

THE ROAD TO THE WINTER OLYMPICS

Introduction



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Focus

After seven years of planning and preparation, the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics are finally here. This *News in Review* story looks at how Canadian organizers, athletes, and some members of the public worked for—and against—the Games' success.

Quote

"My only concern about [Vancouver] now is that their Games might be better than my Games in Lillehammer."
— Gerhard Heiberg, CEO of the organizing committee of the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, considered by many to be the best Winter Games ever staged (*The Globe and Mail*, October 8, 2009)

For only the third time in history, Canada is hosting the Olympic Games. Vancouver is now the centre of one of the biggest televised events of 2010.

On the whole, preparations for the Games have gone well. All venues were completed well ahead of schedule. The Olympic Village is one of the most attractive in recent history—well on its way to becoming a Vancouver landmark. Ticket sales have exceeded expectations. Applications to fill the thousands of volunteer positions were three times the number of positions available. The highway between the two main venues, Vancouver and Whistler, has been widened to accommodate additional traffic. A new public transit line links Vancouver International airport with the downtown. Vancouver is ready.

Canada's athletes are also ready. Own the Podium, a program begun in 2005 to improve Canadian medal chances in Vancouver, has funnelled increased funding into development and training for competitors. Another program, Top Secret, has used new technologies to refine training methods and develop new equipment. Canada's goals are simple: to win more medals than any other country at the Olympics and to place among the top three gold medal winners at the Paralympic Games.

For Discussion

It's probably fair to admit that \$3-billion is a lot of money for a country the size of Canada to spend on hosting an athletic event. Do you feel it is worth it? Are there advantages that come to Canada from hosting such an event? Could the money be better spent elsewhere?

However, some of the preparations have not been without controversy. Construction cost overruns have been significant, especially at the Olympic Village. Taxpayers could be on the hook for millions of dollars and therefore paying for the Games for years to come.

Local civil rights associations have objected to some legislation and bylaws associated with the Games that they consider to be attacks on free speech and civil rights. Some Aboriginal groups, despite the official presence of four First Nations as hosts of the Games, object to the Olympics taking place on traditional lands.

Security at the Games has also been a concern. The price for the security forces, originally estimated at \$175-million, is now expected to be nearly \$1-billion. In a time of recession, there are many Canadians who argue that this money could have been better spent elsewhere.

The final cost of the Games is estimated by most observers to be in the range of \$3- to \$4-billion. Whether or not the Olympics are worth that kind of outlay is a topic that will likely be argued long after the Games are over. The response of many Canadians to that question may well depend on our athletes' final medal totals.

THE ROAD TO THE WINTER OLYMPICS

Video Review

Answer the questions in the spaces provided.

1. When did Vancouver win its bid to host the 2010 Olympics?

2. What was the estimated cost of building new facilities and renovating existing ones?

3. For how long have Canadian athletes had a “home field” advantage in training for the Olympics?

4. What was the percentage increase in construction costs at the Olympic venues?

5. What arguments were protestors against the Games, and average citizens, making?

6. What is the anticipated cost for security at the Games?

7. How long did it take Montreal to pay off its debt from the 1976 Olympic Games?

8. What are some of the problems that have been generated by the government’s attempt to get the homeless off Vancouver’s streets?

9. How have local businesses been coping with these problems?

10. a) How many people carried the Olympic torch?

b) How many kilometres did they travel?

11. What materials are being used (in place of snow) to build some of the snowboarding courses?

For Discussion

1. Security costs for the Games were originally estimated at \$175-million. It is now believed that they will come in at close to \$1-billion. Why do you think the original estimate might have been so much lower?

2. An opinion poll held in October 2009 asked Canadians if they were excited about the upcoming Olympic Games. Among Canadians, 54 per cent said they were either not very excited or not excited at all. Only 14 per cent said they were very excited. In British Columbia, 71 per cent of those surveyed said they were not very excited or not excited at all. Nine per cent said they were very excited.

How would you explain these results? Shouldn't the hosts of the Olympics be the most excited people in the country?

3. Many Olympics observers have said that Vancouver 2010 has the potential to be the most successful Winter Olympics ever. What would you say are the components of a successful Winter Olympics?

THE ROAD TO THE WINTER OLYMPICS

Gearing Up for the Games

Definition

The term *carbon neutral* means that if you add polluting emissions to the atmosphere, you can effectively subtract them by purchasing “carbon offsets.” Carbon offsets are credits for emission reductions achieved by projects such as wind farms, solar installations, or energy efficiency retrofits. You can purchase these credits and apply them to your own emissions to reduce your net climate impact.

Further Research

The Web site of Millennium Water (the Olympic Village) is at www.millenniumwater.com. The City of Vancouver’s Web site for the Olympic Village is at <http://vancouver.ca/olympicvillage/index.htm>.

Preparing for the 2010 Winter Olympics has required hard work by thousands of people. Venues for the various sports needed to be rebuilt or renovated. Housing for the athletes had to be constructed. Efficient transportation for athletes and spectators had to be assured. Security for the Games was a special concern. All these preparations were further complicated by the Vancouver Organizing Committee’s (VANOC) desire to make the Games themselves carbon neutral. In this section we look at some of the challenges faced by the organizers in preparing for the competitions.

Facilities

In 2006, Rod Mickleburgh—the former British Columbia deputy minister of transportation—took over as director of the Games construction program. Working with a \$580-million budget (construction costs were initially budgeted at \$470-million), Mickleburgh pushed contractors hard. The Olympic venues were finished a full year ahead of time, and within budget. For two years, athletes were able to train in the very facilities in which they would compete during the Olympic Games.

Not all construction projects went as smoothly as Mickleburgh’s. The Olympic Village in Vancouver turned into a major headache for both VANOC and Vancouver city council. The property, known as Millennium Water, was planned to be sold as a mixed-income residential community after the Games. The cost of constructing the village soon went \$100-million over budget, and the private companies financing the development refused to advance additional money to the

developer. The city was forced to take over financing because it had guaranteed the village to the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

By this point, taxpayers in Vancouver had advanced about \$850-million for the Village and provided another \$320-million for roads and other public projects. The energy-efficient Village was completed and delivered to VANOC on schedule. The developers are optimistic that construction costs will be recovered and the loan paid back when the condominium units are sold after the Games. However, units planned as low-cost public housing may end up also being sold as condominiums.

Security

At the 1972 Munich Olympics, gunmen opened fire and killed a number of Israeli athletes. Ever since that tragedy, security has been a major concern for Games organizers. Vancouver’s security detail was massive and included 1 800 police officers, 5 200 RCMP officers, and thousands of military personnel. In addition, 5 000 temporary security personnel were recruited and trained by Contemporary Security Canada, a new company put together by Aeroguard Group, a private security firm. It joined with a U.S. firm and a second Canadian company to win the job of staffing checkpoints and monitoring metal detectors at all Olympic venues.

When Vancouver first bid for the Games, security costs were estimated at about \$175-million. Costs are now expected to be almost \$1-billion.

Workers

VANOC faced a major task in finding about 55 000 workers and volunteers to

Further Research

The Sea-to-Sky Highway Improvement Project has its own Web site at www.th.gov.bc.ca/seatosky/index.htm.

help with the Games. In October, some of the paid positions—ranging from cooks and cleaners to drivers—remained vacant; housing for workers from outside the area is hard to find. But there was no shortage of volunteers. There were 70 000 applications for the 25 000 positions advertised. VANOC also asked for, and received, 1 500 skilled volunteers from the private sector.

Transportation

Getting to and from Olympic venues will have a huge effect on how spectators and athletes view the Games. If transportation is slow or difficult to manage, people will have a poor impression of the Games. Many steps have been taken to make travel as efficient as possible, both in Vancouver and on the road to Whistler.

The biggest transportation project was the widening and improving of the Sea-to-Sky Highway between Vancouver and Whistler. This \$600-million engineering project has dramatically improved access to the Olympic sites outside Vancouver

proper. During the Games, only public transportation will be allowed into these sites; no private parking will be available.

To make getting around Vancouver easier during the Games, the city has asked its residents to change the way they travel—and when they travel. Residents are encouraged to leave their cars at home, and companies have been asked to change their hours so employees travel at times other than those when Olympic events are taking place.

In short, when the Games began, Vancouver was ready. Despite the economic downturn and some disappointments with sponsorship funding, VANOC ensured that everything was in place to guarantee success. They had a plan for almost every eventuality. Even a lack of snow at Cypress Mountain, the site for freestyle skiing and snowboarding events, was anticipated. The solution: bring snow from the top of the mountain down to the competition sites.

Follow-up Activity

One of the Vancouver 2010 official sponsors is Offsetters, a Vancouver company that provides ways in which individuals and corporations can reduce their carbon footprint. Travellers to the Vancouver Olympics can pay an amount of money toward an Offsetters project to neutralize the carbon they create by their travels.

1. How much would it cost you to travel to Vancouver and pay Offsetters to eliminate your carbon debt? Use the calculator at www.offsetters.ca/2010-travel-and-accommodation-calculator to figure it out.
2. How successful do you think Offsetters' efforts will be in attracting participants to their program?

THE ROAD TO THE WINTER OLYMPICS

The Cost of the Games

Further Research
The Vancouver 2010
Integrated Security
Unit Web site is at
<http://bc.rcmp.ca>.

Hosting an Olympic competition has become very expensive. Communities that take on responsibility for the Games cross their fingers and hope to break even. They dream of—and occasionally do realize—an “economic dividend” in the form of an improved international profile and an increase in investment and tourism.

Often, however, there are surprises waiting to trip up organizers’ plans. For example, construction cost overruns created a deficit for the 1976 Summer Games in Montreal that took the city 30 years to pay off. On the other hand, the 1988 Calgary Winter Games actually operated at a profit.

Stephen Brunt said in an article in *The Globe and Mail*, on January 15, 2009:

“Even in good times, there is always the issue of who pays the tab for the Games and whether it can be justified. Invariably someone is left holding the bag, and invariably that is not the International Olympic Committee, which has cleverly structured its business model to make sure others assume all of the risk.

“That’s the Olympics.

“This is also the Olympics, the beautiful part, the fantasy part, the patriotic-hearts-a-beating part that during the 17 days of the Games tends to make all of those earthly worries at least temporarily vanish.”

Vancouver’s Facilities

Vancouver has had its share of problems. Construction cost overruns have been a constant problem. It is estimated that new competition facilities built by the city have cost about \$45-million more than the city had budgeted. The total cost of renewing existing venues and building

new ones, including those at Whistler and Cypress Mountain, was almost \$600-million.

But the biggest problem for Vancouver has been where the athletes are housed: the Olympic Village. The Village was designed as a new waterfront development, a complete neighbourhood of condominium units that will be sold or rented after the Games. The city chose a private developer for the project. As the costs of building the Village rose rapidly, the developer was denied increased funding by its private backer. The city was forced to take on the full financing of the \$1-billion project, which is now at least \$100-million over budget. The Village was completed on schedule, but it remains to be seen whether the full costs will be recoverable when the units are sold later this year.

Security

When Vancouver bid for the Olympics in 2003, security costs were estimated at \$175-million. It is now estimated that the security operation, which will involve more than 12 000 people—police, RCMP, military, and private security personnel—will cost nearly \$1-billion.

Security needs also contributed to construction costs. About \$40-million was spent to build military camps along the Sea-to-Sky Highway connecting Vancouver and Whistler.

VANOC’s Operating Budget

The Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) created an operating budget of \$1.62-billion to run the Games. This is in addition to construction and security costs. VANOC anticipated raising this money through ticket sales, merchandise sales, and sponsorship deals.

The sponsors were to include 11 major contributors provided by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Unfortunately, the economic downturn led to the withdrawal of several sponsors, and the IOC was only able to obtain nine of the 11. This meant a shortfall of \$30-million for VANOC. And while ticket and merchandise sales exceeded expectations, revenue from outdoor advertising has been millions of dollars less than anticipated.

Part of VANOC's budget was a contingency fund of \$100-million; about half of this is left. In a rare concession, the IOC has said that, should VANOC's budget not balance at the end of the Games, they will be coming forward with specific support.

Transportation

To help obtain the Games for Vancouver, the B.C. government promised to make major improvements to the Sea-to-Sky Highway between Vancouver and Whistler. The cost of this project is generally reported as \$600-million, but a former B.C. auditor-general has estimated the real cost at \$1.98-billion. In any event, the provincial government does not include the cost of highway or urban transit improvements as part of its contribution to the Games.

The Actual Cost

Coming up with a final figure on what the Games cost taxpayers is not easy to do. The total depends on the answers to several questions, including:

- Did VANOC stay within its budget?
- Will the sale of condominium units at the Olympic Village recover the money invested?
- Are the three governments involved in the Games reporting all of the costs associated with hosting the event?

We do know some things for sure. The federal government has committed more than \$1.2-billion to the Olympics, mostly for security. The provincial government says its contribution is \$600-million, a figure that the auditor-general believes fails to include all the real costs associated with hosting the Games. Construction cost overruns have cost the City of Vancouver at least \$45-million; these could be much higher if the costs associated with the Olympic Village are not recovered.

Most observers currently estimate the total cost to taxpayers—Canadians, British Columbians and Vancouverites—at anywhere from \$3- to \$4-billion.

THE ROAD TO THE WINTER OLYMPICS

The Controversies of the Games

Did you know . . .

Many First Nations anti-Olympics groups are part of the Olympics Resistance Network (ORN) and will be actively protesting during the Games. Its Web site is at olympicresistance.net.

The Olympic Games have often been surrounded by controversy.

In some cases the controversy involves specific events. The quality of hockey refereeing and figure skating judging are two topics that have caused disputes during the Games. Vancouver had its own sport controversy even before the Games opened.

Women's Ski Jumping

Ski jumping is the only winter Olympic sport that does not have a competition for both men and women. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has long argued that there are not enough high-quality competitors in women's ski jumping to justify holding an Olympic competition in the sport.

As one might imagine, women who do compete in ski jumping strongly object to this attitude. In an attempt to force VANOC, the Vancouver Organizing Committee, to include women's ski jumping in the Games, several athletes from Canada and the United States brought a lawsuit in a British Columbia court. They argued that VANOC was violating the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They asked the court to require VANOC to hold a women's competition or to cancel the men's event.

The British Columbia Supreme Court ruled against the women, accepting the argument that Olympic competitions are determined by the IOC, not VANOC, and are not subject to Charter rights. The athletes appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada, but in December the Court refused to hear the appeal.

Aboriginal Lands

Other controversies recently in the news have nothing to do with individual

sporting events. They deal with the impact of Vancouver's hosting of the Games on the lives of the people who live in the area.

Four First Nation peoples (the Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh) have joined with VANOC to host the Games. This marks the first time Aboriginal peoples have been full partners in organizing and conducting an Olympics.

Not all Aboriginal people see this as a positive development. Many argue that the land on which many of the competitions are being held is traditional native land, stolen from them. Others argue that the billions of dollars spent on the Olympics could have been better spent helping with the social and economic problems that plague First Nations peoples across the country.

Civil Rights and Free Speech

Many British Columbia civil rights and free speech activists have become alarmed by recent legislation and regulations passed by the municipal and provincial governments.

These include the Assistance to Shelter Act, a law giving police the right to force homeless people into shelters during bad weather. Police argue that the law is needed to help them protect the lives of the homeless, who are also often suffering from mental illness. Critics, who refer to the law as the "Olympic Kidnapping Act," argue that the law will be used to hide the homeless during the Olympics and will turn shelters into jails and their workers into guards.

Also under attack is a municipal bylaw that states: "During the Games period . . . a person . . . must not distribute any advertising material or install or carry any sign unless licensed to do so by the

Further Research

The *Protesters' Guide* is available online at www.lrwc.org/documents/Civil.Disobedience.Guide.November.20.2009.F.pdf.

city” (*The Globe and Mail*, October 9, 2009). The bylaw also forbids any sign that is not a “celebratory sign”—meaning, if people do put up a sign about the Olympics, it must be one that supports the Games. In addition, no one may “cause any disturbance . . . interfering with the enjoyment of entertainment on city land by other persons,” and no one may possess “voice amplification equipment” on city property, for the duration of the Games.

The city has tried to reassure civil rights advocates that the bylaw is not intended to take away civil liberties but rather is meant to assist bylaw officers in dealing rapidly with anyone who is not a legitimate Games sponsor but tries to use the Games as an advertising platform.

Activists have their doubts. As early as June 2009, activists were complaining that the RCMP’s Integrated Security Unit was using questionable tactics, including badgering friends and family members, to intimidate anti-Olympic activists.

IOCC

The Impact on Community Coalition (<http://iocc.ca>) was formed after

Vancouver won the Olympic bid. It describes itself as “an independent, non-partisan, and community-based coalition that is dedicated to maximizing the positive impacts of the 2010 Vancouver/Whistler Olympic Games for the host city and surrounding regions, while minimizing the negative impacts.” The IOCC works with VANOC to minimize the impact of the Games on civil rights—especially those of the poor—and free speech.

One of the ways in which the IOCC communicates with the public is by issuing a “report card.” The April 2009 report card (available at iocc.ca/documents/2009-04-19_IOCC_2ndInterimReportCard.pdf) gave VANOC, the governments, and the RCMP a grade of D-, mostly for their failures to protect civil rights. A second report card will be issued soon.

Anticipating problems with the protection of civil rights at the Vancouver Games, Leo McGrady of Lawyers’ Rights Watch Canada, has prepared the *Protesters’ Guide to the Law of Civil Disobedience in British Columbia, November 20, 2009, Olympic Edition*.

Follow-up

The information in this feature is only an introduction to a few of the controversies that have swirled around the Vancouver Olympic Games. You may choose to investigate one of the following controversies associated with the Games. These include:

- The impact of the Games on Whistler and the surrounding area
- Free-speech restrictions on the artists of the Cultural Olympiad
- Low-income housing and the future of the Olympic Village
- Canada House—the Canadian Olympic Pavilion—constructed by an American company
- The Vancouver Symphony’s refusal to appear at the opening ceremony of the Games

THE ROAD TO THE WINTER OLYMPICS

Own the Podium

Quote

"Then there is the performance of the host team. Winning medals creates a frisson [a shiver] that courses through the crowds, the volunteers, the entire nation. When the home team bombs it leaves everyone asking: What was the point?" — Gary Mason, *The Globe and Mail*, December 15, 2009

Further Research

The Own the Podium Web site is at www.ownthepodium2010.com.

The members of the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) are not the only Canadians who have been gearing up for the Games. So have the athletes and the members of the various governing sports bodies to which the athletes belong. Many of them have been preparing with the generous financial assistance of Canada's Own the Podium program.

For many Canadians, the real success of the Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games will depend on how well our athletes perform and how many medals they win. Canada currently has the dubious distinction of being the only country to ever host an Olympics—summer or winter—where the host country failed to win a gold medal. This has happened twice: in Montreal in 1976 and in Calgary in 1988. Olympic organizers would very much like Vancouver 2010 to destroy this record.

Own the Podium was launched in 2005 as an attempt to guarantee the greatest possible success for Canada's athletes at the 2010 Vancouver Games. It was supported by all of the winter sports governing organizations, as well as the major sources of funding for Canadian athletes. These include Sport Canada, the Canadian Olympic Committee, the Canadian Paralympic Committee, and VANOC. Its specific goal is to ensure that Canada's athletes win more medals than any other country at the 2010 Olympic Games and that Canada place in the top three for gold medals at the 2010 Paralympic Games.

A similar program, Road to Excellence, was created in 2006 to improve Canadians' chances at the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing.

Its goal, a 16th-place finish in overall medals at the 2008 Games, was met when Canada finished tied for 13th. Road to Excellence was renamed Own the Podium. The goal for the 2012 Summer Games in London is a 12th-place finish in total medals for the Olympics and an 8th-place finish at the Paralympic Games.

It works this way: Own the Podium makes recommendations to national funding parties on the amount of resources allocated to targeted winter and summer national sport organizations, Canadian Sport Centres, innovation and research, and other needed programs. It then monitors the implementation of the targeted national sport organizations' high-performance programs to ensure maximum performance results and intervenes where necessary.

Partly because of this focused approach, Own the Podium's Olympic funding has increased dramatically in preparation for the Vancouver 2010 Olympics and Paralympics. In the four years prior to the 2006 Turin Games, Own the Podium invested \$14-million in 15 Olympic sports and \$1.5-million in four Paralympic sports. For the 2012 Vancouver Games, Own the Podium's four-year investment rose to almost \$70-million for 17 sports, and \$10-million for the same four Paralympic sports. The amounts range from \$35 000 for nordic combined to \$8.7-million for alpine skiing.

For Paralympic sports the sums range from \$1-million for wheelchair curling to \$4.6-million for para alpine (www.ownthepodium2010.com/Funding/comparison.aspx).

Not all Canadian Olympic winter athletes are funded by Own the Podium. Only certain athletes have been targeted.

Further Research

A 2009-2010 breakdown of funding by sport, including the names of the targeted athletes for each sport, is available at www.ownthepodium2010.com/Funding/winter_sports.aspx.

Others, like those of nordic combined, which mixes cross-country skiing and ski jumping, receive no support from the program. Canada's team, with only one experienced member, is considered a non-contender for medals. Its members are ineligible for financing by Own the Podium, and the sport organization itself has received minimal financial support.

Top Secret

Top Secret is the name given to a program combining technology and physiological training in an attempt to give Canadian athletes a competitive edge at the 2010 Games. In past competitions, Canadian athletes often felt they were at a disadvantage against more generously funded competitors. But over the past five years \$8-million in funding by Own the Podium has been spent on 55 different projects aimed at making the 2010 advantage a Canadian one.

The program was indeed kept secret, and it was only just before the Olympics that some of the details were released to the press. Researchers and designers wanted to be sure that competitors would not have the time to duplicate any of the equipment they had developed.

Maclean's was one of the first news sources to break the Top Secret story

For Discussion

Own the Podium has become the major source of increased funding for Canadian athletes. Do you think it will continue to be of primary importance once the Vancouver Games are over? Will its future depend on whether Canada meets its Olympic and Paralympic goals?

(www2.macleans.ca/2010/01/12/olympic-secrets-revealed/), and it listed some of the technological breakthroughs available to Canadians at the Games.

These include:

- Snowboards with super low-friction bases and a revolutionary composite plate for bindings
- A computerized database that helps alpine skiers choose the best skis, waxes, and base grinds for any conditions
- An adjustable sit ski for para-alpine skiers that has already given Canadians three world championship titles in 2009
- A new skater's skin suit that is so good at cutting friction that speed skaters expect it to be the fastest suit at the competition

These and other technological breakthroughs, combined with new ways of training, make Canadian athletes believe that "owning the podium" is more than just a possibility.

Own the Podium has already been credited for some significant improvements in Canadian athletic performances. Since its inception, Canada has won an impressive number of World Cups and World Championships.

THE ROAD TO THE WINTER OLYMPICS

Activity: Time to Rethink the Games?

Vancouver 2010 is the third time that Canada has hosted the Olympics. It is likely that it will not be the last time a Canadian city will want to bid to host the Games.

Proponents of the Olympics have many arguments in favour of hosting:

- The Olympics bring prestige to the city and country that host them.
- Hosting often leads to an increase in tourism before, during, and after the Games.
- Jobs are created, especially in the construction industry.
- Hosting leads to civic improvements via new facilities for sport, public spaces, and transportation.
- Hosting the Games gives a boost to the country's athletic programs.
- As was the case in Calgary, the Games can break even or make money.

Opponents of the Games argue:

- Money spent hosting the Olympics could be better spent elsewhere, especially on social programs.
- The Games are disruptive for the community hosting them, especially given the security measures required to keep participants safe.
- Jobs created by the Olympics are temporary.
- Facilities built for the Olympics, built under time constraints, are often more expensive than other building projects.
- Support for athletic programs often falls off after the Games are over.
- As was the case in Montreal, the Games can lose millions of dollars.

Your Task

Consider the following proposal: "Resolved, that Canadian cities no longer be allowed to bid for future Summer or Winter Olympic Games." Would you support or argue against this policy?

Prepare a short (no more than one page) position paper stating your position on this subject. Give specific reasons why you agree or disagree with the proposal. These may include some of the above arguments, as well as your personal observations during Vancouver 2010.