

Can 2010 boost civic pride like Vancouver?

 By [Dr Nikolaus Eberl](#)

9 Mar 2010

When the Olympic flame was extinguished in the cauldron and the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games were officially declared closed by IOC President Jacques Rogge, commentators were unanimous in declaring the hosting nation the biggest winner.

[Said Iain Macintyre](#) from the *Vancouver Sun*: "To be honest, it's not the Winter Games themselves I'll miss but the emotion and patriotism that spilled from Canadians like a dam burst, unleashed by two weeks of a lack of inhibition towards our country and each other. For me, the Games were about our city and our country, about us and our identity and a collective self-assurance only loosely connected to winning medals."

A nation inspiring her team

"Yet, for all these achievements - an Olympic winter record of 14 gold medals for Canada - it didn't seem so much the athletes inspiring a nation as the nation inspiring them. Even when Canada was winning little the first week of the Games, a contagious energy and pride was already crackling across the host city and host resort."

Interestingly, Macintyre pinned the ["transfer of this positive, powerful energy"](#) down to one single moment, which occurred exactly one week after the opening ceremony, at a time when Canadian athletes had fared poorly and the whole nation was desperately waiting for Gold.

The moment arrived when little-known skeleton racer Jon Montgomery, having conquered the event, walked off the Blackcomb gondola and strode through Whistler village on his way to a television interview, ["high-fiving and cheering along"](#) with fans before grabbing a pitcher of beer and, without breaking stride, quaffing about a pint of our national drink."

According to Macintyre, this very moment turned out to be the tipping point for unparalleled civic pride amongst Canadians, [concluding that](#) "either Montgomery was one of us or we were lots of him, but the distinction between athletes and fans was dissolved and the Games at that moment became about all of us."

Nation-building at its best

Much of the talk surrounding the games centred around Canada's ["Own The Podium"](#) programme, a training and funding plan designed to get local athletes to the top. At first the programme was the subject of mockery and scorn - especially from the foreign press. But even in Canada, it received its share of scepticism and doubt.

However, after winning more gold medals than any country ever has at the winter Olympics, the [editor of *The Concordian Daily*](#) declared that "Canada has proven that in sports - as in everything - Canadians compete and win against the best in the world. This display of athletic success has triggered a large outpouring of national pride, of a kind that we are too often unfamiliar with."

Incoming Canadian Olympic Committee president Marcel Aubut [concurred that](#) "this was nation-building at its best."

Punching above her weight

[Tyson Lowrie from *The Concordian*](#) put the outburst in patriotism into perspective: "We Canadians tend to think of our country as a middling nation that occasionally punches above its weight. We may be a smallish nation, but we are certainly one of the richest and most powerful... It is only in comparison to our southern neighbour that we seem weak. Our

perception of ourselves is shaped largely by geography. And perhaps it's time for us Canadians to stop being so modest."

Numbering only 33 million people, Canada ranks as the 36th largest country in terms of population, but 15th in terms of her GDP. [Continues Lowrie](#): "Our country was born less than 150 years ago, and the idea of Canadian identity is even younger. It was not until 1947 that Canadians became citizens of this country and stopped being British subjects. It was not until 1982 that we received our own constitution, that what we now see as fundamental Canadian values were enshrined as our most basic law."

"Perhaps it is silly to generalize 30 million people with superlatives, but Canada truly is one of the greatest nations on earth. What the hell, we're the best."

The games that changed a nation

Canada's [National Post Daily](#) summed up the Vancouver Olympics as "a moment where Canadians seemed to transform themselves. The flags worn as capes, the maple leaf face paint, the red and white riot of good feelings - it felt, in this country, like something new."

Added Vancouver Organising Committee CEO [John Furlong](#): "What's happened, is all of these things together have caused a different kind of patriotism to break out here, and it's beautiful to look at, and that as a whole for me is the prize... There has been a euphoria here, and a change. Something has happened, and it's not just in Vancouver, it's all over the country."

"I think the country has taken a different position around these Games. They have not been spectators, they have lived every moment with us. And I think that is something that we can be proud of. I'm not sure how you describe that in a banner headline, but I'd like to think that this has been a great human occasion for the country."

What does it mean to be Canadian?

One reader, nicknamed Rivermaniac from Steveston, British Columbia, [expressed her feelings thus](#): "In my opinion, Canadian patriotism says 'We Love Canada - Welcome!' - because as Canadians, we understand fully the importance of inclusion and tolerance. The Canadian Mosaic would come apart if not for those two 'glues'".

"This was demonstrated clearly in the way we attended and cheered at events where Canada was not a participant, or was not favoured to win any medals; and in the way we helped out visitors at every opportunity, and roared our support for the Georgian team at the opening ceremonies."

[Concludes Rivermaniac](#): "What does it mean to be Canadian? It means we love our country, and are willing and eager to share that love. As many commentators have said in the past few days, now we know how to show it."

Will 2010 bring about a South African love generation similar to the Canadian, and unearth the latent patriotism that has made this country famous on previous occasions?

ABOUT DR NIKOLAUS EBERL

Dr Nikolaus Eberl is the author of *BrandOvation™: How Germany won the World Cup of Nation Branding* and *The Hero's Journey: Building a Nation of World Champions*. He headed the Net Promoter Scorecard research project on SA's destination branding success story during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, co-authored the World Cup Brand Ambassador Program 'Welcome 2010' and was chairperson of the inaugural 2010 FAN World Cup. Email nikolaus@brandovation.com and follow [@nikolauseberl](https://twitter.com/nikolauseberl).

- Leadership lessons from the Iron Lady - 11 Apr 2013
- Lessons from Obama's presidential campaign - 8 Nov 2012
- Can SA restore investor confidence? - 18 Oct 2012
- Should SA bid for hosting 2020 Olympic Games? - 16 Aug 2011
- [2010 FIFA World Cup legacy] The true legacy of 2010 - part 2 - 8 Jul 2011

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>