S. government indictment, based on wiretaps, revealed the Russian mobster boasting to a colleague about which French and Russian judges were onside, and accepting a thank-you call from a woman believed to be the mother of the Russian-born French skater Marina Anissina, who won France's first figure skating gold since 1932 with her victory in pairs ice dancing. In return for actually carrying out the fix, Tokhatakhounov was to receive preferential treatment in getting his French visa extended. Eventually, Tokhatakhounov was arrested in Italy, and was awaiting an extradition order to stand trial in New York for rigging the gold medal competitions in both the ice dancing and pairs figure skating disciplines at Salt Lake City.

In the meantime, the Russians vehemently refuted all accusations. Russian Olympic Committee Chief Leonid Tyagachyov dismissed all charges: "I can't imagine that anybody outside of sports can be involved in such a thing as trying to fix the results" (quoted in Sheppard, 2002, p. 56). Tokhatakhounov's lawyer, Luca Saldarelli, said: "He [Tokhatakhounov] is absolutely surprised. He doesn't know anything about the Salt Lake City Olympic Games. He's not even a fan of figure-skating" (*ibid.*).

In line with the ideological buildup, the Russians threatened to pull out of the games just days before their end. Leonid Tyagachev, the president of the Russian National Olympic Committee, cited a pattern of disrespect and unfairness towards the Russian athletes in the pairs figure skating, but also mentioned the unfair judging of the Russia-Czech Republic hockey game as well as the disqualification of the Russian women's cross-country team after one of the athletes was found to have high levels of hemoglobin in her blood (Janofsky, 2002). Although that threat never materialized and the Russian complaints were dismissed after an inquiry by the International Olympic Committee, the Russians showed a heightened level of frustration and anger (Janofsky, 2002).

"Skategate" in the U.S. media

The pairs-skating scandal led to the revival of animosity and media fervor unparalleled in the years following the end of the Cold War. The *New York Times* announced "drama and scandal at the Olympics," ESPN called it "the Ice Storm," other newspapers spoke of the "revival of the East-West ideological rift," *Newsweek* called the scandal "Skategate," and *Maclean's* called the Salt Lake City Games, "a barbarous Olympiad."

Evidently, the media debate around the judging decision at the pairs figure skating final and the ensuing animosity between the Russian Olympic delegation and the hosting organizational organs overwhelmed audiences and took on a public dimension of significant proportions. So much so that a study conducted by the media monitoring organization Universal McCann indicated that the Olympic Games controversy actually increased interest and viewership among the American audiences. Their research polled 600 people (59% female and 41% male) ages 13 or over across the country and found out that 25% of the respondents overall indicated that they were more interested in following the game because of the judging controversy. Moreover, interest in the games was particularly strong among those aged 13-24 with 13% of those in this age group saying they intended to watch more of the games specifically because of the judging controversy. Olympic viewers appeared to be absorbed by the competition, as 74% of those who were watching the Games reported tuning in daily and more than one-half reported viewing more than an hour each day. Overall, the existing polls indicate that the Olympic Games generated and recorded a sizeable interest among the American viewing audience, making the scandal's media coverage an important venue to study in order to gain insight on the tone and temper of the ensuing controversy.

Most of the critics who followed the Olympic skating scandal recognized that the mass media played a crucial role in publicizing the significance of what took place on the ice during the pairs figure skating scandal at Salt Lake City (see Sandomir, 2002, Barringer, 2002). To the majority of U.S. reporters, the

skating competition brought Cold War memories and flashes from an era instilled with ideological tension masquerading as athletic competition. This is why ESPN reporter Jim Caple announced that the events at the pairs figure skating final only exemplify that at least on the ice, the Cold War goes on, while CBS reporter described the skating conflict as “a curtain falling on the Winter Olympics.” Caple also employed a number of favorable verbal descriptors to describe both the performance and the demeanor of the Canadian contesters. He reported that Pelletier “at least maintained an impressive level of composure, grace and humor,” implying that the Russian couple failed to offer a tolerant and calm approach to the tension which arose as a result of the final judging. The reporter also wrote, “Sale and Pelletier went out and dazzled the crowd with a mistake-free performance to the theme from ‘Love Story’, including two terrific throw jumps,” while offering virtually no comment on the Russian’s performance beyond, “they skated very well.” In the same article, Caple discussed the votes cast among the skating judges, emphasizing that the American, Canadian, Japanese and German judges voted for the Canadian, while the Chinese, Polish, Ukrainian and French, voted for the Russian couple, placing an exclamation mark next to France’s vote as though it was utterly inconceivable to see the French crossing over the ideological divide and siding with long-time enemies and ideological foes from the Cold War era.

The sense of approval for Sale and Pelletier echoed in all major publications as well as in many of the non-traditional media. The popular online magazine *Salon*, for instance, ran a series of articles, discussing and analyzing the events around the controversial final judging. In these articles, the Canadians were described as “adorable,” displaying “an admirable mix of humility, graciousness and wit.” In another *Salon* article, Allen Barra offered his interpretation of what took place at the finals, openly admitting that “conversational decisions are endemic to any kind of heated athletic competition,” but at the same time, sarcastically attacking the value systems and aesthetic standards of the Russians and Eastern Europeans, who in his opinion, come in dramatic and almost satirical opposition to the Western sense of aesthetics. He wrote:

Maybe in Eastern Europe stumbling like a hog on a newly waxed linoleum while coming out of a quadruple somersault –the exact technical term in skating escapes me at the moment—is considered something good, something aesthetically pleasing. Maybe it’s the brinkmanship of the thing they admire . . . I mean, Eastern Europeans really do have a whole different sense of aesthetic than we do. I sincerely believe that there are people who sat through all of Eisenstein’s ‘Ivan the Terrible’—Part 1 and 2—and enjoyed the experience. I don’t think anyone who feels this way is strange; I do think anyone who feels that way without having spent their entire life in Russia is strange (conclusion part, ¶15).

Barra’s view of the fundamental differences found at the root of the skating controversy comes at first reading as one more take on the age-old conflict between the civilized West and the brute and rigid taste of

the Eastern bloc. His main argument was that because of the colossal gap in systems of aesthetics between the East and the West, the sheer process of judging an international skating competition in which the opinions of judges from both sides are equally important, is doomed to failure. Yet Barra's comment goes a step beyond recognizing the fundamental differences in judging criteria by suggesting that to understand Eastern European aesthetics, you need to be an Eastern European and any attempt to do so by Westerners can be classified as an eccentric, if not an entirely, unconventional whim.

Salon's senior writer King Kaufman also offered his interpretation of the figure skating controversy. He described the events surrounding the controversy, but aimed at turning the attention of the readers to the manner in which NBC treated the two competing pairs in their pre- and post-pairs finals coverage. While the Russian skaters received what he called "the sappy NBC Olympic treatment" before the competition took place, soon after the skating scandal erupted, the tone of coverage drastically changed. Before the final, the Russians were depicted as strong warrior-like characters, who both have overcome great challenges in their lives—Yelena, through her near-death experience as a result of a car accident, which nearly ended her career and her life, and Anton, as her moral support, friend and companion through these difficult times. Yet, as soon as the pairs figure skating final took the unexpected turn that it did, the Russians were no longer the heroes who triumphed over adversities in life, but the foreign arch villains who robbed the Canadians of their deserved victory. Immediately after the judging controversy, appropriately named by MSNBC as "The Ice Storm," the Russians appeared on NBC to present their interpretation of the events in English, a language with which both Berezhnaya and Sikharulidze did not feel very comfortable, sounding awkward and ill-equipped to adequately express their feelings and hopefully, gain the sympathy of the American public. NBC's decision to interview the couple in English rather than use an interpreter might have been based on a number of good reasons, but the ultimate result of it was, as Kaufman wrote, that the strange sounding foreign names of the Russian skaters, capped with their difficult to comprehend accent, transformed the Russians from the pleasant, all-enduring couple, to "the shadowy figures, those thuggish Russkis, who had skulked off the gold."

Echoing the same sentiments on the development of the skating scandal was also Keri Laureman, another *Salon's* writer, who offered her view on the Canadian-Russian controversy. Laureman chose a sarcastic approach to analyzing the events of the final competition and the ensuing investigation, but even in the sarcastic tone of her writing, the unfavorable treatment of the Russian couple dominated her writing style:

Fans of the Russian team have taken swipes at Sale and Pelletier's saccharine music selection (the score to that masterpiece of movie schmaltz "Love Story"), while Canadian fans take pride in their pair's modest costumes and roll their eyes at the Russian's typical Siegfried and

Roy-inspired attire and pretentiously *serious* choice of Massenet's "Meditation From Thais" for their musical accompaniment (¶10).

She described the Russian's couple appearance on the Larry King show as "deer-caught-in-headlights appearance," carried out in "fractured English," and in "punch-drunk" daze, while clearly sympathizing with the Canadian competitors. Laureman argued that the reason for the Canadians' success was not the sheer fact that they were Canadian, and therefore, culturally and ideologically closer to the U.S. viewers, but because they were indeed the better skaters in terms of their technical performance and were superior in every way to the Russian couple's performance.

The skating scandal was also the center of attention for a number of influential media outlets. *Newsweek*, for instance, ran a series of articles under the title "Our Sports Has Gangrene," exposing the corrupt judging practices at the Olympics and the effects of commercializing the sport of figure skating. Yet, while *Newsweek* did examine in great detail the past and the future of the sport of figure skating from a variety of critical perspectives, it also did not fail to demonstrate the rather unfavorable view of the skating tradition in the East. "Even fans sympathetic to Jamie and David wondered aloud whether they would have gotten the gold if they had been homely, bucktoothed, balding and Bulgarian, rather than cute, charismatic Canadians" (Begley, Starr, Rosenberg, Springen, and Power, 2002, p. 38).

The *New York Times*, too, devoted considerable coverage to the scandal and its aftermath, yet the most astute observations came from its columnists. Schmemmann (2002) argued that the Russians did not push the matters further because there were eager to enjoy the far more lucrative post-Olympic contracts. Yet, he correctly observed that "...it will not be the last scandal. The potent mix of glory, money and national pride will continue to spin off heroes and villains, dramas and scandals" (p. D1).

Conclusion

"Skategate," although exposing a level of corruption, political and commercial manipulation in sharp opposition to the ideals of the Olympic games, did not hurt the popularity and the reputation of figure skating. Regardless of the ideologically charged vocabulary which sport commentators and journalists used to report the skating controversy, the figure skating scandals at the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics had a huge commercial appeal which was successfully exploited by both NBC and other media outlet in their strife to attract higher ratings. Figure skating is among the most spectacular sports at the Olympics and the dramatic element added by the judging controversy was a welcomed opportunity to popularize and promote this sport to virtually every sports fan. In fact, some critics have argued, if anything, the skating scandal boosted up interest in the Olympics and in the sports of figure skating by placing the judging

scandal on the front page of every newspaper and on every major television network. In the end, new knowledge of the sport as a result of the scandal turned people toward it, and probably introduced many to the sport who might not have seen it before. The events of the Olympics clearly supported the hypothesis that the "bad" publicity of the skating scandal turned in "good" publicity for the sport of figure skating, bringing extra profits for NBC, the figure skating authorities, and extra contracts for the "bitter" competitors.

And while the commercial success of the games was probably amplified by the judging controversy, ignoring the ideological and nationalistic discourses so evident in the media coverage of the Olympic Games will be ignoring the very mechanism by which, as Hall (1992) argued, nations build their own narratives, that is, "a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals which stand for or represent the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation" (p. 293). This is particularly magnified by the fact that for the two former superpowers of the Cold War period, the Olympic Games presented the one venue where the stories of national glory and ideological pride played out in their most aggressive, yet non-violent, form. In fact, as Kestnbaum (2003) suggested, figure skating competitions serve as the "symbolic stagings of Cold War conflict" (p. 111).

Therefore, it is not surprising that despite the relative thaw of Cold War enmities between the Eastern bloc and its Western opponent in the years following the collapse of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the "meta-narrative" of Cold War animosity was quickly revived within the context of the judging scandal at the Salt Lake City Olympics. Ideological tensions of the magnitude of the Cold War are difficult to suppress, especially when the most established discourse of understanding fifty years of athletic competition masked as a symbolic battle for physical domination and superiority, remains embedded as a common mythical thread for both media commentators and media consumers alike. In short, the Cold War presents an easy to understand, commonly circulating and still culturally relevant metaphor through which the competing world powers can create and control narratives of nationalistic and ideological importance.

More importantly, it must be noted that the nationalistic and patriotic discourse that was ingrained in the 2002 Winter Olympic Games cannot be separated from the analysis of the sources of the long standing ideological tension between the Eastern bloc and the West, which quickly rekindled in the pairs skating competition. While Hogan (2003) argued that the commercial elements of "staging hosting nations" are indeed paramount to understanding the discursive power of the Olympic Games' media coverage, it is also equally important to recognize the locus of political and national interest which informs the very nature in which international athletic competitions are covered in the media. "The modern Olympic Games, as both a product and promoter of economic, cultural and political globalization, exemplify tensions between globalism and localism and provide fertile ground for articulation of national identity" (p. 103).

Ultimately, whether the ideologically charged language which the U.S. media employed in their treatment of the judging scandal contributed to the commercial success and the popularity of the figure skating remains to be examined. Yet, it becomes apparent that the long-harbored sentiments of political and ideological rivalry between the West and the East take a very small sparkle to ignite and bring the Cold War era mentality and vocabulary in virtually every media outlet.

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