

The Winter Olympics

The thrill of victory. The agony of defeat.

Where is Jim McKay when we so need him? The voices once respected seem to have been forever stilled.

What do the Olympics mean to those who are good enough (or bad enough) athletically to get there? Most of us cannot remember who won certain events at this year's Olympics or any before it. But, few have forgotten some of the most memorable scenes - winning or losing.

Helen Folasade Adu, known as singer Sade, recently released her first album in twenty years. She is best known for the single, *Smooth Operator*. Of Nigerian descent, she has lived in England most of her life. When she released a new album, she became international news once again. She was asked what it was like to be such a big star in small Clacton-on-Sea and she told the reporter she was not that sought after. She said tourists to her town wanted to meet and have their picture taken with Eddie "the Eagle."

Fans of earlier Olympics know who Eddie "the Eagle" Edwards is. Was. In 1988, he became the first entry from Great Britain in ski jumping at the Olympics. Better at speed skiing and stunt jumping, he nevertheless competed in the '88 Winter Olympics in Calgary, Alberta as a ski jumper. He became a ski jumper because it was cheaper and he would face no competition in Great Britain to make the Olympics field. He did not do well.

Eddie was 20 pounds heavier than other competitors, was self-funded and lacked training. He was also farsighted and had to wear his glasses when he jumped. They fogged up and he could not see where he was going. Even though he was Great Britain's best ski jumper, he finished dead last in both his events, the 70m and 90m jumps, at the Calgary Olympics. His ineptitude and personality endeared him to fans and at the closing ceremony, when the words, "and some of you have even soared like an eagle," were spoken, 100,000 chanted his name, "Eddie! Eddie!"

Even the greatest losers at the Olympics can become the greatest winners in life. And "Eddie the Eagle" is more in demand to tourists than the incomparable Sade.

Heartbreaking failure has been followed by heartwarming success - such was the case with Dan Jansen. Misjudgment has cost winners the gold medal. Some competitors somehow come back for two or three Olympics in sports that generally bring along younger competitors quickly. Some, like Eric Heiden and Apolo Anton Ohno brought attention to a sport heretofore ignored. Beautiful women in skiing and figure skating draw attention from better athletes in bobsledding and luge.

There is way too much television coverage but when we see the unrestrained joy and excitement on the face of Rachael Flatt, we are reminded of the positive contributions of the Winter Olympics.

City streets

As I drive around Cheyenne now, I'm reminded of my childhood. No, not because of the decay of the downtown or the emptiness of buildings that used to hold thriving businesses.

No, I'm reminded of something else.

As a boy, my dad was a woodworker. Not with a lathe - with a chain saw, a team of horses or caterpillars and trucks.

All of us in the family joined him in the woods when we were old enough. The youngest could help at about the age of 9 because the pulp sticks were to be 100" inches long and even a little guy could carry a "measuring pole." That was a slender sapling cut to 100" length and put along the fallen tree so the sawyer would know where to cut through the tree at the right length. I had an older brother who didn't like to take the time to measure so he "guessed" at 100 inches. Loads of his "guesses" would have sticks way too long (which would have to be cut off on the truck or box car) or too short. Speed was his goal, not accuracy.

Anyway, my dad would buy "stumpage" from the state, county or private owner and we would harvest the pulp or logs. He wasn't buying the land, just the standing timber. When done, we'd move on and the owner would have his land and our money. Popple (poplar, aspen, etc.), birch and jackpine would typically go as pulp - Norway pine, oak, elm, etc., would usually be logs. Use of the wood also had a bearing. Lumber. Cardboard. Etc.

We could either cut the trees in the woods and "skid" the sticks to a landing where they could be hauled to a box car or long distances to a mill or we could build our own "roads" and the truck(s) would navigate down through the cleared areas and load from "piles" of pulpwood that we would schlep to beside that road for loading.

Whether using a team of horses or a caterpillar or having the truck come into the woods to load, the roads had to be passable. By that, the stumps could not be too high or too sharp. Height would block the "scoot" and sharpness would puncture tires. So, we were road builders as well as timber producers. The larger logs couldn't be piled so they'd be dragged out of the woods by cables on a hydraulic drum. We'd hook "tongs" onto the end

of a 100" stick and pull it to the pile we'd made alongside the road (or built after a pile had been started) and lift it onto a pile so the truck would have the fewest number of stops to make a truckload.

At this point in Cheyenne, I am reminded of those woods roads because our roads were in better shape than city streets now.

We took pride in our "roads" because we wanted the truck loaded as quickly as possible, without incident or problem. The stumps could be large or small. But they had to be flat to the ground. A sapling chopped off with an axe could have an edge sharp as that axe and the first tire to hit it would explode. Tires weren't steel belted or puncture-proof at that time. And changing a tire in the woods would be an unpleasant and time-consuming effort and whoever had cleared that road would be challenged for intelligence and likely called unprintable names.

So, our roads were good roads.

Better roads, in fact, than many City streets right now.

Rain would create "potholes" in our roads, too. But we fixed 'em as soon as they occurred. To have one side of a truck tip into a hole might cost the load of peeled pulpwood. Reloading would first require repiling the sticks, then using the hydraulic loader to make a truckload again. We would fill the holes with dirt carried to it or with sticks to make kind of a "bridge". Anything to prevent a big drop on one side of the truck and dumping a load.

In town now, there are potholes deep enough to dump one of our loads. As it is, the damage is caused to our car's front end alignment - no loads are lost.

The tragedy is that, because of the wasteful spending of reserves over the past few years and the current state of the economy not providing an endless supply of revenue, little repair is anticipated in the near term and none is likely to occur.

You see cars and pickups slowing to a crawl in some areas - where they've learned the hard way that under that water is a deep hole. A drop-off that would have dumped a Featherly payload. We fixed roads in the woods to avoid catastrophe. They don't fix 'em here.

WOODHOUSE RODEN Law Firm

1912 Capitol Avenue, Suite 500
(American National Bank Bldg, Fifth Floor)



gaywoodhouselaw@aol.com



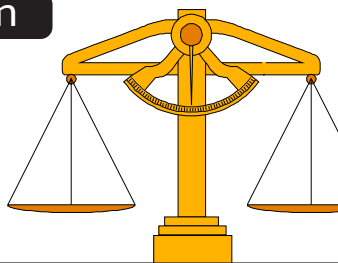
debb@woodhouseroden.com

www.gaywoodhouse.com

432-9399

FAX: 432-7522

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