

Opinion: Embracing magic of Olympics

By Kathryn Reed

PARK CITY, Utah – I'm never going to be an Olympic athlete. I'm guessing that comes as no surprise to anyone.

I wanted to be. This probably isn't that unusual of a dream for kids who play sports. To me the Olympics are the pinnacle athletic competition— not the World Series or Super Bowl.

Swimming would have been my dream sport. I was a fish as a kid. I was in first or second grade when I started competing. Back stroke was my favorite. The farthest I aspired to was being on a leg of a relay in the Far Western Championships. This was the culmination of years of competing on an AAU team.

At some point, though, I had to realize I was pretty slow – at least in terms of Olympic speeds – or collegiate for that matter, probably even high school. (By high school I had traded a swim suit for a tennis skirt.) Nor did I have the discipline to put in the time it takes to be an athlete of that caliber.

When I was growing up the Olympics were purer, at least for much of the world. It really was amateurs competing; except for the Eastern Bloc countries. Back then it didn't cost as much to participate as it does today, nor was it so lucrative. Things really have changed.

The Olympics are big business now – for the competitor, the host city-country, sponsors, media and countless auxiliary entities.

Now professionals are competing. To me, this has tarnished the Games. But not enough to keep me from tuning in next February.

What might be extremely fun to see in 2018 is the U.S. men's hockey team because the NHL has said players under contract are not allowed to compete because it would impact the pro season. This means the U.S. team will be full of college athletes.

Could this be another miracle on ice like 1980 when it was a group of amateur young men who took home the gold in Lake Placid, N.Y., upsetting a slew of competitors – most notably the Russians in the gold medal round?

While the Games are a little more than four months away, for the athletes the pinnacle of their careers is within sight. For most, they won't return home with a medal. It is wearing that red, white and blue, competing for their country, to say they are an Olympian that no one will ever be able to take from them. Once an Olympian, always an Olympian.

Plenty of more training will take place between now and then, but their enthusiasm this past week was palpable.

I returned to Tahoe on Thursday from a four-day Team USA media summit in Park City, Utah, for the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea. More than 100 athletes were in attendance, with six from the Tahoe area – Jamie Anderson, Maddie Bowman, Julia Mancuso, Nate Holland, David Wise and Travis Ganong. (We will tell their individual stories in the coming weeks.) Some are eager to repeat their successes and others ready to improve upon their 2014 performances in Sochi, Russia.

For some, it will likely be their last hurrah on this world stage. Age, aching bodies, and a younger generation are contributing factors. The R word – retirement – isn't being iterated by any of them because they have a job to do. That job is to start the World Cup ski and Grand Prix snowboard seasons this fall with gusto, all in the quest to podium in South Korea.

Let's hope world leaders don't escalate tensions to the point of jeopardizing these Games – in terms of safety and countries pulling out. Athletics should be a unifier. And now it appears we need these Olympics – for our country and the world – more than ever.

These athletes deserve the opportunity to compete and we spectators deserve the chance admire their resolve and to perhaps live vicariously through them if just for a moment in time.