

## National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Games won't break even

?Who shot him? I asked.

The grey man scratched the back of his neck and said: Somebody with a gun.?

? Dashiell Hammett [www.goodreads.com/author/show/1692](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1692)

That's pretty much the reaction I had upon picking up last Friday's Toronto Star and reading the main, front-page headline:

????????????? ?Games may not stay on budget, minister says.?

Really?

The reference was to the upcoming Pan Am Games and cited Ontario's Minister of Sport Michael Coteau who, despite repeated claims that the \$2.5 billion event would be on budget, confessed, ?I can't make that promise to you.?

So what else is new? we ask. When in the history of large government projects has anything ever been both on time and on budget?

It's just not part of the process.

So to claim it may be over budget is like a Homer Simpson ?Doh!? moment. Of course it will be over budget. Government projects ?

and for that matter most private projects ? are always more costly than their original proponents claim they're going to be. If they

told the truth out of the gate, they might not get the approvals they want.

Earlier in the week, your correspondent was in Vancouver reading a report from the Vancouver Olympic Committee which claimed

? straight up ? that those Olympic games broke even. To arrive at this startling conclusion, alas, they simply ignored a host of

big-ticket expenditures mostly on the specious grounds that the newly-built facilities will be used for things other than the Olympics themselves.

This sort of nonsense always happens with these mega projects. Why we wanted the Pan Am Games in the first place ? having lost several times early on in pursuit of Toronto Olympics ? remains a mystery to me.

And while it might be a wonderful thing, for example, for the town of Milton to have a world-class Velodrome cycling track, is that

something that community really needed to spend \$56 million to build (up from the estimated \$50 million)? How much will it cost

to maintain it after the games end? And who, pray tell, will use it on a regular basis?

A follow-up story in the Sunday Star quotes the Games' CEO, Saad Rafi, claiming ?It's absolutely fair to say we're under budget.?

Really? For one thing, there's still close to a year to go and lots of construction snags ahead, and it says here there is absolutely no chance ? none whatsoever ? that this sports spectacle will end up either under or at budget. Not going to happen. Never does. Never will.

Even the vaunted Olympic Organizing Committee is quietly acknowledging that the cost of staging their games has grown to the point that fewer and fewer cities are interested in bidding for the alleged privilege of hosting them. They've grown so out of control ?

with an seemingly endless array of competitive ?sports? being added (like, really, is synchronised diving something you'd want your

son or daughter to devote their early years to?) ? that the only way for them to pay for themselves is to have a tyrant like Russia's

Vladimir Putin run them since he really doesn't have to worry about his costs being approved by anybody or publicly opposed either.

I feel the same about these giant ?amateur? sport displays as I do professional sports, not because I don't like sports ? I do,

particularly baseball, golf and hockey ? but because I think the people who patronise these things should pay for them. Same goes

for opera, ballet and various concert venues.

Want to go? Then pony up the dough and go. Just don't take a free ride on the backs of taxpayers.

One more thing. While I'm being a tad grouchy and focussing on the subject of sport, I have to say that I'm glad the World Cup is

finally over so that now the sports pages can get back to covering sports I care about.

And why is it that people who love a particular sport tend to get incensed with anybody who doesn't share their passion? I was

speaking to a man last week who asked who I was cheering for in the World Cup. When I said I didn't care who won ? or lost ? he

got upset, launching into a lecture about what a great sport soccer is.

That's fine, for him. But not for me. I love baseball ? the Yankees first and foremost ? but I don't care if people say they find it

boring or whatever. So what? Don't watch it.

There's room for all the sports anybody's heart desires. No need to lecture those who have different interests. Just as long as the

public doesn't have to pay for your favourite pastime, that's fine with me.

