

POLITICS AS USUAL: The Green Games

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I am a sucker for all things Olympic.

I love the spectacle of the games, the determination, the artistry, the sheer power of the dreams of each and every athlete that competes.

The extraordinary accomplishment, their mere presence on the Olympic stage represents is just awe inspiring. I was sick on Friday so ? as there is always a silver lining to even the crummiest day ? I got to watch the opening ceremonies live. As always a combination of fantastic, weird, kooky and a few glitches for good measure

Watching all the athletes file into the stadium makes me a wee bit weepy.

It is so emotional for them all. They are realizing their dreams ? and we in turn get to experience those dreams too ? albeit vicariously. It makes one so proud to be Canadian. (I did give a big shout out to Ireland too! Yes, Ireland is not exactly a powerhouse in winter Olympic sports but hey, they're giving it a go! Erin go Bragh!)

As I write this column on Saturday, the first full day of competition has come to a close and it has already been a spectacular one for us. Gold, Silver and Bronze. Go team Canada!

I am sure there will be many more highs and lows in the days to come.

While the Olympics are ostensibly a sporting spectacle, they are also a political spectacle and this is most evident in Sochi. Hosting the Olympics is a source of immense national pride. The country puts on its Sunday best ? or at least tries to.

The mad scramble to be prepared to host the world has led to some embarrassing snafus for Russia. Piles of dirt, unfinished buildings, taps that either produce no water or ?water that is dangerous for your face? (seriously). And on and on.

But worst of all is the price tag for this national vanity project ? \$50 billion.

That's right. Think of it this way ? that's 5x times the budget to run the entire city of Toronto ? for five years!

Personally, I think the quadrennial spectacle has gotten out of control. We now have multiple venues in multiple countries at a cost of literally trillions of dollars. Why? So that every 4 years, a new country gets the ?honour? of putting their crown jewels in hock and emptying their royal treasury so that they can put on a circus?

That does not make sense to me. I think it is immoral to spend that amount of public money building sporting venues that will never be used again while putting a country into bankruptcy in the process. Think I'm exaggerating? Look at what happened to Greece.

Or us, frankly. We've only just finished paying for the Montreal Olympics for heaven's sake.

Do not get me started on recent decisions on the awarding the games. Suffice to say that countries with grinding poverty should not be put in the position of diverting millions of dollars from the public coffers to build sports domes.

I think that the COC should consider a more sensible plan ? share the Olympics amongst the existing sites. Every National Olympic Committee should have to contribute an equitable amount of funding to keep existing facilities up to current standards. And the ?awarding? of the games would be a simple exercise in cost benefit analysis? which of the existing facilities and countries within which they are situated is in the best shape to host.

They can be rotated fairly amongst the various sites around the globe. So North America (Canada or USA) can host a winter Olympics, while Asia (South Korea or China) can host a summer games, then next round a European country can host a winter and Australia can host the summer. And so on and so on. They can even be hosted jointly.

Each country pays lip service to the sentiment that the games are about sport and not politics. Well sharing the Olympics will force the point.

We do not need white elephants littering the planet all built in the name of sports highest contest while beggaring nations in the process. Make the Olympics truly ?green? games ? Reduce, Re-use, Recycle - use the facilities that already exist and create truly Sustainable Sports.

In the interim? Go Canada Go!

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is, after all, Our Town.