

The Wonders of the Winter Games
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This is the first time in many years that I have not anxiously awaited the Winter Olympics. I fondly remember our great family gathering in Vancouver for the 2010 games and our lucky seats next to the ice where Kevin Martin's Alberta rink won on their way to the curling gold medal. But thinking of another Winter Games and their arrival midst Covid worries and restrictions in totalitarian China have left me bewildered and essentially disinterested. However, I am incredibly thankful at the prospect that I will not have to encounter, nah endure, figure skating, snowboarding, and doubles luge, for another four years. But back to the current lunacy.

Figure skating is a kind of competitive ballet on ice, set to snippets of otherwise unrelated music. Aside from a confusing array of spins (upright, sit, camel, and combinations) and rushing around the ice with unnatural arm and hand contortions, the activity has descended – or ascended – into jumps, especially more, higher, and complex. The most confusing and unintelligible part of all this to me is listening to the gushing dribble by the so-called color – colour in Canada – commentators during these ice spectacles. Of course, I can recognize when someone jumps in the air and even, at least to some extent, the number of times they spin around while airborne, although it is very hard to tell how many times they go around after two. This is getting even worse to follow and count now that quads are becoming more common – triples were bad enough. But the worst part of all this is having to listen to endless identification of these jumps according to the standard, ISU classifications like, “That was a wonderful triple Lutz and double Salchow combination”! Or was it really a triple Axel and double Toe-loop? That's the point. I have no idea what any of this means, and I don't know anyone else who does. I don't mind occasionally watching this stuff and even being quite amazed at the performances, but why do I have to be bombarded by commentators who seem more intent on demonstrating their intricate, technical knowledge than on providing useful information?

Snowboarding, especially the half-pipe competition, is much the same. Boarders fly around from side to side, more in the air than on the snow, spinning and rolling over and over. Of course, like figure skating, there are names for all these maneuvers. Unlike the “elements” of skating, here they are called “tricks.” The broadcasts of these event also have their so-called expert, color commentators, who equally spout what to me are incomprehensibly technical descriptions of what is happening like, “Wow, she really threw down that backside 540 with an air to Fakie.”

Then there is the doubles luge. While singles luge – flying feet first down an icy track on a small sled – is strange enough, doubles luge is just plain weird. Two people – one lying uselessly on top of another – propel themselves down the bobsled run. I have no idea what this is all about.

However, unlike my wife, I am fine with curling, if only because I used to get up early Sunday mornings in Canada to join a motley crew of other rank amateurs to launch 40lb (18kg) stones down an ice sheet and mysterious sweep their route with corn brooms.

Oh well, when this madness finally ends, I can always look forward two years when gymnastics, including the rhythmic variety, and synchronized swimming and diving return.