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Olympics fail to win over big chunk of B.C.: poll

By Rod Mickleburgh
From Thursday's Globe and Mail

B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell may be disappointed if he is hoping for a Games-based popularity bounce

B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell may be disappointed if he is hoping for a Games-based popularity bounce, an extensive poll by Innovative Research Group suggests.

While large numbers of skeptical Canadians were won over by the recent 17-day event, the online survey found that nearly 40 per cent of British Columbians still believe it was a mistake to host to the Olympics, twice the percentage of those holding that view in the rest of the country.

"Basically, they are saying, 'Yeah, I watched the Olympics on TV, and yeah, it was fun, but to my mind, it wasn't worth it,'" Innovative pollster Greg Lyle said yesterday as he released results of the poll.

The survey was based on an Internet sample of more than 2,300 Canadians during the first week after the Olympics.

"They don't deny the Games were successful. They just think of them as a good party, with a big bill."

While 51 per cent of B.C. residents polled felt the Olympics were "a great idea," a solid 39 per cent thought the bid for the Games was a mistake.

Across Canada, only 19 per cent considered the Olympic quest a mistake. Two-thirds agreed that it was great to go for the Games.

No other Canadian politician came close to matching the Olympic fervour of Mr. Campbell, who was front and centre at Games-related events across the country, waving his red mittens and yelling "Go Canada go!"

But Mr. Lyle wondered whether the Premier's passionate embrace of the Olympics, at a time when his government was cutting back on grants to sports, arts and community groups, may have stiffened public opinion in B.C. against the 2010 Games.

On the other hand, if Mr. Campbell were inclined to look at his Olympic glass as half full, he might gain comfort from the fact that only 22 per cent of British Columbians surveyed by Innovative as recently as last December thought the Games were a great idea.

That percentage ballooned to more than 50 per cent by the time the Olympics concluded, as those previously on the fence decided they liked the Games, after all.

A similar shift in pro-Games sentiment was reflected in the rest of Canada, according to Innovative's sampling.

The percentage of Canadians believing the Olympics were a great idea shot up from 28 per cent in December to 66 per cent once the Games concluded.

Before the Olympics, meanwhile, just 18 per cent of Canadians questioned by Innovative said they intended to watch events every day. But when the Games began, 47 per cent wound up tuning in daily, a figure reflected in the unprecedented, sky-high ratings recorded by Olympic broadcaster CTV.

Three-quarters of respondents thought the staging of the 2010 Olympics had helped Canada's image around the world. Only 3 per cent felt it had hurt the country's image.

"We surprised ourselves," said Mr. Lyle.

"We went into the Games kind of cool, and then we got swept off our feet. People who had been undecided all got convinced."

The results of another poll question could also be troubling for Mr. Campbell, who has pointed to the record-breaking warm weather and lack of snow on local mountains during the Olympics as proof of the need to combat climate change.

A majority of those surveyed scoffed at his argument.

Sixty per cent (67 per cent in B.C.) said the climate was "just another normal winter on the West Coast."

Just 26 per cent attributed the prolonged mild spell to climate change.

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