



American speedskater Joey Cheek carries a U.S. flag during the closing ceremony of the Winter Olympics on Sunday in Turin, Italy.



Jim Litke



Tim Dahlberg

Olympic winner: 'The king of Italy'

SESTRIERE, Italy

Here's a toast to all those Olympians who didn't start celebrating until they won something.

Hoist a cold one for Fabris and Klassen and Ahn and Raich, and maybe a few for those wacky Kostelic kids, the brother-sister act on skis from Croatia that won more medals than some nations.

These were games when speaking English meant missing some of the best parties, unless your name was Bode Miller, but not the best feud between winners, a dubious distinction claimed by American speedskaters Shani Davis and Chad Hedrick.

Italian Enrico Fabris wound up climbing a step higher on the podium than either of those two in his sport's equivalent of track and field's mile and overnight became the most popular thing on ice in this soccer-mad country since Campari.

Until two months ago, this nation of 57 million boasted exactly one Olympic-caliber oval, and even then his countrymen never got around to building a roof over it. Good thing, too, because it might have put a ceiling on Fabris' imagination.

Italy had never won an Olympic medal in "pattinaggio di velocita" when Fabris, 24, a dead ringer for actor Adrian Brody, glided to the start line for the 5,000 meters two weeks ago. He began honing his craft on a frozen pond near his hometown of Asiago, then quietly became a world-class competitor and, finally, a revelation by slipping in to grab the bronze medal that Saturday.

But his best was yet to come.

After next leading Italy to a gold in the team pursuit, Fabris won a high-stakes, high-drama shootout in the 1,500 against the heavily favored duo of Davis and Hedrick and zoomed off with yet another gold.

"Today," Fabris said, "without any arrogance, I'm the king of Italy."

His three medals may have been the most-trumpeted among the 252 awarded to the top three finishers in 84 events. But Fabris, Canadian long-tracker Cindy Klassen (five medals) and Korean short-tracker Ahn Hyun-soo (four medals) weren't the only ones to take home enough of the bagel-shaped discs to think about hosting a brunch.

Germany won the medal standings with an Olympics-best 11 golds in addition to 12 silvers and six bronzes. The United States was next, with nine golds, nine silvers and seven bronzes, followed by Canada with seven golds, 10 silvers and seven bronzes.

But Austria got the award for efficiency. It came to Italy with 22 skiers from a nation of just 8.1 million people, and left with an Olympic-record 14 of the 30 Alpine medals, including two golds each by Benjamin Raich and Michaela Dorfmeister.

Janica Kostelic, Croatia's one-woman band, was almost as reliable. She became the most decorated female Alpine skier of all time by grabbing a gold in the combined and a silver in the super-G.

But Kostelic was none too happy about having to fight the flu and being forced to hang around while officials delayed the start of the downhill leg of the combined.

"They're stupid," Kostelic said.

And if that wasn't enough venting, well, Janica could always return to the Kostelic household and razz older brother Ivica, who won only a silver.

Snowboardcross, a kind of NASCAR on ice, was not only the surprise winner as an event at these Olympics, it provided a kiss between the men's and women's gold medalists that had everybody buzzing.

American Seth Wescott is dating the women's winner, Tanja Frieden of Switzerland. His Swiss miss sneaked in for gold after Wescott's teammate, Lindsey Jacobellis, tried to provide a flourish at the end of her race, slipped and had to settle for silver.

"I started celebrating once Tanja won," Wescott said sheepishly. "Nothing against Lindsey."

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Big losers: Late nights, black auras

TURIN, Italy

So, like, dude, I was grabbing some air, looking for some metal and I just beefed. No big deal, though. At least I'm not a Bode or a Betty.

America may call me a loser, but no one will ever call me a noob. Besides, I'm coming home with one of those doughnuts made of silver.

They don't give those away on the bunny hill.

Yes, I'm Lindsey Jacobellis, the most notorious silver medal winner since Roy Jones Jr. got drunk in South Korea. And, yes, it's true that I got a little caught up in the moment and looked flamboyant weezy on that jump.

But, hey, I'm a snowboarder. Without us, the red, white and blue would have been totally wack.

Want that in English? OK, try this:

"I really don't care what people think," Jacobellis said. "I still won a silver medal, and no one can take that away from me."

Maybe Jacobellis is right. Maybe there's something to the notion that every Olympian is a winner, even those who never come close to a medal or fail spectacularly when gold is in their grasp.

More likely is that she's just a snowboarder whose spends too much time chasing the ultimate ancillary stake.

Every Olympics has to have losers. Without them, how could we identify winners?

With that in mind, let's take a look at those who might have fit in the train pack but not on the medal stand.

Get out your snowboard-ionarys (snowboard dictionaries for the less schwank) and let's go to figure skating, of all places, where Johnny Weir had to put up with a dorm room with (horrors!) no room service and closets that wouldn't hold a good swan suit.

Without a hotel concierge to read the bus schedule, Weir arrived late for the biggest night of his life and quickly sank from medal contention. He came looking for gold, silver or bronze, but all he had was a black aura to remember his Olympic experience by.

Unlike Weir, Bode Miller at least had fun during his Olympics. So much that he should have been given a special Olympic medal for the cross-country party marathon.

When last seen, the Newsweek and Time cover boy and special "60 Minutes" guest was eating a sandwich in his RV, seemingly oblivious to the fact that the sponsors who hyped his shot at five medals at least expected an honest effort out of him.

"It's been an awesome two weeks," Miller said. "I got to party and socialize at an Olympic level."

You didn't even have to be an Olympian to be a loser in Turin. Wayne Gretzky's wife, Janet Jones, arrived with the Great One besieged by questions about her betting habits. Gretzky swore the scandal that threatened to envelop him would not affect Canada's chances to repeat as gold medalists, but the Canadians could barely score a goal and the puck stopped there.

Which brings us to one big loser: NBC. The peacock network wasn't crowing so much about an Olympics so lacking in American star power that it took a whipping not only from "American Idol" but from lesser shows as well.

Michelle Kwan was gone, Bode Miller disappeared and so did the ratings. Things got so bad that viewership plunged 10 million from Thursday night's figure skating to the next night, effectively ending the games three nights early for NBC.

It was enough to make Jim Lamplsey's hair take on a life of its own, almost enough to stop Katie Couric from being so perky. In the end, NBC was forced to send in replacements, making retired anchor Tom Brokaw trudge through the snow to Miller's RV for an interview. Thankfully, he didn't make him apologize for wasting \$600 million of the network's money on the Winter Games.

Don't worry. There's another one four years from now.

Tim Dahlberg is a national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Send comments to tdahlberg@ap.org.

That's a wrap!

U.S. finishes up-and-down Games with 25 medals

By LARRY McSHANE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TURIN, Italy

Across 16 topsy-turvy days in Turin, the U.S. Olympic team teetered somewhere between torment and triumph, each step up to the medal stand tempered by one step back somewhere else.

There were unlikely Alpine golds from skiers Julia Mancuso and Ted Ligety. And the disaster in the mountains that was Bode Miller and his tattered reputation.

Speedskater Joey Cheek set a standard for Olympic class, winning two medals and donating his \$40,000 reward from the U.S. Olympic Committee to a charity for children trapped in war zones. Teammates Chad Hedrick and Shani Davis typified something less than class, fussing and fighting like second-graders in a sandbox.

A kid dubbed "The Flying Tomato," Shaun White, sailed into the sky above Bardonecchia to claim a gold medal in the snowboard halfpipe. Another snowboarder, Lindsey Jacobellis, hot-dogged her way out of a gold medal in a still-stunning turn of events that typified a growing Generation X Games gap among the Americans.

By the time the Turin two-step was done, the final medal total left the United States somewhere between total success and perceived failure. The collection of 25 medals — nine gold, nine silver, seven bronze — was far less than the record 34 of 2002, but nearly double the previous high of 13 from 1994 and 1998.

Despite the medals haul, the Olympics proved to be not much of a ratings draw for NBC, which was consistently beaten by shows such as "American Idol" and "Grey's Anatomy." The network said it wasn't a disaster, though it was on the low end of their ratings expectations.

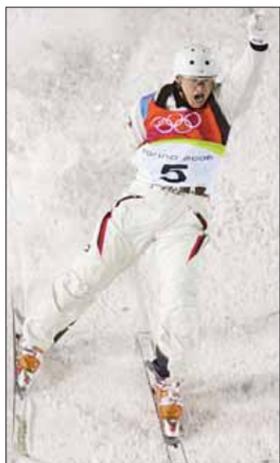
No one came into the games with higher expectations than skier Miller and speedskater Hedrick, each entered in five events. Miller won nothing; Hedrick epitomized the yin/yang of the Americans in collecting a gold, silver and bronze between yapping with Davis.

Almost lost in the backbiting was Davis' Jackie Robinson moment, a gold medal in the 1,000 meters that made him the first black athlete ever to win an individual Olympic gold medal.

The U.S. medal haul came from their domination in men's long-track speedskating and snowboarding, with seven medals apiece. Short track skater Apolo Anton Ohno added a gold and two bronzes, one of the latter in a relay event.

The news wasn't as good elsewhere in the Piedmont region.

Hockey was a dual disappointment: The professionals from the NHL looked like amateurs, winning a single game. The women — gold medal finalists in 1998 and 2002 — settled for a bronze. The



American skier Jeret "Speedy" Peterson celebrates after jumping off the ramp during the qualifying session for men's aerials. Peterson finished seventh in the event.

women speedskaters were shut out. Michele Kwan, plagued by a groin injury, never reached the ice.

The Alpine team, the self-proclaimed "Best in the World," boasted of a potential eight-medal haul and won two.

"This just in," announced David Letterman on his "Late Show." "Bode Miller has tested negative for medals."

The games' most enduring moment was also its most bizarre. Jacobellis, on the next-to-last jump of the first women's Olympic snowboardcross, grabbed her board in an unnecessary bit of showboating and then crashed, blowing her gold medal. Her silver seemed almost insignificant.

The stunt was endlessly replayed, with Jacobellis alternately cheered (by the snowboard community) and chastised (by everyone older than 40).

The disagreement demonstrated a generation gap involving the age of the sports, not the athletes. The new wave U.S. Olympians on snowboards or skis wanted to put on a show ... and maybe get a medal, too.

Take aerial skier Jeret "Speedy" Peterson. A seventh-place finish in the aerials couldn't wipe the smile off his face.

"I came here to do the Hurricane," he said, referring to the difficult maneuver, "and I did the Hurricane."

Never mind that he botched it. Or that an easier stunt might have won a medal.

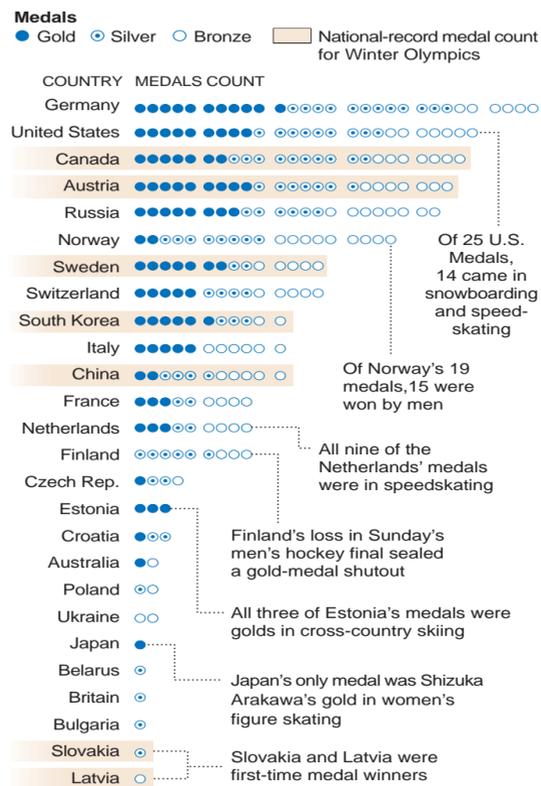
The mind-set wasn't universal. Tanith Belbin, a Canadian who won American citizenship on Dec. 31, came to Turin and won a surprising silver medal with ice dancing partner Ben Agosto on Feb. 21.

There were other stunners, too: Shauna Rohback, cut from a medal-winning sled before the 2002 games, coming back to win a silver with teammate Valerie Fleming in the bobsled. Three-time Olympian Rosey Fletcher, a self-described dark horse, grabbing a bronze in the snowboard parallel giant slalom.

2006 WINTER GAMES

The Turin Games' closing tally

The Turin Olympics ended with Germany atop the overall medals standings for the third-straight Winter Games. In all, 26 countries took to the podium in 2006, more than in any other Winter Olympics.



SOURCES: Turin Organizing Committee

Peter Santilli, Chris Kaeser • AP

Spreading the wealth

The Associated Press

TURIN, Italy

Germany and the United States again won the most medals at a share-the-wealth Turin Olympics that featured more countries winning medals and more in double figures than ever before.

Canada and Austria, among others, had their best all-time showing. Twenty-six countries, including first-time winners Slovakia and Latvia, earned at least one medal, up from a high of 24 in 1998 and 2002. And 11 countries won at least 10 medals; the previous mark was 10 countries at Nagano in 1998.

The Germans and Americans repeated their one-two finish from Salt Lake City four years ago, although both fell short of their 2002 totals. Germany led in Turin in overall medals with 29 and golds with 11, while the Americans won 25 medals overall, nine of them gold.

U.S. officials said they were pleased with their team's performance, the nation's best for a Winter Games on foreign soil, and expressed regret about pre-Olympic projections that the Americans would match or exceed

the record 34 medals of 2002.

"This has been an incredible performance," said U.S. Olympic Committee chief Jim Scherr. "It's probably our fault that it's been viewed a little less than that."

Canada was among the major success stories, bettering its record 2002 haul of 17 medals with 24 in Turin, including a games-high five by speedskater Cindy Klassen. The team's performance lent some credibility to Canada's "Own the Podium" plan to finish No. 1 when it hosts the next games in Vancouver in 2010.

Austria also had the best showing in its long Winter Games history with 23 medals overall, nine of them gold, despite a police raid and unannounced doping tests that targeted some of its cross-country skiers and biathletes. It was most proud of a record 14 medals in Alpine skiing, including a medal sweep in the men's slalom on Saturday.

"This is the greatest Olympics ever for us," said Alpine director Hans Pum.

Others with their best Winter Games included Sweden with 14 medals, and China and South Korea with 11 each.