

Olympic athletes getting free state-of-the-art medical tune-ups

When the world's greatest athletes aren't going for Olympic gold on Canadian ice and snow, some of them are apparently going for free teeth. Canada may not be sweeping the medals, but the Games are certainly maintaining our image as world champions of free medical care. One of the many volunteer doctors helping to tend to the daily parade of wounded Olympians here says there is also a "steady stream" of foreign athletes and their national entourages getting medical tune-ups that are both state-of-the-art and free. "We see a lot of them, especially from former East Bloc countries — and that's everyone from athletes to their administrative support staff — coming in to get their teeth fixed while they are here," he said.

"They also have access to more advanced medical imaging equipment, stuff like MRIs, than you'll find in most hospitals, so some people take advantage of those. Hey, it's free."

Who's paying for all this is a tangle of corporate sponsors, the Olympic organization and the projected \$2 billion in government funding.

The special Olympic mini-hospital is housed in a temporary shelter, and is part of the massive infrastructure created specifically to serve the athletes and their teams.

Clearly, no effort is being spared — count the seconds from a skier's crash until there is a medical team on the scene, and a helicopter overhead to airlift the racer to the super-clinic.

As an added bonus, our doctor source tells us, the most expensive equipment in the clinic was donated by a sponsoring medical technology company, and will be given to regional hospitals at the end of the Games.

Foreign competitors can grumble about being beaten up on some of the treacherous race courses here, but they certainly can't complain about the TLC they are getting for their breaks and bruises.

Speaking of medical treatment, an outbreak of post-Games depression seems imminent among some local homeowners who went for Olympic green.

Ever since the Games were awarded to Vancouver and Whistler, many owners of already pricey condos and homes in this world-class ski mecca have been giddy with Olympic dreams of striking it rich from rents during the Games.

Indeed, some got lucky, especially those who put their properties on the market for the Olympic period soon after the games were awarded.

Anecdotally, some houses are rented out for more than \$100,000 for the month.

And if you wondered how security for the Games could be running up a billion-dollar bill, a local Whistler inn with one of the best restaurants in the area has been rented to the military since last September, the entire property converted into an army camp for security forces.

But like the Calgary Games in 1988, many of the greedy who waited for a desperate market to produce absurd rents have instead been left with empty digs.

Even in the hotels, there are relatively affordable accommodations available this week right in Whistler village.

It's the same story with a lot of the tickets to Olympic events — at first, prices soared into the absurd, then dived faster than a bobsled.

No one we have met in the past week has paid more than \$60 to see an event here.

On Sunday, a stranger walked over to our lunch table and offered us tickets to the bobsled races.

"How much?" I asked.

"Free," he said. "How many would you like?"

Free teeth and tickets. What's not to love about these Olympics?