

could any local brewers come up with an Olympic brew for the Olympics – without running afoul of the all-powerful VANOC...

by Joe Wiebe

Last fall, as the XXI Winter Olympic Games approached, I wondered what it was going to be like for beer lovers. More than 350,000 visitors were expected to descend upon Vancouver and Whistler, BC, during the 17-day sporting extravaganza. And when you add the thousands of security personnel, journalists, athletes and coaches, the result would be a whole lot of thirsty people...

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Unfortunately, with Molson-Coors as the official beer sponsor, all those thirsty people would be stuck drinking Coors Light and Molson Canadian in the official venues – and paying \$8 for a 14-ounce plastic cup!

Maybe local brewers would seize this opportunity to come up with special brews to attract the attention of these potential patrons outside of Olympic venues. But when I asked Vancouver-area brewmasters what they had planned, I was surprised to find out that most did not plan on crafting anything special for the Olympiad.

Why not? First off, the city's brewpubs – Dix, Steamworks and Yale-town Brewing—all expected to be kept busy enough just trying to keep up with the demand for their regular products. Considering the long lineups to get into downtown bars during the Games, and the fact that the city passed a bylaw allowing restaurants to stay open an hour later, it appears they were right.

But what about the city's craft breweries? Wouldn't they want to do everything they could to attract tourists to their products, perhaps even to entice visitors to bring some bottles home with them as souvenirs of their Olympic experience?

Sure, but at the same time, the small craft breweries were probably nervous about getting in trouble with the all-powerful entity known as VANOC (the Vancouver Organizing Committee), which very strictly regulated all media for *ambush marketing* by unaffiliated companies trying to cash in on the Olympics.

When the Games finally arrived, it turned out that a couple of local brewers managed to come up with creative ways to connect a special brew with the Olympics – without running afoul of VANOC.

Howe Sound Brewing, based in Squamish, halfway between Vancouver and Whistler on the Sea-to-Sky Highway, came the closest to risking Olympic wrath with their special-edition Three Beavers Imperial Red Ale, released just in time for the Games. Sold in their usual one-litre "potstopper" bottles, it bears a label with three beavers sporting gold, silver and bronze medals. Although this sounds like something that would prick up the ears of VANOC's formidable legal staff, a closer inspection reveals that the beavers are wearing medals won at the North American Brewers Association awards in 2007 and 2009. Nice trick that!

Best of all, Three Beavers is good. At 7.5%AVB with a bitterness of 45 IBUs, this robustly malty and hoppy ale packs an Olympian

punch, perfect for sipping in front of a roaring fire at a ski lodge, or quaffing with fellow Team Canada boosters in front of the TV. This is a very tasty beer; in my opinion, it owns the podium for its combination of flavour and cheekiness.

Stephen Colbert's "DON'T BE AN ICE-HOLE" campaign spawns an R&B response...

The other Olympic brew requires a bit of background. In the months leading up to the Games, American comedian Stephen Colbert, host of Comedy Central's *Colbert Report*, initiated an anti-Canadian "Don't be an Ice-Hole" campaign because he felt the US speed skating Team (which he was sponsoring) was not getting enough training time at the Richmond Olympic Oval.

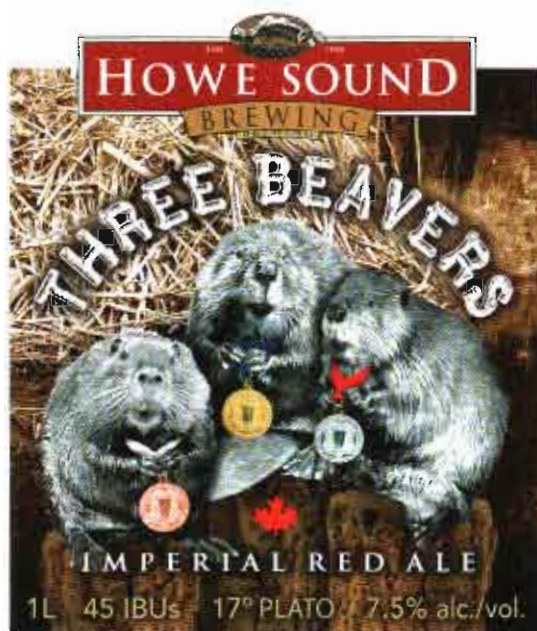
In response, R&B Brewing released Iceholes Celebration Lager two weeks before the start of the Games. Barry Benson, co-owner of R&B, said, "We are proud, syrup-sucking, Canadian ice-holes. In celebration of our icehole-ish behaviour we have decided to get even rather than get mad. Canadians can wreak their revenge against Stephen Colbert in a truly Canadian way and have a beer."

When Colbert announced he'd be filming episodes of his show live in Vancouver, Benson promised to have his hotel suite stocked with Iceholes Lager.

Iceholes Celebration Lager is a European Pilsner, 5%AVB, 24 IBUs, that tastes suspiciously similar to R&B's previously released Bohemian Lager. Even if it is the same brew, it is delicious, with a medium body that belies its pale golden colour and a zingy hop finish truly reminiscent of German or Czech pilsners.

Otherwise, the best beer-drinking opportunities at the Games were some of the international pavilions set up by competing countries. Holland Heineken House, situated near the new Speed Skating Oval in Richmond, just south of Vancouver, proved to be very popular, with long lineups to get in after dark, although one could avoid the queue and the \$20 admission price by heading there in the afternoon instead.

Germany offered not one but two good options for sampling their brews. The German Fan Fest tent located in a prime waterfront location right next to Steamworks brewpub where one could try



Köstritzer Schwarzbier, something not normally available in Vancouver; and the Saxony House, at the Vancouver Rowing Club on Coal Harbour in Stanley Park, which served Wernesgrüner Pils.

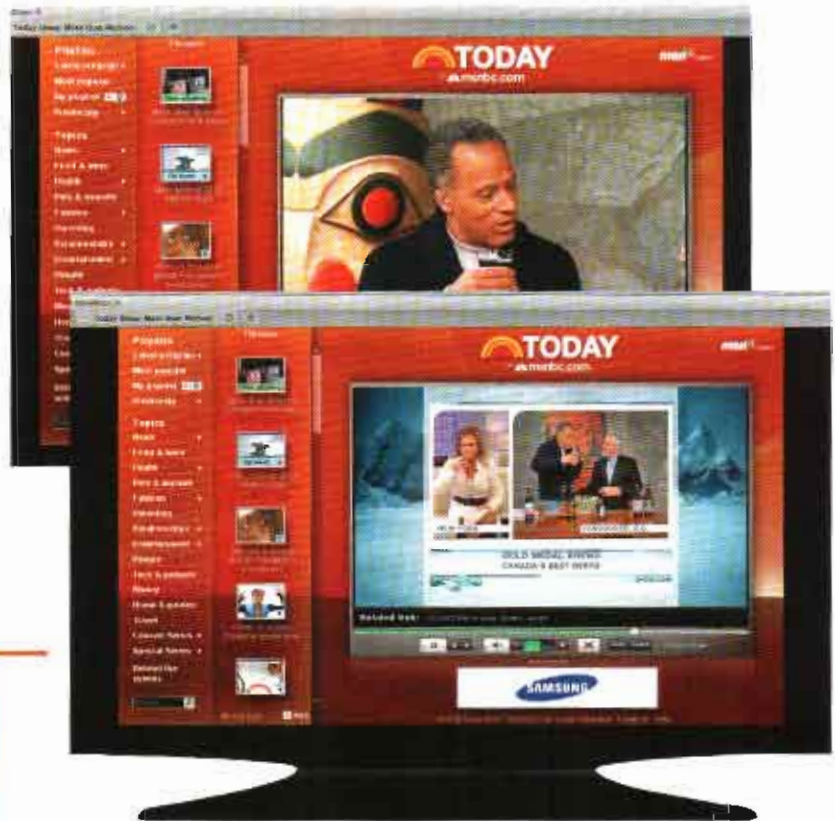
There was one other beer-and-Olympics-related campaign worth mentioning. Shortly after the Games began, flyers and buttons promoting “Gastown House – the authentic Vancouver Olympic experience nobody told you about” were distributed on downtown

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streets, and a website appeared. Although Gastown, the cobblestoned neighbourhood just east of downtown is normally a tourist Mecca, it was left off of the Olympic map in terms of official venues and free events. So, Richard Gallagher, the Creative Director of a Gastown company called Engine Digital, created and financed the campaign himself.

While Gallagher admitted, “I fully expected to get some sort of cease and desist for my flagrant use of Olympic-trademarked names and jargon,” as of the final weekend of the Games, he hadn’t heard from VANOC at all.

While most of the city’s brewers get no points in my scorebook for their lack of effort to showcase Vancouver’s brewing culture during the Games, the creative attempts by Howe Sound Brewing, R&B Brewing and the Gastown House campaign earn the city a bronze medal in this humble judge’s opinion.



More than Molson! Canada’s Best Beers...

On February 20, NBC’s Today Show filmed a segment in Vancouver on “the Great White North’s best beers” in conjunction with the Games. Today’s food editor Phil Lempert poured several craft beers for the show’s host, Lester Holt, who gamely sampled them all even though it was only 5:00am local time.

At one point during the segment, Lempert said, “You can see the craftsmanship here in Canada, when it comes to microbreweries it’s far better than in the US,” to which Holt responded, “The beer has been exceptional here.”

Wow! High praise indeed. Ironically, it turns out none of the beers featured were actually brewed in Vancouver, but rather they were from several Victoria, BC, breweries: Swans, Spinnakers, Canoe, Driftwood, Phillips and Vancouver Island Brewing.

Editor’s Note: I was pleased to see that during the over 800 hours (48,000 minutes) of programming 3 minutes and 40 seconds was dedicated to a truly Canadian icon – our beer. Generous of them. I was somewhat astounded by the lack of knowledge by the correspondent in New York. First she asked, “what makes this beer (Vancouver Islander) a craft beer?” All six were craft beers... duh. And my favourite moment was when she picked up a full glass of an obvious stout beer, thinking it was a light lager, she actually said, “it’s light and dark... interesting”... Puh-leeeeeze!!!