Seeing Ads for HIV Meds During the Olympics? That's a Win For Everyone.

August 3, 2021 By Shawn Decker

I love the Olympics. Despite a crush on Katarina Witt, I didn't really start watching regularly until I was in my 30s. (I'm 46 for context.) It makes sense, because I've always loved games. Games shaped my childhood, my friends and I would make up all kinds of physical challenges to pass the time. I always scored higher than my friends, because living with a bleeding disorder added a degree of difficulty that allowed me to set myself apart from my peers.

In retrospect, playing a game called "Sackball", which was basically football removed of everything except the bone-crushing tackles, wasn't the best thing to get involved in. Thankfully, I avoided serious injury.

As a bleeder, I wince a lot during the games. They just introduced skateboarding, for instance. "Oh, this should be fun," I told Gwenn. Within seconds I was saying, "OUCH!.... my God!.... FUUUUUUUUUCK that had to hurt." The wipeouts were brutal. But every skateboarder hopped up, and waited for their turn to perform (or attempt to perform) the next death-defying trick.

One thing that doesn't make me wince? All of the ads for Biktarvy I've been seeing during the games. If you own a TV or a laptop, you've seen the ads. You know, the ones with the Suspiria lighting and people with HIV smiling, laughing, dancing... just people enjoying their lives. I know, I know, it's Big Pharma propaganda- but it's true. You are more likely to have the opportunity to enjoy an active and healthy life if you're on a successful HIV drug regimen. The same way you're more likely to survive a COVID-19 infection if you're vaccinated.

Now, full disclosure, I'm on Biktarvy. But no, I'm not getting paid for this shout out. Unfortunately.

I think back to the day when Katarina Witt won my heart with her Robin Hood ice skating routine in 1994. The "HIV cocktail" breakthrough was right around the corner, but the reality of living with HIV was quite different. While I miss Witt's charisma on the ice, I don't miss those days of not being able to allow myself to even think about where I'd be in four years when the next Winter Olympics rolled around... only now, in my mid-40s, do I realize how sad it was to not think of the future as anything but a coin toss as to whether I'd be alive or not.

But here I am. An expert on all competitions, whether they are on the sand or on the snow. I root for who I like, regardless of nationality, because I am a man of the planet and my loyalty to my

fellow human beings knows no man-made barriers, such as the invisible lines that separate nations. If there was a Gold medal for Olympics watching, I'd like to think that based on my moral compass and the sheer amount of hours I put in, that I would be a serious contender.

In all seriousness, just being here feels like a victory. And I'm thankful to the advances in treatment that made my survival possible. I'm also glad that fellow fans of the Olympic Games are having their own biased view of people with HIV altered by those ads.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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