

《Some Olympic events just plain lame》

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A recent international poll of sports journalists identified race walking and dressage as the most inane events at the Summer Olympic Games, which open on Aug 5 in Rio de Janeiro.

OK, maybe that's a bit misleading. The "international poll" actually consisted of one Canadian (yours truly), two Chinese, a Brit and an American swilling beer at a bar in Lido while tossing out suggestions for Most Boring Olympic Event Ever.

Notice we didn't say "non-athletic" or "stupid." From the perspective of ardent armchair critics, we respectfully limited our mockery to "boring" and "lame."

That's not to say these events are devoid of skill – far from it. With their itzy-bitsy strides and spastic arm movements, Olympic race walkers must attain a cadence comparable to 400-meter sprinters in order to reach optimum speed – and they do it non-stop for hours, in 20- and 50-kilometer competitions.

Race walking might look ridiculous, but any Olympic sport that has only two rules deserves grudging respect. The first rule dictates the competitor's back toe can't leave the ground until the heel of the front foot has touched, while the second stipulates the supporting leg must be fully straightened on contact with the ground and remain in that position until the body passes directly over it. Go figure.

But what's the deal with dressage? Why do the riders take all the credit (and the medals) when it's the horses who are the real athletes?

Dressage was invented around 2,000 years ago when generals in ancient Greece figured out that in order to survive in battle a horse and rider must achieve perfect synergy. Horses were trained to make lightning-quick lateral movements and then burst into a gallop in any direction the soldier signaled. But just like in the modern Games, those ancient horsemen did little more than hang on and hope for the best once their four-legged partners swung into action.

Our poll identified rhythmic gymnastics, synchronized swimming and sailing as other cringe-worthy contenders for Most Boring Event Ever. The first two are the Olympic equivalents of chick flicks, while in terms of speed and athleticism, none of the sailing disciplines can hold a candle to what should be a no-brainer for inclusion in future Games: Jet Ski racing.

Of course, none of these pontifications will mean a thing to the billion or so people around the globe who will tune in to watch 306 events in 42 disciplines in Rio ... and that's how it should be. To each his own.

Still, we take comfort in knowing the International Olympic Committee would rather stick with slumber-inducing events like race walking and dressage than return to "experimental" competitions like the live pigeon shooting that

was featured at the 1900 Games in Paris.

Yup, leave it to the French, who described the event as “très aristocratique” (very aristocratic). You can look it up: nearly 300 birds were slaughtered in a feathery bloodbath, with the top prize awarded to a Belgian shooter for his 21 confirmed kills.

Let the Games begin!

