

What the Olympics mean to me

If there is one thing the Olympics has taught me, it's not the obvious, "reach for my dreams" or even the words to the song "Simply the Best," it's taught me that I am inexcusably self-involved.

The Olympics aren't about ME. I know that.

They're about athletes achieving the highest level in their sport. They're about countries coming together to participate in an event that has spanned thousands of years. Thousands, I say! Hercules himself would be astounded at the spectacle of athletic mastery of the modern games.

So why do the Olympics just make me think about me?

When I watch the athletes' precision, grace and strength, I think, "Where do I fit in here? Why am I so staggeringly common?" But, admittedly, the years of unrelenting practice and early start time immediately exclude me for any real attempt at greatness. Still I wonder, if they had the Olympics of the average achiever, would I shine then?

Now there's a competition that doesn't make me want to fake an ankle sprain. Bob Costas could interview me on my macaroni and cheese making ability. "You have an innate ability to mix just the right amount of milk and butter, how did you hone that skill?" He'd ask as the fireplace crackled behind us. "Well Bob," I'd answer after a moment of reflection, "I was a latchkey child in the '70s..."

The other question that haunts me when I watch the Olympics is this: What if the one thing in life I could do perfectly, my genius, was in, but I never find that out because I haven't ever picked up a snowboard in my life? The idea that I might have missed my calling pops up in almost every category of competition.

Watching the Olympics can be—if you like to torment yourself in these ways—the ultimate ghost-of-Christmas-past experience. “You shouldn’t have listened to your seventh-grade P.E. teacher (slash social studies teacher). Your ‘lame’ stride would have made you a star speed walker,” the ghost shakes his head while we watch an old Super 8-scene of me spastically running down the track in a pair of Keds.

Darn you Mr. Pratt! Darn you and your Dolphin shorts (slash clip-on tie).

What if I have missed my opportunity of grandeur by not committing my life to be an Olympic coxswain? I know, I’m too tall to be a coxswain, and what about that? You hear it all the time, “Phelps has the genetically perfect body for swimming.” What is my body perfectly build for? I know it’s not J.Crew swimming suits. I know it’s not walking all day at Disneyland in flip flops. So what then?

The unanswerable questions just pile one on top of the other while the self-involved watches the Olympics.

There are the moments of pure brilliance and glory, when tears fill my eyes as the announcer is able to put into words the magnificence of the moment and I think... “I shouldn’t have dropped out of broadcasting school.” Arr, I’m doing it again.