

## A lesson from the Olympics

I've been a fan of the Olympics since I was a pre-teen. My interest was heightened when I had the opportunity to attend several events during the 2002 games. Since 2002, I have contented myself by watching the games on television. I follow the Olympic games for the same reason most sports fans watch; to draw upon the cliché, I watch to see the "thrill of victory and the agony of defeat." From time to time, you also have the opportunity to witness an event that carries a lesson that transcends sport.

On Feb. 12, the women's downhill ski race ended in a tie. Tina Maze of Slovenia and Dominique Gisin of Switzerland finished the downhill courses with a time of 1 minute 41.57 seconds. Because the race is officially timed to a hundredth of a second, the race ended in a tie and both skiers were awarded gold medals. That has never happened before in the history of alpine Olympic ski competition. The fact that two skiers could cover a course of almost 2 miles in the same time is remarkable, and that fact makes the 2014 women's downhill an historic race. Yet for me, the most interesting part of this story is what took place behind the scenes.

In the timing booth, three race officials had actually timed the race to a 10,000th of a second. According to the computerized timer, one skier had a faster time than the other. However, the timers refused to reveal the times beyond a hundredth decimal point. What was their reason? Even though the computerized timing devices displayed numbers at

the 10,000th decimal point, the timers didn't have faith that these numbers were accurate. The best outcome was to call the race a tie, and their decision was supported by the rules of the International Ski Federation that oversees the Olympic alpine skiing event.

In our current era, it is refreshing to see someone question the limits of technology. Consider a few of the areas where we see increased faith and reliance placed upon technology. Public libraries struggle for funding because city and county officials believe that residents can find anything they need online. States believe they can cure the problems of the K-12 education by spending millions of dollars to give students iPads. Hollywood producers turn mediocre movies into blockbusters by showing them in 3D with Dolby Surround sound.

At a more troubling level, many believe that we do not need to concern ourselves with problems like water scarcity, overpopulation and climate change because at some point in time a technology will be invented to

save the day.

In the Hans Christian Andersen story "The Emperor's New Clothes" it took a child to point out the obvious. A few days ago in Sochi Russia three race officials reminded us that there are limits to what technology can do. That is an important lesson to take away from the 2014 Olympic Games.

### Top of Utah Voices



**Michael Vaughan**

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**Commentary**

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