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SALT LAKE CITY 2002

Written By: Harry Gribnitz

I think many of you spent many hours last month watching the Salt Lake Olympic Games on television. I know I did!!!! I even found myself watching sports, like curling, skeleton or biathlon that normally wouldn't make it onto my radar. We view the Olympics as something very special. As the second Olympic fundamental principle says, ympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principle."

In the drive for Olympic glory and medals the joy of effort, sportsmanship and ethical principles sometimes seems to get lost in the whining about judging, the protests over officiating, the need for drug testing and the deluge of corporate sponsorship money. Fortunately, every Olympics provides examples of those participants that understand the principle. The third generation Olympian competing on the Skeleton. The ski jumper representing Great Britain, a country without a single ski jump. The young American short track speed skater, picking himself up from a four skater crash just yards short of the finish line and throwing himself feet first across the line to claim a medal.

My favorite example was an 11th grader from Great Neck, N.Y. that showed every one about the joy of competing. Sarah Hughes was fourth after the short program of the women's figure skating event. "I didn't even think about winning a gold medal. I had a great time. This is the Olympics, I just want to enjoy skating the best I can". It wasn't about being the best in show, it was about being the best in Sarah Hughes. She electrified the crowd with her show of unmatched technical brilliance, landing triple-triple combinations that she rarely landed cleanly before. When finished with her performance, Sarah and her coach spent a long time crying, laughing and hugging. It was not about winning a medal, nothing was assured at this point. Sasha Cohen, Irina Slutskaya and Michelle Kwan would all likely finish ahead of Sarah.

Cohen crashed early in her program. The audience gasped, stunned by the knowledge that she certainly had surrendered her bronze medal to Sarah. The pressure on Michele Kwan to win the Gold, injected tension into her legs. She looked a little stiff before she also shocked the crowd by falling onto the ice. Slutskaya, probably the strongest of the group, skated last. She was very conservative in her program, leaving out some of her most challenging tricks. If she just skated clean, the Gold was hers. In her effort not to loose the medal, her normal flair, grace and joy were gone. When Irina finished, little Sarah Hughes had the upset of the ages. Maybe a second Miracle on Ice. Just because she skated for "joy of the effort" rather than the Gold Medal around her neck.

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When she returns to her 11th grade class in Great Neck, she can talk about her Olympic experience and the joy of competition. Maybe you'd like to share her good example with the 6-year old soccer player, the pre-teen skater or high school athlete in your family.

Thanks,

Harry Gribnitz

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