



Feb. 19, 2018

Downhill racing, speed skating, that crazy luge, I've been desperately studying the athletes this week in the 2018 Winter Games. I'm looking for tips. Because I'm well aware that there but for the grace of mud go I.

Without mud this time of year, I could very well be on ice, lashed behind 300 pounds of frolicking Irish wolfhounds. And

frankly, I can't skate worth a flip. I *do* drag amazingly well. Manhole covers and storm drains are *not* my friend.

Mud is my friend. That and weeks of cold gray rain that's turned my backyard into a bog that has no bottom. My two dogs are as big as ponies but they won't go out there now. I have to lash lines on them so they can go out and do their business. Our two little rescues get snorkels. too. I toss 'em out, I reel 'em back in. We all stare at each other in disgust.

And then we collapse on the couch in a moaning heap of misery and muttering. Oona rolls on her back with her legs in the air like a giant dead bug, listlessly watching her nephew Oisín zip around the room and across the ceiling. He's *frisky*. He's young. He still has hope.

While Oisín runs laps around the walls, Oona and I watch the rain come down and down and down. Occasionally we nudge each other to see the other jump. Yeah, we have our fun. Our miserable, housebound, muddy fun...

And then I noticed this Olympics thing on TV. I'm not much of a sports guy but even I notice that these people have been on TV night after night doing outrageous things on ice, skis and skates.... and a thing called the skeleton. It sounds ominously prophetic.

Which reminds me that this is only mid-February and we've only had one real round of snow and ice so far. I'm not much of a *snow* guy, either. And I know Round Two is out there with its friends, Round Three and Snowmageddon. And come what may, the dogs *will* insist on walking again sometime soon. Ice just makes 'em skitter faster.

These jumpy young people in the dayglo suits are the finest athletes in the world. I'm an old fat guy lashed to two hounds who are three-feet tall at the shoulders. They born to run and bound. I bound like a sack of rocks. Surely these young gods and goddesses of ice and snow can teach me something.

I notice right off that they're bulging with muscles. The *guys* are, too. Me, well, I'm bulging, too...

These Olympians seem to have cat-like coordination, too. Right now after weeks of being stuck on the couch, my head spins if I leap to my feet. I have the coordination of a slow cat. An old one, maybe with arthritis. We're not leaping much.

Watching them make those incredible turns on the ice, I imagine they've practiced a little, too. Look! There's Shaun White and all his rowdy friends, zig-zagging down the halfpipe then zooming up... and up... and up in the air, twisting and tumbling like maniacs.

Heck, I did that last Thursday in front of the county library when Oisín went over the wall after a squirrel. Wait. White landed a lot more elegantly than I did. He doesn't seem to be using any of the colorful phrase I did, either. So, the Olympians have a little more.... discipline?

Or maybe they just need a couple of wolfhound for creative inspiration. Maybe *they* need to walk my behemoths while I work on my strength and coordination. March is right around the corner.

You *know* we'll have plenty of ice and snow then... Time to step up the training.