

How to Keep Your Eye on the Gold

The win-win story of a truly honorable Olympic Competitor

By *Peter Vidmar*

Recently, I gave a presentation that was a departure from the kind of program I usually deliver. I was asked to speak to a community business organization that promotes moral and ethical leadership. My topic (borrowing a phrase from my friend Michael Josephson) was, "Pursuing Victory with Honor: Ethics at the Olympic Games."

I reminded the audience that of all major sporting events we follow (Super Bowl, World Series, NBA Finals, Stanley Cup, etc.), only one begins with the athletes taking an oath to play fairly and with sportsmanship. At the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games, one athlete, representing all athletes, holds a corner of the Olympic flag and recites the following:

"In the name of all competitors, I promise we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, committing ourselves to a sport without doping and without drugs, in the spirit of true sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honor of our teams."

Sadly, that oath has been broken many times. Even the ancient Olympics in Greece had its scandals. The earliest recorded cheater was Eupolus of Thessaly, who bribed boxers in the 98th Olympiad. Callippus of Athens bought off his competitors in the pentathlon during the 112th festival. And The Emperor Nero didn't even finish the Chariot race, but was declared winner! We have to look no farther than the recent headlines regarding Marion Jones to know that the modern Olympics are not free from unethical behavior.

But there are many inspiring examples of individuals who, while striving to be the very best athlete, didn't lose sight of being a very good person as well. Let me share with you just one story.

At the 1964 Olympic Winter Games in Innsbruck, Austria, the clear favorites in the four-man Bobsled event were the Austrians and Italians. The Canada 1 team was not expected to win. But on the very first run, Canada broke the Olympic record and was leading after the first heat. But on the very last turn of their record breaking run, the Canada 1 sled hit the ice wall, damaging the axle. If the axle couldn't be fixed, their quest for the gold medal would end.

So imagine the worry, then the surprise as the Canadian driver, Victor Emory, reached the top of the mountain only 15 minutes before his next run to find his sled upside down. It was said that Eugenio Monti, the legendary Italian team driver, didn't want to win unless they raced against the best, and the best were competing on equal terms. So his team pitched in to fix the Canadian sled. As a result, Canada 1 was able to race and hold on to its lead...and the gold medal was theirs. Italy's Eugenio Monti and his team took home the bronze medal.

The story gets better.

A few days later, in the two-man Bobsled event, Tony Nash of Great Britain, recorded the fastest run in the first heat, but a bolt attaching the runners to the shell sheared off. Just before Eugenio Monti took his sled down the track, he said, "Get an Englishman and a spanner to the finish and they can have my bolt." After his run, he removed the bolt from his own sled and had it brought up the mountain to be attached to the British bobsled. Tony Nash and his partner Robin Dixon took home the gold for Great Britain and Eugenio Monti took home the bronze for Italy. For his sportsmanship, Monti was awarded the "Pierre de Coubertin" award for fair play. Although Eugenio Monti was viciously criticized in the Italian press, he was firm in his conviction that he did the right thing. "Nash didn't win because I gave him the bolt," he said. "He won because he had the fastest run."

Lately, I've been spending some time researching fascinating stories like this, of individuals who understand what it means to pursue excellence at the very highest level, and not forget to help others achieve their dreams as well. These people are my heroes.

Competing in sports is much like competing in the workplace, where you may find yourself competing *with* your teammates, while simultaneously competing *against* them for individual honors. I don't see many corporations with two presidents. A wise coach once taught me, that if I ever want help in life, I have to be willing to give help as well. When teams and individuals work together, everyone improves. Now that's what I call *win-win!*

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