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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Paul Hamm, Trevor Graham, and others
AUGUST 24, 2004

It seems as if at every Olympic games there comes a point when there is a meltdown of one sort or another. In these games which are designed to produce international cooperation and understanding, nationalism more often than not raises its head in anger. Designed to promote friendship and good sportsmanship there is often a moment, or several moments, in which sportsmanship seems to leave the venue entirely.

The beginning of week two at the Athens Olympics has seen a sudden outbreak of both forms of anti-Olympic spirit. It warms the heart to see the ideals of the games under attack by so many at one time. At least something seems to unite athletes, officials, television commentators, sportswriters, and fans. Somehow it makes spending all this money for the spectacle in Athens seem worthwhile.

It is difficult to decide where to begin, but given the level of the noise involved, the compounding of the errors, and the sheer stupidity of it all, it seems that the Men's Gymnastics Overall competition should get the honors.

Where to begin within this maze of incompetence, poor sportsmanship, and a complete lack of any sense at all? First, of course, was the initial mistake in which judges couldn't figure out their own rules and standards and apply them correctly. The result was that Paul Hamm received a slightly higher score than Yang Tae-Young. When the error was discovered the event was over, the medals awarded, and no one wanted to take responsibility for the blunders. The International Gymnastics Federation claimed that nothing could be done, the IOC, as is its custom, passed the buck back to the IGF. Unfortunately no one could find the third monkey who could do no evil.

The simple and logical solution to this mistake by the judges would be to award a second gold medal to Yang. This was done in the 2002 Winter Games at Salt Lake City in the figure skating fiasco. It should be said of course that this case is different. Korea is a small country and so the politics are different, and Korea does not have a powerful television network in all out

hysteria over the issue. The figure skating case also involved cheating by judges and not simply incompetence.

From this nonsensical set of positions two athletes will needlessly suffer for official incompetence and the subsequent gutless performance by both the IGF and the IOC. Yang Tae-Young will be left without his rightful score and medal, and Paul Hamm will be put under pressure by irate fans and sports writers who want to blame him for the incompetence of others. Hamm performed his best, he was judged mistakenly as the best, and given a medal. You cannot reverse that mistake because you cannot know how the competition would have proceeded if the accurate scores were known at the time. So Hamm, like Yang, is made miserable in what should have been a moment of glory.

Claiming that they could not possibly change the result in the Men's Gymnastics overall competition the IGF then proceeded on Monday to change a score in the high bar competition under pressure from an angry crowd following a low score given to Alexey Nemov of Russia. This also led to a delay in Paul Hamm's competition by some eleven minutes, which was unnerving at best.

On the same day the Brazilian volleyball team tanked its game against the U.S. in order to manipulate the draw for the medal round, setting themselves up for what is deemed to be an easier route to the gold. Meanwhile more drug test failures were announced and medals re-awarded as disqualifications changed results. By Tuesday the number of athletes disqualified at the games was into double figures, no doubt moving closer to the number who had been disqualified before the games. As usual the weightlifters were the frontrunners in this phase of the competition. Finally came my favorite story of sportsmanship so far. Trevor Graham has now admitted that he was the track coach who sent the vile of THG to the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency that resulted in breaking the BALCO scandal. He will not say how he came to have the THG. He is the ex-coach of Marion Jones and Tim Montgomery, the former under investigation by the Anti-Doping Agency and the latter facing a lifetime ban. Two other of Graham's former athletes face similar bans and a total of six of Graham's athletes have tested positive. Five track athletes, including sprinter Dwain Chambers, tested positive for THG and were banned from the Athens games following Graham's heroic act to save track and field from drugs. It also happens that Trevor Graham is currently the coach of Justin Gatlin who won the 100m competition in a field depleted by the THG testing and BALCO probe, as well as two other emerging stars. Does this cast a shadow on Gatlin and the others? Should it? More importantly

does this raise significant questions about the sportsmanship of Trevor Graham, whose athlete won the 100m in a field reduced by Graham's actions in the THG case? Does any of this cast a shadow on the results of the 100m and the upcoming 200m races? Probably only Dick Pound knows.

This is the sort of thing that makes the Olympics an activity whose necessity is seriously questioned by people around the world. The beauty of it is that this marvelous spectacle has been staged at a modest cost only slightly in excess of nine billion dollars.

Some things ARE priceless. Others cost a lot of money.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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