

The 29th Summer Olympics are upon us. It is always an exciting time for me as I love to watch virtually any sport being performed by an athlete at his or her highest capacities. It is a two week period in which the world focuses on the spirit of competition and forgets about the other issues that abound. Though it sounds cliched, you do still see moments like Dara Torres holding up her swim final so that one of her competitors could change suits and be ready to compete. This was an amazing act of sportsmanship, and it seems like every Olympiad provides us with stories like this, along with the countless tales of personal struggle. Having worked at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, I know that this spirit of good will and fair competition does exist - and these tales of personal challenge are more the standard than the rarity.

There has been great debate over China hosting the Olympics - primarily due to issues of human rights and individual freedoms. Should the International Olympics Committee have chosen Beijing for the 2008 Olympics given that human rights are a key element of the Olympic movement?

But what this reminds me of is freedom - something that we do in fact enjoy in our own backyard.

Freedom is something that we talk about in this country quite regularly. It is something in which we take great pride. Oftentimes, it is something that we take for granted.

I recently went to Washington, D.C. for the first time and was finally able to see all of the memorials, the Mall, and a number of museums. From my days as a child, I've been fascinated by American history. In Canada, we're actually pretty well-versed in it in school, as most Canadians think it's respectful to know something about your neighbours. Unfortunately, the reverse isn't often the case as "Big Brother" often doesn't care much about their "Neighbour To The North"! This was an opportunity to view all of the history that I'd only read about in the past.

The highlight of the day was the Lincoln Memorial. I got to stand on the stairs of the memorial where King stood to give his "I Have A Dream" speech. And I had a moment to ponder the stirring qualities of civil rights and what we know as freedom.

When the U.S. waged battle with the British for their independence, they fought for freedom passionately. It was the fuel that brought everyone together as a nation, to forge ahead and make their own decisions about their own future. They brought freedom to themselves. They fought for it of their own accord. Nobody brought it to them.

Nobody has EVER brought freedom to a group historically. People have had to fight for it because it was important to them. And it is not something that we can ram down the throats of the rest of the world just because we want to "bring freedom" to places like Iraq. If the passionate desire for freedom isn't there, then it doesn't matter how much you try to "give" it to someone - they need to want it, crave it, die for it of their own volition.

But by living as an example of what freedom holds, we can show the world the value of freedom, the value of human rights and responsibilities. ♦ This unto itself will lead the world by our actions and not just our words or 'peace-keeping' initiatives.

In the meantime, events such as the Olympics should serve as a reminder of our own freedom - something that we should not ever overlook, Olympic year or otherwise.