I'll Miss You, Olympics ... But Only A Little

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At the risk of being pelted with apple pies, I'll just come right out and say it: I'm not really into the Olympics.

As someone who has dedicated a lot of time to sports — a lifetime cumulative I'd find embarrassing and depressing, I'm certain — the Olympics was never really very compelling for me. In fact, I've always found it to be strange that so many people take a passing interest in curling once every four years.

This year, as friends, family, and media chatter about nothing but, I decided to take another look at the Olympics. A look that made me realize that I've been going at this thing all wrong.

Despite the fact that I have very little interest in ever snowboarding (it's too cold here!), I still stared slack-jawed when helicopter cameras showed Shaun White's private half pipe built for him by Red Bull in the backwoods of Colorado. He spoke to cameras in a very humble manner, and then obliterated all elements of "average guy" with a graceful and athletic gold medal-earning performance. It's the kind of display that makes you think, "That guy really knows what he's doing." For someone like me, it also makes me all too aware that I will never be that good at anything … but instead of feeling defeated, I find myself energized. Why? Because watching people exceed your expectations is exhilarating.

I think people get wrapped up in the Olympics not just because of the athletic component, but also the human elements. Allowing myself to become lulled into the nurturing overtones of Bob Costas' voice, I watched some coverage here and there, and realized that the value of the Olympics, for me, was in the profiling of the minds of folks who are just *really good* at something. The fact that I couldn't even explain

the rules of that skiing and shooting thing is sort of irrelevant.

Not to sound like a motivational speaker, but perhaps if we surround ourselves with visions of success, no matter what type, we can benefit from its intensity. I can tell you that watching Olympic athletes these past few weeks has been a great motivator to try just a little bit harder. Nobody makes it that far by phoning it in or cutting corners. Whether it’s figure skating or manufacturing: wouldn’t it feel good to be great?

Athletes always say that the way to get better is to play someone who is better. Tennis players have been known to “play down” to the level of a lesser-skilled opponent. Maybe it’s because these amateurs hit the ball in an unpredictable way, much like an inexperienced blackjack player can throw off the shoe for the whole table.

It stands to reason then that if you can “play down” you can also “play up.” Keeping an eye on those that do something really well might just help permeate your organization with a bit more vitality and motivation.

Check out the *IMPO Onsite* article in *IMPO*’s upcoming March issue, which talks about a MA-based turnkey manufacturer that has really mastered its relationships with suppliers. There are good ideas to be gleaned from a 125-year old company with an eye for this part of their business and, in general, it’s a pleasure to watch someone do something very well.

Talent, focus, skill cultivation, and motivation are goals which transcend an individual sport or industry and it’s a qualitative benefit if we take an Olympic caliber approach to our every day … not just when we’re under pressure from the boss or when production goals don’t get in the way.

That said, I’m about ready to pack up the Olympic TV coverage in favor of regular programming again. Recent reports say that NBC actually ran more net time of commercials than athletics, and that’s something from which I could use a two-year break.

Do you get inspired from the Olympics or do they just bum you out? Are you a manufacturer who likes to "play up" with the competition? Let me know your thoughts at anna.wells@advantagemedia.com *[1].*

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