Esse Quam Videri

To Be, Rather Than To Seem

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Every two years, people from all over the world gather together in excitement and eagerness to watch the lighting of the Olympic Torch. This event is a tradition that has passed down through the ages. This is not a modern tradition, however. It is a tradition that dates back many centuries—even centuries before Jesus Christ walked the earth. At the beginning of each Olympiad, a sacrificial fire was lit by the Greeks as a form of worship to the gods. This was an important tradition for the Ancient Olympic Games. In 2006, we continued the tradition as Stefania Belmondo reached the center of the Stadio Olímpico and lit the Olympic Cauldron, signifying the beginning of the XX Olympic Winter Games.

Fire is a representation of the desire within each athlete, as shown by the motto of the 2002 Salt Lake Games (“Light the Fire Within”) and during the opening ceremony of the 2006 Torino Games. The Olympic Flame has been described as a symbol of determination and strength. Religionists describe it as an example that shines, and its effects are described accurately by the parable “a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.” (Holy Bible, p. 1193)

The Ancient Greek tradition of the Olympic Flame offers another view on the representation of fire. The flame was lit, as it is now, at Olympia, the “Mountain of the Gods.” According to historical records, this was a commemoration of how the Greek god Prometheus stole fire from Zeus and gave it to the Greeks. (Wikipedia, 2006) Since that time, fire has become a symbol of Zeus and his power. Even in modern times, the Olympic Flame is lit in a manner that symbolizes the gift of fire from the gods. Flames ascend upward, as if reaching toward the gods, just as the Greeks aspired to ascend to the gods. That is the significance of the flame. During the games, under the light of the sacrificial flame, all athletes would aspire to reach higher, run faster, and be stronger. When the winner of the games was declared, he was considered equal to the gods. His status as a human image of the gods passed, and he became a hero, that is, “a man, often of divine ancestry, who is endowed with great courage and
strength, celebrated for his bold exploits, and favored by the gods.” (Dictionary.com, 2006) So he came “to be, rather than to seem.”

Though aspiring to godhood may not be the purpose of an athlete's performance today, the upward reach of the flame still inspires a desire to ascend, to fulfill a dream, to receive glory and honor, or just to be something more. These men become heroes, or “[persons] noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose.” Joey Cheek, Chad Hedrick, and Shani Davis of the U.S. Olympic Speed Skating team are excellent examples of such heroes. In this paper, we will focus primarily on Cheek's example, but a view of Hedrick's example is necessary to understand the significance of Cheek's heroism.

At fourteen years old, Joey Cheek was just like any other fourteen-year-old around the world. He was an ordinary boy sitting at his home in North Carolina watching the performances of the XVII Olympic Winter Games in Lillehammer, Norway. But when Johann Olaf Koss raced to a gold medal, Cheek became an ordinary boy with a dream. He strapped on a pair of inline skates and took his first strides after this new hero. However, his training was limited in North Carolina. So when he was sixteen years old, he moved to Canada to improve his talents year-round. (CBC-CA, 26 Feb 2006, Para. 20) Pretty soon, his talents began to show.

After years of training and competition, his dream began to take form internationally. In 2002, he won a bronze medal at the XIX Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, bronze in the 2005 World Sprint Championships (NBCOlympics.com - Athletes, 2006, Bio: Para. 3) and gold at the 2006 World Sprint Speedskating Championship. (BBC News, 2006,) Those first strides following the strides of Koss eventually led him exactly where he wanted to be—higher in the rankings, faster in the races, and stronger physically and mentally. A Canadian reporter records what Koss said of his disciple: “He [Cheek] is passionate about his commitment... He is intelligent and very genuine. His actions kill cynicism and that's great.” (CBC-CA - Not Your Average Joe, 2006, Para. 15) “It is a dream come true,” Cheek said. (BBC News, 2006, Para. 3) And it literally was. He showed great courage and strength, and is recognized for his bold actions. By doing so, he filled the
shoes of a hero.

That wasn't the end of his dream, however. He had only earned the bronze medal in the 2002 games. In Torino, Cheek fought to achieve higher, to be faster, and to be stronger in determination. As the XX Olympic Winter Games of Torino opened, Joey Cheek appeared, but not as a favorite of the media among American participants. He was overshadowed by his teammates Chad Hedrick and Shani Davis. Before and throughout the seventeen days in Italy, the media focused on Hedrick and the possibility of matching Eric Heiden's record of five Olympic gold medals in speed skating. Cheek's potential was dwarfed in the giant issues of Chad Hedrick. Did Joey Cheek back down? Never. He continued his preparation and focused on his goal instead of the rising issues around him.

Monday, February 13, 2006, Cheek prepared for his run in the 500m race. He did so quietly without a lot of media attention or a fuss of any kind. When he approached the line, who knows what he was thinking. Perhaps the tension of the moment was causing a little anxiety and doubt. Maybe he was as calm as a quiet spring morning. Whatever the case, once the gun was shot, it was left behind as he raced what he later called “a race of a lifetime.” After the first round, he was the only one to race under 35 second. In fact, he was the only one to race under 35 seconds in each round. "He not only won, he blew everybody away," said Casey FitzRandolph, US skater and defending gold medalist of the 500m race in the 2002 games. Another teammate, Kip Carpenter, said "He's incredible...He is by far the best skater out there today. In my opinion, he's the only guy who brought his 'A' game to this competition.” Cheek has become well-known among all.

After his victory in the 500m race, Cheek continued his excellent performance by winning the silver medal in the 1000m, finishing 2nd to teammate Shani Davis, receiving $25,000 and $15,000 for the two medals, giving a sum of $40,000. In addition, Joey Cheek was nominated as a finalist for the U.S. Olympic Spirit Award following the games. Cheek has changed from following the steps of a
hero to being a hero. It is only fitting that his home state, North Carolina, has a motto of *Esse Quam Videri* which is Latin for “to be rather than to seem.”

Chad Hedrick began his Olympic career with a decision in Las Vegas during the 2002 games. He saw the victory of his friend and teammate, Derek Parra, and decided to train for the 2006 games in Torino. So he took the previous training he had in speed skating, and trained hard until he qualified for the games in Torino. His Olympic career started following the footsteps of a friend, but soon followed the path of some other idol.

Hedrick was a favorite among American spectators. Everyone expected him to match Eric Heiden's record. After the first event, the 5000m, Hedrick was right on track, having won the gold medal. Five days later, however, his dream fell when he and his team placed sixth in the team pursuit. From that moment on, it became apparent in media interviews what his true goal was. For instance, after the 1000m race, Shani Davis placed first, Joey Cheek second, and Chad Hedrick sixth. In an interview shortly following, Hedrick said “Once Shani beat me, I didn't care if I got a bronze. I'm here to win. It's all or nothing.” (NBCOlympics.com - Speed Skating, 18 Feb 2006, Para. 13) His object wasn't what Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Modern Olympic Movement, had in mind at the organization of the games in 1894. Rather, Hedrick chose the gold and the glory of the gold as his goal. Not even his teammates’ victories would satisfy him. In the same interview, Hedrick said the following about Davis: “Shani skated fast today...That's about all I have to say about that.”

So, was Hedrick also a hero? He fought bravely and worked hard to achieve his goal. But is that enough to classify him with Joey Cheek and Johann Olaf Koss? In his article “Why I Revived the Olympic Games,” Pierre de Coubertin mentions two important ways of regarding sports. The first is a desire to participate and practice them for the sake of sport and health, or in his own words, a desire “[to seek] in wholesome sports an admirable means to perfect his health and increase his strength.” The second purpose of sport is participation for reward. “Athletics for the sake of winning something:
this directly is the potent incentive and the dangerous canker with which we have to reckon.” (Adams, 2002, p. 110) Participating for reward causes us to forget the purpose of sport, yet our current society demands it. So therefore, it's what runs the Olympic Games, and it's what destroys the Olympic Games. Joey Cheek also commented regarding participation for reward: "If people watch the sport because of that and find they like [the sport], it will be good for us," Cheek said, "but if it's blown into this big thing, all the negative things, it's not good." (NBCOlympics.com - Speed Skating, 21 Feb 2006, Para. 27)

So according to Coubertin, this desire for nothing but the gold is a "dangerous canker." Yet by definition, Hedrick has classified as a hero. The purpose of this paper is not to declare heroism on some and not on others. That will be left for the opinion of the public. The true sportsman, athlete, or hero will follow the same ideals that his sport promotes. What are those ideals? For an Olympic athlete, they are declared by the International Olympic Committee. Here are two statements made by the IOC expressing how an Olympic athlete should live:

**The Olympic Creed**

"The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well." (italics added)

**The Olympic Oath** (taken by all athletes at the opening ceremony of the games)

"In the name of all competitors, I promise that we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honour of our teams." (Adams, 2002, p. 179) (italics added)

Here is where true heroism and Olympism show themselves. Athletic heroes are those who take part in the sport for the sport. Status isn't the important aspect of the games. An Olympic hero
takes part, fights hard, works with his teammates, and shows excellent sportsmanship, no matter the outcome. That is the distinguishing point in the accomplishments of Joey Cheek.

As we have just determined, a hero isn't formed solely by his victories. It has been mentioned that Joey Cheek's hero is Johann Olaf Koss of Norway. This status, however, is not only due to his excellent race in Lillehammer. In preparation for the 1994 games, the Lillehammer Olympic Organizing Committee (LOOC) organized a group called “Right to Play.” Its purpose was “to show support for people in war-torn countries and areas of distress,” and its goal to “raise funds for and awareness of the specific initiatives each of these organizations were implementing.” (Right to Play - Our History, 2006, Para.1)

The LOOC decided to ask Olympic athletes to be the “ambassadors” for this mission. Johann Olaf Koss, four-time Olympic gold medalist, was chosen to be the “lead Athlete Ambassador” (Right to Play - Our History, 2006, Para.2).

As part of the 2006 games, Koss, now president and CEO of the organization, visited Torino to promote the case of “Right to Play.” While there, he stated the following:

“I remember being on the podium thinking how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to reach the pinnacle of sport accomplishments, especially while there were so many children in disadvantaged areas of the world who didn’t even have the chance to play. But, just over 10 years later, it’s amazing to see that Right To Play is changing that. Now we reach over 500,000 children on a weekly basis.” (Right to Play - at the Winter Olympics, 2006, para. 2)

Alongside of many current and former Olympic athletes, Koss has helped the group grow and expand.

Joey Cheek saw where the footsteps of his hero led—and he followed them wherever they went. Before the media could ask about his victory, he stated that he would donate all the bonus money to “Right to Play.” ‘I knew I had a very brief moment to do something substantial,' Cheek told ABC News. 'Rather than letting them get their traditional Olympic story about a kid from North Carolina who becomes a winter athlete, I was going to take over the story a bit.”’ (CBC.CA, 26 Feb 2006, Para. 5)
showed great courage in his performances and, true to his word, demonstrated nobility of purpose by donating his $40,000 to help the children in countries torn by war, hunger, and pestilence. Koss was right in saying that Cheek was passionate about commitment.

But that wasn't the end of Cheek's role either. He encouraged corporation and sponsors to also donate and match his gift. Within a week, a sum of $300,000 had been donated because of his challenge. He stated that these donations were for “[more] than just medicine and food but things to let the children have a chance to play...And through play, hopefully learn some things about health and supporting each other.” (ABC News, 2006, Para. 6) These funds will be donated to the refugees of the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan.

Again, this wasn't the end of Cheek's influence. His influence spread like wildfire. Canadian speed skater Clara Hughes, bronze medalist of the 2002 Salt Lake women's 5000m race, silver medalist of the 2006 Torino women's team pursuit, and gold medalist for the 2006 Torino women's 5000m race, also donated CAN$10,000 to “Right to Play,” despite the fact that she received no bonus for her gold medal. (CBC.CA, 28 Feb 2006, Para. 18) Clara also challenged corporations and sponsors to donate to the fund. Like Joey Cheek, she also raised $300,000 for the organization. Many other athletes followed suit and donated what money they could to the organization. Whether to their own country or to the poor children around the world, all of these athletes have become heroes.

Joey Cheek aspired to something higher, and, by his determination, he succeeded and his dreams have become reality. He showed great courage, strength, and boldness on and off the track. No more will he have to “seem” like his hero, Johann Olaf Koss. Now, he can “be” the hero. And to many people worldwide, he is a hero.

The Closing Ceremonies of the Torino Games were approaching. The U.S. Olympic Committee had to choose one among 211 athletes to carry the American Flag into the stadium. The committee examined all the athletes that had proved themselves as heroes during the games. Chad
Hedrick, Shani Davis, and Joey Cheek were undoubtedly included in the list. On February 24, they announced that Joey Cheek would be the flag bearer. (NBCOlympics.com - Speed Skating, 24 Feb 2006) It is clear to see why considering Cheek's demonstration of Olympism.

In 2001, the International Olympic Committee released *The Olympic Charter*. To begin the Charter, they established a few Fundamental Principles. Among those are the following:

"2. Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the *joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.*"

"3. The goal of Olympism is to place everywhere sport at the service of the *harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity*. To this effect, the Olympic Movement engages, alone or in cooperation with other organizations and within the limits of its means, in actions to promote peace.

"4. The Olympic movement, led by the IOC, stems from modern Olympism." (Adams, 2002, p. 173)

(Italics added)

This Charter tells us that the purpose of the Olympics, which "stems from modern Olympism," is to establish a peaceful relation between all nations and to develop a person's physical ability and joy. Joey Cheek has lived up to these attributes and has lived by the Olympic Spirit. Through his courageous efforts in performance and donations, he has shown to all the world the meaning of Olympism. He is a walking representation of the goal of the Olympic Games.

On the evening of February 26, 2006, the Olympic Torch of Torino, Italy, was extinguished. It's tongues of fire no longer reach for something higher, but the effects of the games will continue for a
long while, and those affected by the spirit of Olympism will aspire to become someone more—to become higher, faster, or stronger. In ancient times, the ending ceremony was a celebration of one who had become like the gods. They and their deeds were immortalized so those of future generations would know of their heroic acts. We celebrated the same at the mentioned ceremony, for while the glory of those who achieved medals fades away, the heroic acts of those like Joey Cheek will live on forever. They, as the heroes of old, have learned "to be, rather than to seem."
References


