

Celizic: Best U.S. moments | And the worst

Images: Top moments of Olympics

Analysis: 2010 should be better for U.S.

Slide shows: Highlights | Emotional moments

Results | Standings | Images | Video | MORE

COMMENTARY

By Filip Bondy

msnbc.com contributor

updated 6:42 p.m. CT, Mon., Feb. 27, 2006

msnbc.com



Filip Bondy

TURIN, Italy - The Winter Games head back to North America next, to Vancouver 2010, with lessons learned and opportunities left on the rinks, ovals and mountains of Turin. The big names who failed, the little names who succeeded, are all thinking right now they will be there again in four years.

Except, of course, they won't. Stuff happens over the course of a quadrennium. As much as these athletes don't want to believe it, as much as they'll tell you it's all about the process, most bodies aren't likely to stay in competitive shape.

The hype this time was all about Michelle Kwan, Sasha Cohen, Apolo Ohno, Shaun White and Bode Miller. The hype next time may be about Kimmie Meissner, Ted Ligety and four or five teenagers who mean nothing to you right now.

Vancouver figures to be better than Turin, frankly, though the mountains in Whistler will be just as far away as those in Sestriere. The Winter Games will regain some of those lost ratings and popularity, if only because of the friendlier time zone.

Fewer tape delays on NBC. A greater sense of immediacy. A hometown advantage. Canada is already aiming to win the medals count, but we all know the arenas will be filled with just as many Americans.

Here's a look at each sport, and a first guess how the U.S. can expect to fare in each discipline in 2010:

Figure skating

Cohen insists for now that she will continue toward Vancouver, with no guarantee she will make it that far. Look for Meissner to become America's darling by then, with possible backup from Emily Hughes and a teenager to be named later. The favorite in the clubhouse, though, is Mao Asada of Japan.

ALSO ON THIS STORY

Vote: What was the best sport to watch?

If Tanith Belbin and Ben Agosto want to keep skating competitively, they can be the No. 1 dance team in the world by 2010.

As for the men, Johnny Weir, 21, has promised a joyous return. "I'm just a baby," he said. Weir is the best quote at the Olympics, and may be one of the favorites for 2010. But Yevgeny Plushenko says he's coming back, too.

Alpine

Daron Rahlves and Bode Miller, the biggest busts at these Games, will both be gone by Vancouver. Bet on that. But barring injury, Ligety should be peaking.

The women's Alpine team has a way of turning over every couple years, though it would be nice to think that Lindsey Kildow would get another shot at the downhill after her terrible crash here in a training run.

 Slide show



Taking gold
Check out the best images from the 2006 Winter Olympics.

Launch

Ice hockey

You won't recognize the U.S. men's team next time around. The old, grizzled grumps will all be gone, replaced by the kids coming up from last year's World Junior championship team.

The women have already turned over their roster, for the most part, and will build on their bronze medal and around their University of Minnesota core group. Say goodbye to Angela Ruggiero, a three-time Olympian.

Snowboarding

We can't do much better in this stuff. Halfpiper Shaun White will be 23, and can't possibly be as flexible as he is now. But he's so much better than everybody else right now, he can afford to slip a bit.

 Slide show



Pictures of the Day
Check out Sunday's best Olympic images.

Launch

Most snowboard medalists are all young enough to return, though Lindsey Jacobellis will be 24, probably too old at redemption in a young woman's sport as crazy as snowboardcross. Look for a whole new generation of kids.

Speedskating

If you expect this to be the Shani and Chad show in 2010, you'll be as sadly disappointed as Hedrick. Speed skaters rarely endure at the top for more than two or three years. Again, a new generation of new names will make itself known, but no sooner than 2009. For the men, that's a shame. For the women, that can only be good news.

The other sports

Look for Americans to rebound in short-track and freestyle skiing, to fall back in curling, to do nothing again in cross country and biathlon. The U.S. won 34 medals in Salt Lake, fell back by more than 33 percent in Turin, and probably will split the difference in Vancouver, where the Canadians already are promising to top the table.

 Slide show



Emotional Moments
Feb. 26: See photos of athletes' highs and lows from Sunday.

Launch

Just remember this, as we float from continent to continent, Olympics to Olympics: The faces may change, but the sports dynasties remain the same. If we stunk at it in Turin, we'll probably stink at it in Vancouver.

Filip Bondy writes regularly for MSNBC.com and is a columnist for the New York Daily News.