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Guest Column:

The 'Olympic Ideal'... Looking for it in all the wrong places

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By *Stephen F. Gambescia*

The 30th Olympiad is complete and during these competitions there was no shortage of scholars, pundits, and the “average citizens” espousing that the Olympic Ideal is dead and “truth be told” by some historians never existed. The misnomer that so many of us are accused of harboring may not be self evident to the critics; for the Olympic Ideal is well beyond the sight of spectators and the media.

While I cannot speak as an Olympian, some of us have set this status as a goal at some time in our lives and at some level of participation. For each Olympian there are hundreds of athletes living the Ideal—just not as fast, high, and strong. The Olympic Ideal can be found...

- when everyone around you refers to you as a “child prodigy” and you are smart enough to know that there are many, many kids your age (just well beyond the neighborhood) that are going faster, higher, and stronger.
- when you forgo Prom because a championship game is the next morning.
- when you are up early before class so you can get in a “double” [workout].
- when you get up early to run on Christmas before the kids wake up, so they can still believe in Santa Claus.
- when you run on a Holiday knowing that it would be o.k. if you did not, but it makes it more fun to do so, because you really did not have to.

- when you are swimming along coastal waters through jelly fish and the comments from passersby are whether or not you are concerned about sharks.
- when you have missed many, many, family functions to work out (but not funerals) and are often not forgiven.
- when you hop out of the car 15-miles before the family vacation spot to get a run in, so you don't steal precious time from being with the group. (Are we there yet?)
- when you stop while running in a strange southwestern town to help someone change a flat tire in the 100 plus degree heat.
- when you barge into a small shop up north and ask for a pair of gloves to avoid frostbite and the shop owner trusts that you will repay her someday—"Just don't slip on the ice."
- when you are asked to save a struggling swimmer caught in a rip-tide because you are running by and seem to have decent oxygen exchange.

The Olympic Ideal is in the multiplicity of everyday events for those wanting to go faster, higher, and be a little stronger. Critics of the Olympic Ideal are looking in all the wrong places.

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