WE WERE BEST WHEN IT COUNTED

The Vancouver Games started as a 'crazy' dream and ended up a wondrous spectacle that transfixed and, just maybe, transformed a nation

BY KEN MACQUEEN AND JONATHON GATEHOUSE

Ignition: Wayne Gretzky lit the outdoor Olympic cauldron in front of thousands of rain-soaked spectators

There are tides and rhythms to an event that spans 17 days and includes 82 countries—an event so large it is capable of altering the emotional climate of a city, a province, a nation; indeed, the moods of many nations. Rather like the weather at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Games, which flip-flopped time and time again from monsoon to shorts and sunshine.

From a Canadian perspective, the run of these Games—from early stumbles to triumphant conclusion—went a bit like speed skater Christine Nesbitt's 1,000-m race on the first Thursday at the Richmond Oval. At the start gun, 24-year-old Nesbitt later said, "Instead of skating I kind of panicked. I had a slip after two or three steps." Sometimes when that happens it's hard to regain control. Just 200 m into the race Nesbitt was in a dismal 15th place. At 600 m she had clawed back to ninth, and the podium seemed an impossible reach. But she prepared mentally and physically for such things. The only way forward is to draw on your training, stick to your plan and to make sure no one can accuse you of giving up. And so she raged through the last lap, throwing herself across the line to win Canada's third gold medal by two one-hundredths of a second—still scowling at herself for not having run a perfect race.

It was later that night, after the medal presentation ceremony at BC Place, that Nesbitt finally unclenched. Yes, she allowed to a couple of *Maclean's* reporters, she was feeling better now. It's just that she thought she could do better, she said. "I don't want to regret anything, right?" Then the smile grew bigger. "But if you don't have the race of your life and you still win gold, it's pretty sweet."

Writ large, these Games followed a similar path to a "pretty sweet" conclusion. The organizational and emotional equivalent of those first 200 m were indeed the worst: struggling through the tragic death of Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili hours before the opening ceremonies; warring against the elements for control of Cypress Mountain; fighting premature claims the Games were hell-bent for disaster; staring down international rants that we were too hungry for medals, and domestic bleats that we weren't hungry enough.

And then a corner was turned, and another, and another. You win by following your training, by having a plan, and a backup plan, and yet one more. You win by dealing with the moment, not by obsessing about the outcome. And so VANOC, the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee, fulfilled its promise to create a world-class event.

The Olympic bid began as a spark with a tourism employee. 'Go away, Bruce,' his boss said.

The Canadian Olympic Committee and its curiously controversial Own the Podium program delivered the conditions that earned Canada more medals than at any Olympics in history. And those who don't often follow sports learned of a 22-year-old moguls skier named Alexandre Bilodeau who won, on the second night of the Games, the first Canadian gold medal ever on domestic soil. True to his promise that night, there were many more to come: 14 in total, the most of any country.

True, our 206 athletes didn't own the podium with their 26 medals. Full credit for that goes to the remarkable performance of the U.S. Olympic team with 37, building—Canadian legislators take note!—on the resources and legacy of the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Games. But one can add immodestly (a trend apparently born of these Games) that Canada won more winter gold than any host country before, well above the 10 gold the U.S. won in Salt Lake. There, we said it. Um, sorry.

What our athletes did—those who made the podium and many who fell short—is elevate us with their very human stories of commitment, sacrifice, guts and sportsmanship. Make that sportswomanship, for Canadian women carried the load, as they did in Turin, by winning 56 per cent of the podium finishes. When the great Clara Hughes capped off her Olympic career on the Richmond speed skating oval with her sixth medal, she donated her $10,000 medal bonus to an East Vancouver outdoor program for at-risk youth. With equal generosity, she credited Canadian fans for lifting her across the finish line. "They gave me wings," she said. Well, Ms. Hughes, the feeling is mutual.

It's largely up to us what we make of these Games, now that the men's hockey team has gold, and the grand party that was the clos-

PREVIOUS PAGE: MARK RALSTON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Built for speed: Whistler's sliding track was the focus of tragedy, controversy and triumph

CHARLIE RIEDEL/AP

ing ceremonies is over, and the Olympic circus has left town. Much can be built from the legacy. There's no secret to the formula—it's the one that brought the Olympics to Vancouver and the one that saw them through: vision, planning and ceaseless toil. A thick skin doesn't hurt either.

THE IDEA of a Vancouver-Whistler Olympic bid began with the spark of an idea in 1996. Bruce McMillan, an employee at Tourism Vancouver, popped into his boss's office to announce his brainwave. The organization's CEO Rick Antonson was swamped with paperwork. "Go away, Bruce," he said.

McMillan persevered. Vancouver and then-B.C. premier Glen Clark got on board. Clark became one of the bid's biggest early boosters, calling the bid his "crazy dream."

The bid outlived Clark's political career. It was Premier Gordon Campbell's decision in 2001 to put the bid process in the hands of Jack Poole, a tough-as-nails real estate developer with a high tolerance for risk. The job that would preoccupy the rest of his life paid a salary of $1 a year.

By the time the bid was put before the IOC at a meeting in Prague in 2003, with speeches by Campbell, then-prime minister Jean Chrétien and Wayne Gretzky, the Vancouver bid team was a well-oiled machine. In the final vote, Vancouver edged out Pyeongchang, South Korea. The announcement by IOC president Jacques Rogge was greeted by cheering crowds jamming GM Place in Vancouver and in Whistler's outdoor square.

The euphoria died soon enough. There were protests, from gritty anti-poverty activists who call the event a misuse of resources, to residents of a posh West Vancouver neighbourhood who set up roadblocks in a futile attempt to prevent construction of a new highway diversion to Whistler. There were cost overruns at the expanded waterfront convention centre. Construction of the rapid-transit line from downtown Vancouver to the airport devastated businesses along the Cambie Street corridor. But the biggest threat came from the collapse of the global financial system, less than two years before opening day. The Olympics are about money as much as sport, and for a time it looked like


ALERT
N
W
T

Vancouver would be the first city to host the Games during a depression since Los Angeles in 1932. Vancouver had to bail out the developer of the athletes' village with a $100-million emergency loan. Although VANOC raised $953 million in domestic and international sponsor revenue alone, the economic crisis triggered massive internal cost-cutting as it struggled to stay within its $1.75-billion budget. "Notwithstanding what's going on out there, the public expects us to get to the finish line, no matter what," said an increasingly weary John Furlong, VANOC's CEO.

Throughout, VANOC pressed ahead with its inspired notion to stage the most ambitious Olympic torch relay in history. It began in Victoria after the flame was delivered from Athens and ranged across the country for 106 days, visiting more than 1,000 communities. More than anything else VANOC could have done, it transformed the Vancouver Games into a national event.

Locally, the sweep of the Games, from Whistler to Richmond, encompassed the traditional territories of the Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh. The so-called Four Host First Nations were involved in the bid process as early as 2004, a far-sighted move by Poole, who had Metis heritage. The result was a large component of Aboriginal culture in the Games and ceremonies, as well as economic development and job opportunities. "We are writing a new chapter in Canadian history together," declared Tewanee Joseph, CEO of the host nations group.

Unfortunately, not everyone who worked on the Games could be there to see the cauldron lit. Last August, Leo Obstbaum, who designed the Olympic medals and the overall look of the Games, died at age 40. Then in October, just one day after the torch was lit in Greece, Poole, 76, succumbed to pancreatic cancer. Today, the cauldron, which drew throngs of visitors throughout the Games, stands in a waterfront plaza that bears Poole's name.

Trail of the torch: Clockwise from top left, in Vancouver, with NBA star Steve Nash; at CFS Alert, Nunavut; at Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto; off Long Beach, near Tofino, B.C.; in K'omoks, B.C.; outside Drumheller, Alta.; in Vancouver, with singer Sarah McLachlan; town of Old Crow, in the Yukon

CP; GETTY IMAGES; STR; STF; CALGARY HERALD; JONATHAN HAYWARD/CP

B.C.'s always muscular protest groups used the approaching Games to draw attention to such issues as globalization, poverty, social housing, the problems of Vancouver's drug-addled Downtown Eastside, unresolved native land claims and the seal hunt, to name a few. Add to this a local population skeptical of cost overruns, wary of inconvenience and ground down by seven years of Olympic planning and debate, and no one quite knew what reception the world would get.

A day before the Feb. 12 opening ceremonies, Prime Minister Stephen Harper addressed the B.C. legislature in Victoria. It was telling, if just a bit strange, that the often stiff and buttoned-down Harper felt the need to urge Canadians to let loose. "Patriotism, as Canadians, should not make us feel the least bit shy or embarrassed," he said, to the bemusement of some in the American media. "We will ask the world to forgive us this uncharacteristic outburst of patriotism, of our pride, to be part of a country that is strong, confident, and tall among the nations," Harper said. By opening day, and in the days after, as the streets thronged with people, celebration houses thumped into the early hours, and choruses of *O Canada* erupted at the least provocation, it was clear: message received, and understood.

Can't decide who should be the final torchbearer? Give your Olympic cauldron four arms.

Canadian athletes held a pre-Games pep rally in the Olympic Village. One speaker was Joé Juneau, a former Olympic and NHL hockey player and assistant chef de mission for the Canadian team. He spoke of the youth hockey program he fosters in the Inuit community of Kuujjuaq in northern Quebec. He spoke of the piled stone inukshuk, a Games symbol that serves in the Arctic as navigational and survival aids. You have a great opportunity here, he told the team. "We are the inukshuk for Canadian youth."

THE OPENING CEREMONIES of an Olympic Games are meant to define the host nation and set a tone of optimism and possibility for the days to come. In that regard, Feb. 12 was a mixed success. The day will forever be marked by the death of 21-year-old Nodar Kumaritashvili, who flew off his sled during a training run and slammed into an exposed girder. VANOC, the IOC and the luge federation moved quickly to declare the track safe,

which had the unfortunate result of pinning the blame on pilot error. Overnight, VANOC rushed to adjust the ice on the corner and wall off the girders.

With that death, the air of celebration seemed to visibly leak out of John Furlong, the man who had led the organizing committee since its inception. The speech he gave at the opening ceremonies that night, before a massive global television audience, seemed flat. As for the ceremony itself, it was an ambitious and visually stunning spectacle, one that exceeded the expectations of many. Predictably, it also launched a series of national debates: too little French, too much geography, little recognition of urban or Asian influence, no people of colour among the notables carrying in the Olympic flag or among those lighting the cauldron.

Ah, yes, the cauldron. Perhaps it was an intentional metaphor of Canadian compromise. Can't decide who should be the final torchbearer? Build a cauldron with four arms. And so, at the climactic moment, hockey great Wayne Gretzky, NBA star Steve Nash, speed skater Catriona Le May Doan and skier Nancy Greene stood on the floor of BC Place. And waited. Three giant crystal arms appeared, but the fourth, intended for Le May Doan's torch, failed to rise from the floor. If the hydraulic failure was also a metaphor, it's one best left unexplored. Gretzky was then dispatched by pickup truck to light a second outdoor cauldron—one that would soon present VANOC with its own set of challenges.

Clara Hughes said Canadians lifted her across the finish line. 'They gave me wings.'

By far the greatest battle VANOC faced, one that started a month before the Games and continued throughout, was waged at Cypress Mountain, the weather-battered site of all freestyle skiing and boarding events.

Warm winds and lashing rain stripped the slopes and ate into the snow the crew had "farmed" elsewhere on the site and had stored at higher altitudes. What snow there was, and hundreds of loads trucked in from a site three hours away, was used to maintain the playing fields. By the first Sunday of the

Powerful backers: (top) Prime Minister Stephen Harper; B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell (middle); VANOC CEO John Furlong (bottom), all smiles at the closing ceremony

ADRIAN WYLD/CP; ANDY CLARK/REUTERS; JASPER JUINEN/GETTY IMAGES

Games the battle was being lost. VANOC made a hurried decision to cancel 8,000 standing-room tickets for boarder cross. That Tuesday was a public relations nightmare. VANOC cancelled a further 20,000 half-pipe tickets. Compounding that, the increasingly popular outdoor cauldron looked like it was imprisoned behind an ugly chain-link security fence. Add to that the breakdown of some Cypress-bound buses as well as the ice machines at the Richmond Oval and a segment of the foreign press had already written the Games off as a disaster. "What I read in the British press," snapped Mark Adams, the IOC's director of communications, "bears absolutely no relation to what I've been seeing in the competition."

True enough, competitions were going ahead. Kristina Groves iced a bronze medal that first Sunday at the Richmond Oval, though Canada's male speed skaters faltered. Cypress was proving fertile ground for Canadian athletes. In the first four days it yielded a silver for Jennifer Heil and that first gold for Alexandre Bilodeau in moguls, and a silver for Mike Robertson and gold for Maëlle Ricker in snowboard cross. They can thank a well-rehearsed issues management team at VANOC that Cypress was even open.

EVERY OLYMPIC MORNING, at about 4:30 a.m.—just as the last hard-core revellers in Vancouver and Whistler had crashed into sleep or other forms of unconsciousness—Dave Cobb, executive vice-president and deputy CEO of VANOC, got a text message delivered to his cellphone. It was the report from the overnight crew at VANOC's main operations centre—the MOC. The rotating team of senior managers had spent the dark hours of the 24-7 operation filtering through reports filed daily from each function at each of 15 venues of the monster machine that is the Olympics. The aim was to have venue teams solve 95 per cent of the problems on site. The worst five per cent, or system-wide crises, found their way to Cobb's phone.

Cobb, the one-time chief operating officer for the Vancouver Canucks hockey team, signed on with VANOC in 2004. By Games time, his role as head of sponsorship and marketing evolved to something akin to troubleshooter at large. He had plenty of material to work with.

The contents of Cobb's phone messages formed the agenda for a daily 6:30 a.m. breakfast meeting with Furlong, his boss. From there, the MOC executive convened, adding Cathy Priestner Allinger, vice-president of sport, and Terry Wright, vice-president of operations, to the group. Others with specialized responsibility were added as needed. From that meeting, the VANOC team got its marching orders. Some of those demands in the weeks before the Games and during the crazy first week were odd, to say the least. Rebuilding Cypress was a massive challenge. "We needed to make instant decisions on flying in very expensive massive bales of straw," says Cobb. "We got some from the northwest of the United States. We got some from Oregon. Even finding the trucks was a challenge. And then finding suitable snow. I had to learn all the different types of snow there are."

The cauldron, a victim of its own popularity, was another challenge the MOC jumped on. Vancouverites awoke Wednesday, five days after the cauldron was lit, to find workers had built a viewing area on a nearby rooftop. At street level, an eye-level gap in the fence was created to allow better pictures and a day later the deck was wired for lights to accommodate massive nighttime lineups for a photo position. Overnight Thursday, prefabricated Plexiglas replaced much of the chain-link. Canada's medal content was falling far behind the U.S., but perceptions of Games organization was on the upswing. Gilbert Felli, IOC executive director, was lavish in his praise. As the first week neared its close he spoke of two pleasant surprises: "VANOC's ability to address issues, usually within 24 hours," he said. And the streets teeming with flag-waving Canadians. "The enthusiasm of the people was quite amazing."

That spirit was captured in two medal-winning performances later in that first week. Short-track skater Marianne St-Gelais marked her 20th birthday on Wednesday night with a silver in the woman's 500-m. At the next night's medal presentation, she practically levitated off the medal's podium, dancing and shaking with joy like a kid on Christmas morning. In Whistler, the news was bleak. The alpine team was shut out of the podium, and skeleton gold medal hopeful Mellisa Hollingsworth tearfully apologized to the country on Friday for her fifth-place finish. It was skeleton racer Jon Montgomery to the rescue. His gold medal run on Friday was a thing of beauty. Even better was his unaffected exuberance: walking through the streets of Whistler chugging from a pitcher of beer and then leaping onto the podium the next day to massacre the national anthem. Canada got its hoser hero when it needed him most.

Perseverance: (top) fog and rain at Cypress tested everyone's limits; figure skater Joannie Rochette, here with her father, Normand, overcame her mother's death to win bronze

MARK BLINCH/REUTERS; PAUL CHIASSON/CP

WHEN EMILY BRYDON finally made it the bottom of the ladies' super-G course, long minutes after her scheduled arrival on a bright and warm Whistler Saturday morning, the applause was loud and sustained. But the cheers did little to salve her psychic and physical wounds. Canada's top medal hope wasn't the only one to wipe out—15 of the 53 competitors failed to finish—but her crash rated among the more spectacular. A lost edge on a wide right turn, then an explosion of snow as her arms, legs and skis all tried to head in different directions at extreme velocity. "I think I just took part in a train wreck," she later told reporters, large sunglasses hiding her teary eyes. "I was the train wreck. I'm one giant, walking bruise." A Brothers Grimm-type end to a disappointing home Games (Brydon had finished a distant 16th in the downhill) and her Olympic career.

That afternoon at the Richmond Oval, speed skater Denny Morrison faded badly on his final lap in the men's 1,500-m, finishing ninth, well below his, and the country's, podium expectations. And Canada's evening hardly went better. Sitting in third place after the first heat of the two-man bob, Lyndon Rush flipped his sled on Turn 13 at the Whistler track—dubbed "50/50" for your chances of getting through it. He and brakeman Lascelles Brown emerged with just scrapes and bruises, proving more durable than their medal hopes. The pièce de résistance came in short track. The presence of both Charles and François Hamelin in the men's 1,000-m final—a five-man affair—seemed to guarantee a place on the podium. And when the brothers from Ste-Julie, Que., leapt out to an early one-two lead, pacing the field, there was bedlam inside Vancouver's Pacific Coliseum. But with just two laps to go, a pair of Korean skaters sneaked by them on the inside, while American star Apolo Ohno took the outside route. Gassed, crushed, or both, the Hamelins watched their competitors pull away to victory. Charles, the world record holder at the distance, came fourth. François, fifth.

For the first—and as it turned out last—time at the 2010 Games, Canada had gone a day without a medal, and perspective was in short supply. (In Beijing, the country's first trip to the podium, a gold from wrestler Carol Huynh, came on the eighth full day of competition.) Suddenly, the party seemed to be turning sour. In Vancouver, the thick crowds that packed the downtown at night were developing an edge. City police ordered liquor stores to shut just after sundown, and asked the RCMP-led Integrated Security Unit to divert some of its 10,000 officers from the venues to the streets.

Sunday hardly improved the mood. On Cypress, Chris Del Bosco had a ski-cross bronze in hand with the finish line in sight. But a desperate push to catch Switzerland's Michael Schmid and Andreas Matt of Austria ended in disaster: a hard wipeout off the last jump. As he lay crumpled in the snow, Norway's Audun Groenvold skied by to take the final place on the podium. A case, perhaps, of wanting it too much. "I wasn't content," Del Bosco admitted. "Third, I guess it's all right for some people. But I wanted to give 100 per cent for my sport and my country."

Could disappointment really be contagious? By the time the buzzer sounded that night on Canada's 5-3 loss to the United States in men's hockey, the answer was obvious. In their first real test of the Games, the country's top NHL stars had been found wanting. Marty Brodeur, a hero in Salt Lake, looked more than mortal in goal, mishandling pucks, and surrendering soft chances. At the other end of the ice, Ryan Miller stood on his head. Canada outshot the Americans 45-22, but that was little solace. The 13 million people who tuned in to watch across the country—a record audience for a sporting event—weren't looking for a moral victory.

Earlier in the evening, Ottawa's Kristina Groves had put the country back on the medal board with a silver in 1,500-m speed skating. But there was little satisfaction. The 33-year-old already owned two silvers from Turin. The goal was gold. With red eyes and second prize hanging from her neck, she met the media in a subdued mood. "Deep in my heart, I really wanted to win that race." The *weekend horribilis* had Canadian officials backing away from their bold predictions about Own-

ing the Podium, and the media grumbling about the ways the $117 million in extra government and corporate money had been spent. Groves let it be known that the athletes weren't impressed with the carping. They were having enough trouble meeting their own high standards without having to shoulder the nation's burden. "Sport is hard. We're all doing the very best we can with our bodies and our minds," she said. "I look at [medal] expectations and shrug, they're so meaningless. You never know what's going to happen. The Olympics is just that crazy thing."

THE KNOCK ON Joannie Rochette's door at the Olympic Village came at 6 a.m. She opened it to find her father Normand, and her coach, Manon Perron. It was the worst possible news, at the worst possible time. Rochette's mother Thérèse had suffered a massive heart attack only hours after arriving in B.C. to watch Joannie skate. The doctors at Vancouver General were unable to save her. She was dead, at just age 55.

The COC made the news public at a midmorning briefing on Sunday. Canada's chef de mission, Nathalie Lambert, a three-time short-track medallist, was choked with emotion. The decision to continue, or return home to Île-Dupras, Que., and mourn, was entirely up to the six-time Canadian figure skating champion, she said. "I think Joannie is living through the most difficult day of her life. And it will be the most difficult week, and year of her life."

By early afternoon, Joannie's answer was clear. With her tearful father looking on from the stands, she took the ice for a scheduled practice session. She made her way through her short program tango flawlessly. The few people in the rink applauded.

Ice dancer Tessa Virtue was sharing a room with Rochette at the athletes' village when the tragedy struck. She spent much of the day consoling her close friend. And between the hugs and tears, she tried to prepare for the competition of her life. After the compulsory dance on Friday, she and partner Scott Moir sat in second place, behind Charlie White and Meryl Davis of the United States. Sunday evening, while most of the country was watching hockey, they delivered a smoking flamenco in the original dance and vaulted into first.

The next night, as they went for gold in the free dance, they had our undivided attention. Skating second-to-last to Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 5*, their performance was a marriage of power and grace. As they finished, entangled in an embrace at centre ice, Moir gave Virtue a kiss and said, "Thank you so much." The crowd at Pacific Coliseum were on their feet cheering. So too the patrons at a pub near Stanley Park. Beneath the grandstands, Moir watched the final pair of the night, Tanith Belbin and Ben Agosto of the United States, on a TV monitor, while Virtue averted her eyes. When the scores flashed up, he told his partner that they had finished second. He left her hanging for an instant before sharing the truth—they had won gold. Canada's home Games were back on track.

THE VOLUNTEERS WHO spent close to a month heroically struggling against Mother Nature on Cypress Mountain's rain-soaked slopes did their part to preserve national advantage. "Lucky loonies" are buried all over the course. When the snow is finally allowed to melt, there will be more than enough change lying around to buy a few rounds and toast Canada's freestyle success.

> The heroic volunteers at rain-soaked Cypress buried lucky loonies all over the course

On Tuesday afternoon, Whistler's Ashleigh McIvor was the beneficiary. In close to whiteout conditions, she tore up the hill and the ski-cross competition. The 26-year-old burst out of the gate in the finals like she was wearing a jet pack. At the finish, she was 30 m ahead of the Norwegian and French skiers who took silver and bronze. McIvor, who was ranked second in the world coming into the Games, spoke about having the kind of confidence that maybe only extra federal funding can buy. "This was the only race of my life where I just felt like I was going to win," she said. "I used to think it was bad to think that way, that I was going to jinx it."

A few hours later, the men's hockey team finally found their game. In a must-win playoff against Germany, with Roberto Luongo in net before his home rink fans, Team Canada handed out an 8-2 drubbing. It wasn't a classic, but the game was notable for one thing: Shea Weber hammering a puck past

Euphoria: Vancouver was jammed after Canada won gold in men's hockey

In the final days, the medals came so fast and furious that it was hard to celebrate them all

Thomas Greiss and straight through the net's mesh. It left scorch marks.

What will be remembered in perfect clarity, and great emotion, for decades to come, happened just before 9:30 p.m. at the Pacific Coliseum. The roar when Joannie Rochette took to the ice for her short program was the aural equivalent of a loving embrace, but it hardly seemed to register. The 24-year-old exchanged palm slaps with her coach, skated to the centre of the rink and struck her pose. And for the next two minutes and 50 seconds, a nation held its breath.

The cheers when she landed her first and toughest jump, a triple Lutz-double toe loop combination, were deafening. When she followed with a triple flip, they were louder still. At the finish, the dam finally burst. As 11,000 spectators stood applauding, Rochette doubled over in tears. At the boards, she fell into her coach's arms. The marks, a personal best of 71.36, putting her in third place, seven points clear of her nearest competitor, hardly seemed to matter. Sitting in the kiss-and-cry area, she called out to her *Maman*.

POP QUIZ: see if you can identify the theme. On Wednesday, Clara Hughes skates to a bronze in women's speed skating's most gruelling event, the 5,000-m. In her final Olympic race at age 37, she matches Cindy Klassen's career total of six Olympic medals (the most ever won by a Canadian). In short-track speed skating, the ladies' 3,000-m relay team—Tania Vicent, Jessica Gregg, Kalyna Roberge and Marianne St-Gelais—take silver. At the Whistler Sliding Centre, Canada's sleds come one-two in the women's bob. Kaillie Humphries of Calgary and Heather Moyse of Summerside, P.E.I., winners of the gold, do a dance on the podium. Calgary's Helen Upperton and Pickering's Shelley-Ann Brown, the silver medallists, opt for the more traditional tears and hugs. Four medals in the space of four hours, tying the best-day-ever total set in Turin in 2006. All won by women. At the end of Vancouver 2010's day 13, Canada has 16 medals—but only 3½ (Scott Moir) have been won by men.

Not that there's any danger of all that success going to the heads of Canada's women. Leaving the track after her silver medal run, Upperton wonders aloud if anyone besides the people in the grandstands saw it. A few hundred metres down the hill in Whistler, there are large crowds gathered in front of the big screens on the streets, and packing every bar. But it's the hockey team's 7-3 thumping of Russia in the men's quarter-finals that they're cheering about. Four minutes into the second period, the score was 6-1. And from the opening faceoff, the result was never really in doubt. Afterwards, Russian goaltender Ilya Bryzgalov provides the quote of the Games. "They came like gorillas coming out of a cage." From their homes, more than 10.5 million tune in to the blowout.

TRADITIONALLY, ATHLETES sneak out of the Olympic Village at night to get away from their coaches, and their own best interests. Canada's women's hockey team did it to find some competition. Once, just before the Games began, and a second time after a preliminary round where they outscored their three opponents 41-2, the women played clandestine "tune-ups" against a Vancouver boys major midget team, splitting the series against the teens. It had the desired effect. In the semis, they outclassed Finland 5-0. And on Thursday afternoon, with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Wayne Gretzky cheering them on, they blanked the U.S. 2-0 to take their third consecutive Olympic gold.

Before the game, IOC president Jacques Rogge took official notice of the elephant in the room. The sport's competitive balance needs to improve if it is to remain part of the Games, he warned. "There is a discrepancy there, everyone agrees with that."

Later that evening, a composed Joannie Rochette sealed the deal in the women's long

SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

program. Skating to Camille Saint-Saëns's *Samson and Delilah*, she wobbled early, but finished strong. Her free-skate score of 131.28, and total of 202.64, secured third spot on the podium, and perhaps the greatest ovation ever accorded a bronze medallist. "I just went out there and did what my mother would have wanted me to do," she said afterwards. "My mother always wanted me to be a strong person. She was my biggest fan but at the same time the most critical person you could ever meet." Rochette laughed. "Tonight she was telling me, 'What went wrong with that triple flip? It looked so good in practice.' "

COULD THIS REALLY be happening to Canada? Medals coming so fast and furious that it was hard to celebrate them all. On the final Friday night, the men reported for duty. Miraculously avoiding a pileup at the last turn of the short-track 500-m race, Charles Hamelin took the gold. The jingoistic cherry on top for the screaming fans at Pacific Coliseum came when U.S. superstar Apolo Anton Ohno was disqualified for bumping, and Canada's François-Louis Tremblay was awarded the bronze. A half-hour later, another short-track gold, as Hamelin, his brother François, Tremblay and Olivier Jean outhustled the defending Olympic champions, Korea, by 0.222 seconds. The Americans took bronze.

Short-track supremacy, and the general climate of success, took some of the sting out of an epic choke on the curling sheet. Up 6-4 on her last shot in the tenth end of the Olympic final, Team Canada skip Cheryl Bernard missed an open hit and let Anette Norberg and the Swedes steal two to tie the game. In the extra end, the unthinkable happened again, as Bernard, this time holding last rock, missed a straightforward double takeout, losing the game and the gold. The silver didn't hang easily around her neck. When she met the media the next day, the 43-year-old Calgarian said she had spent a restless night, replaying the match in her mind. "I threw those shots over and over again, and I made them every time."

But nothing could put a damper on this party, including an all-too-close call against the Slovaks in the semifinals of men's hockey. Up 3-0 with less than 10 minutes to play, Team Canada took its foot off the pedal. Lubomir Visnovsky scored to make it 3-1. Then, with five to go, Michal Handzus made it a one-goal game. With the Slovak goalie on the bench and an extra attacker on the ice, Canada barely survived the final seconds. A sprawling Roberto Luongo got just enough of his glove on a shot by his Vancouver Canucks teammate Pavol Demitra to deflect it wide. Canada would play for gold.

CANADA WAS IN uncharted territory. As the final Saturday of the Games dawned, the country already had 10 golds, tying the Norwegians in Lillehammer, and the U.S. in Salt Lake, for the most ever won by a winter host nation. And equalling Canada's best-ever Olympic showing at the boycott-thinned 1984 Los Angeles Summer Games. The 11th came just before 2 p.m., at the Richmond Oval. The unheralded men's pursuit team of Denny Morrison, Lucas Makowsky and Mathieu Giroux took an early lead on the Americans, and never looked back. Their victory lap wasn't even completed when 34-year-old Jasey-Jay Anderson made it 12, winning the parallel giant slalom snowboard race at Cypress, finally grasping an Olympic medal in his fourth Games.

Kevin Martin and his rink nailed lucky 13, with an emphatic 6-3 victory over Norway's Thomas Ulsrud, and his team's unspeakably garish pants. At the Whistler Sliding Centre, Lyndon Rush, Lascelles Brown, David Bissett and Chris Le Bihan took a bronze in the four-man bob, Canada's second-ever in the discipline, and first in 46 years. It probably should have been silver. Rush's sled finished with a four-run total of 3:24.85, just 0.01 seconds behind Germany 1, piloted by three-time gold medallist André Lange. The Americans took the gold. "That shows how good he is," Rush said of his German counterpart. "He struggles and wins a silver medal, and I have great runs and get a bronze." Still, it was no time to be greedy. The medal, Canada's 25th, eclipsed the Olympic high-water mark set in Turin four years ago. Vancouver 2010 was now officially our best-ever Games. Home-field advantage confirmed.

The victory celebrations, large and small, carried on into the wee hours. Just after 2 a.m., a happy, Twitter-organized mob descended on Vancouver's Granville Street, carrying portable stereos. They tuned their radios to the same station and waited. When the opening chords of Bryan Adams's *Summer of '69* spilled into the cool night air, they started dancing. Soon hundreds more pedestrians joined in. How could a self-conscious city and country ever have come to this? Could it ever get better?

Yes. Hockey gold. M

With Jason Kirby