

FRIDAY'S ROUNDUP

U.S. curlers earn bronze

Pete Fenson wanted the curling bronze medal to come down to the final shot, and he was ready to take it. The U.S. skip bent his rock into the target area, where it came to rest inside of Britain's best hope and clinched the Americans' first-ever Olympic curling medal.

Only then did the usually stone-faced Fenson break into a grin and raise his broom in victory.

"Our job's done here," he said Friday after winning 8-6 for the first American curling medal in a major men's competition since 1978. "It's always nice to come to a world event and perform well. It adds to the credibility for us. ... Hopefully it will have a great impact in the States."

Canada beat Finland 10-4 for the gold medal.

Hedrick finishes with silver

Mouth agape, tongue hanging out, head tilting over, Chad Hedrick looked like he was done.

Ever so deftly, Dutch skater Carl Verheijen pulled up right behind him, and Hedrick suddenly shifted into another gear with a burst of short, choppy strides and took off.

Already out of the race for gold and fading, the brash-talking Texan played for second in his final Olympic race at these games.

Hedrick finished off a complete set of speedskating medals Friday, settling for silver behind Bob de Jong of the Netherlands in the grueling 10,000 meters after a bit of cat-and-mouse with Verheijen, who finished third.

Hedrick, who already had a gold and a bronze, became just the third U.S. Winter Olympian to claim as many as three medals at one games.

Bobsledder to retire

Todd Hays will leave everything — body, soul, even blood if he must — on the ice.

For Hays, there's no other way to finish an Olympics. And definitely not this one, his final one.

Hays, the Texas-tough driver who put American bobsledding back on track four years ago, said Friday that he will retire following his final two runs in the four-man competition in Turin this weekend.

For the U.S. bobsled team, Captain America has two slides left to win a gold medal.

Typically, Hays promised he'd try anything to get it.

"If I thought crashing would get it done," Hays said. "I'd definitely do it."

After two runs, the 36-year-old Hays, a disappointing seventh in two-man last week, is in seventh place again, this time trailing not only the world's elite drivers but teammate Steve Holcomb, too.

Doping tests negative

The Austrians' drug tests were negative. The doping probe is just beginning.

Austria's biathlon and cross-country teams may have thought they

2006 WINTER GAMES



Medal count

Through Friday
Includes 74 of 84 medal events

COUNTRY	G	S	B	TOT
Germany	9	10	5	24
United States	8	9	6	23
Russia	8	4	8	20
Canada	6	8	6	20
Austria	8	6	5	19
Norway	2	8	8	18
Switzerland	5	4	4	13
Sweden	5	2	5	12
Italy	4	0	6	10
France	3	2	4	9
Netherlands	3	2	4	9
China	2	3	4	9
South Korea	4	3	1	8
Finland	0	5	3	8
Estonia	3	0	0	3
Croatia	1	2	0	3
Czech Rep.	1	2	0	3
Australia	1	0	1	2
Ukraine	0	0	2	2
Japan	1	0	0	1
Belarus	0	1	0	1
Britain	0	1	0	1
Bulgaria	0	1	0	1
Slovakia	0	1	0	1
Latvia	0	0	1	1
Poland	0	0	1	1

were in the clear when all 10 doping samples from last weekend's late-night raids came back Friday showing no evidence of banned substances.

But the International Olympic Committee made clear the case is far from closed, saying it will press ahead with a far-reaching probe based on evidence seized by police under Italy's strict anti-doping laws.

The IOC said the test results on the six cross-country skiers and four biathletes were "only one element in what is undoubtedly an affair which goes far wider."

Finland, Sweden in final

Finland has knocked off yet another world men's hockey power in its unlikely run through the Olympics.

Saku Koivu and Ville Peltonen each scored a goal and set up another as Finland beat Russia 4-0 in the men's semifinals Friday night, setting up an all-Nordic gold-medal game with neighboring Sweden. The Swedes eliminated the world champion Czech Republic on Friday.

Skier seizes the moment

Gold-medal winner worked hard, survived tough times

SESTRIERE, Italy

One run. All the while she was growing up, everybody was sure Julia Mancuso would win, and all of a sudden it was down to just that.

One run. Mancuso began competing as a 3-year-old on the Mighty

Mites team in Squaw Valley, Calif., and even then it was apparent how much she ached to get down the hill ahead of the other kids.

She was 7 by the time she was beating the boys consistently, and when the cold drove them off the slope, she became determined to beat that, too.

"It would be freezing; she had holes in her gloves and nobody to race against," Mancuso's mother, Andrea, recalled Friday, tears streaming down her face.

"But do you think that stopped her?" she added, without waiting for an answer. "Uh-uh."

April Mancuso, older by three years and a member of the U.S. ski team ahead of Julia, knew that about her little sister, too. Still, she beat Julia down the hill just about every time they raced, until a fateful day a half-dozen years ago.

April was 18 then. Julia had just turned 15 and was already thinking about testing her skills on the World Cup circuit. They faced off in a race sponsored by the international ski federation on a tough course in Colorado.

"She beat me pretty good, too," April remembered. "That was hard to take until I realized she beat everybody else pretty good, too."

As Mancuso settled into the starting gate Friday for the second of two runs in the Olympic giant slalom and stared into the blinding snow, the challenge was clearly laid out in front of her: Down at the bottom, the times of every one of her rivals had already been posted.

Somewhere off in the opaque distance, in the front row of the grandstand, her family sat on the edge of their seats, Her maternal grandfather,



Jim Litke



Gold medalist Julia Mancuso celebrates during the medal ceremony for the women's giant slalom at the Turin Winter Olympic Games on Friday. She is the first American woman to medal in an Alpine event in the Turin Games.

Denny Tuffanelli, stared intently at the giant video board. He had skied for Stanford back in the day when being on the college team meant competing in every discipline: Alpine, cross-country, even ski-jumping. And the way he leaned forward on his two canes, he seemed to be willing her down the hill.

On the side of the hill, about a third of the way down, U.S. Alpine director Jesse Hunt looked back up at the start gate, and even though Mancuso had never led a race anywhere near this magnitude, thought to himself, "She's proven that she can handle the pressure over and over again at big events."

And now it was all down to one run to prove it.

"I was thinking podium," Mancuso revealed afterward, "not so much gold, but definitely I would have loved gold."

Who knows what happens in that singular moment when a competitor digs deep down and discovers the heart of a champion is beating inside her chest?

Mancuso did it in the span of 1 minute, 8.30 seconds, launching

herself into the face of all those expectations and down the hill.

Skiing last among the 30 contenders in the second run, she carefully picked her way down a slope so blanketed by fresh snow that workers lining the hill had to repaint the blue course lines between each skier.

Mancuso's first run was aggressive enough to build a .18-second lead over Anja Paerson of Sweden. This time, though, she had to decide on the fly where to take the risks and where to play it safe.

Barely 10 minutes after Mancuso had locked up the gold, her family, friends and coaches milled about, all of them offering a different theory on when they had seen this coming. Her father, Ciro, talked about catching up to his daughter a day earlier and finding her angry that U.S. women had failed to climb even one podium in four previous Alpine events.

"She knew today she had to do it," Ciro said. "This was going to be their last chance."

Andrea, meanwhile, was retelling the stories about what a hard-nosed competitor little Julia had been when someone asked

about a particularly tough stretch in their lives.

In 1995, Ciro Mancuso pleaded guilty to running a marijuana smuggling ring for two decades. Julia was 5 when authorities walked into the family's home six years before and arrested her father. He wound up serving just less than five years and was released in 2000.

How much those days toughened Julia up is impossible to say. But when Andrea turned back to answer the question, she left few doubts that her daughter steeled herself long ago to take a look deep inside.

"Circumstances in childhood made her a tough human being. They taught her to focus," Andrea Mancuso added, "how to be ready when things got tough."

And then she paused. The still-driving snow pelted her cheeks, melting alongside dried tears.

"And just look," Andrea said, her face brightening, "at the conditions today."

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'Idol' beats Olympics in TV ratings

The Associated Press

NEW YORK

"American Idol" did a number again on the Olympics in terms of viewers Thursday, but the big winner from one of television's most competitive nights in memory may be the viewers themselves.

With choices that included the culmination of the women's figure-skating competition at the Olympics and three of television's most popular nonfiction shows, an estimated 11 million more people watched TV than normally would on a Thursday night, according to preliminary Nielsen Media Research estimates.

About 25 million people watched the Olympics in prime time Thursday. That preliminary number does not include the 11 to midnight hour when the medal-winning skating performances were shown, so it is likely to increase.

Women's figure skating typically is the most popular Winter Olympics event among viewers. While no TV executive would dismiss something that draws that many viewers, it still remains that a once-every-four-years event had a smaller audience than a typical "American Idol" episode.

A special Thursday edition of "Idol" was seen by 23.1 million people between 8 and 9 p.m., compared to 17.7 million for the Olympics and 14.8 million each for "Survivor" and "Dancing With the Stars" in that hour, Nielsen said.

CBS' "Survivor" was a competitive casualty; those preliminary numbers represent the smallest audience ever for an original episode of the long-running game.

After "Idol" went off the air, the audience improved for both the Olympics and "Dancing With the Stars." Overall, ABC's "Dancing" had an audience of 17.7 million for its two-hour broadcast.

• Games

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

who left after the first day with a groin injury.

Before the games started, Scherr said the Americans had the potential to match or surpass the record 34 medals from Salt Lake City. He also frequently pointed out that teams competing at an Olympics after their country hosted one traditionally experienced a 41 percent drop.

The U.S. team will do better than that and still has a chance to win the overall medal count. But other countries, most notably Canada and Russia, are doing better this time.

In retrospect, Scherr said the USOC probably had no business shooting for 34 medals.

Asked to grade his team, Scherr handed out the B-plus, "but that could turn into an A-plus because we can still win the gold-medal count and the total-medal count in these games, which would be an incredible feat."

Less impressive were a few off-the-field episodes that made some Americans look petty and unfocused.

The tiff between speedskaters Shani Davis and Chad Hedrick after they won silver and bronze in the men's 1,500 made for great theater. But aren't these guys supposed to be teammates?

Lindsey Jacobellis' hotdog move at the end of snowboard-cross cost her a gold medal and sparked a debate about whether these snowboarders understand the true gravitas of the Olympic



Bronze medalist snowboarder Rosie Fletcher has been one of the United States' pleasant surprises during the Turin Winter Olympic Games.

games, or whether the so-called Olympic community simply takes itself too seriously.

Bode Miller's poor performance on the slope was matched by some apres-ski activities that didn't look so great, tweaking his ankle while playing pickup basketball and being spotted late at night at The Irish Igloo, a popular drinking establishment in Sestriere.

Scherr defended Jacobellis and wouldn't get specific about anyone else. He said the USOC needs to do a better job of spelling out what's right and wrong for athletes who come to the Olympics with the name "United States" emblazoned across their chests.

"We don't want to second-guess what people do," Scherr said. "But at certain points, if certain behavior becomes a distraction to teammates or reflects poorly on the entire U.S. Olympic team, we want to step in and take some action."

Scherr said the USOC might encourage national governing

bodies to use sports psychologists to help athletes prepare for the fishbowl the Winter Olympics have become.

They have always been the "baby" Olympics compared to the Summer Games, but with 10,000 credentialed media, about four reporters for every athlete, this is certainly no regular stop on the World Cup.

The Olympic stage may have been too big for some athletes.

The U.S. Ski Team headed into the weekend with only two medals in Alpine, well short of the goal of eight.

Over at freestyle, Toby Dawson's bronze was the only American medal. The U.S. coach thought three golds were within reach.

Scherr said television ratings back in the States also were disappointing.

"TV ratings, particularly in the U.S. market, are critical to the long-term cause of the movement," Scherr said.

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