



## What do you see in an Olympic medal?

**Some look at this year's design and see food**

By [Miguel Llanos](#)

Reporter

MSNBC

Updated: 2:51 p.m. ET Feb. 8, 2006

Most people look at an Olympics medal and see glory. But this year, some are seeing food.

In blogs and other forums on the Internet, the medals for the XX Winter Olympics, the first ever to have a hole in the middle, are being compared to bagels and doughnuts.

"That gold one just says 'egg bagel' to me," wrote one blogger identified as torinoelle. "Yum. ... hold the cream cheese. I think they're gorgeous!"

"Congratulations — here's your gold donut," wrote GreatLakerMohawk, satirizing an awards ceremony in a posting on U.S. College Hockey Online.

"And it doubles as a washer," added Drop The Puck.

"Looks more like a giant Life Saver, actually," chimed in jtwcornell91.

The organizers of the Torino games have acknowledged that the design is "different" from medals of past games. But they also say it embodies much of what is Italian.

No, not food, but "images, signs and patterns tied to the history of Italy" — from ancient coins, rings and necklaces to the Italian love of plazas.

The Italian design team, led by Ottavani International, did not return requests for comment on the doughnut comparison, but the organizers probably spoke for it when they eloquently said: The hole in each medal "reveals also the area of the chest under which the heart and life beat. And just as the piazza comes to life only when people gather in it, so also the medals of Torino 2006 find their real meaning only when athletes wear them."

## **Salt Lake experience**

By tradition, the hosts of the Winter Games are allowed to design their own medals to give them a national touch. Medals at the Summer Games, however, are always the same.

Adrian Gostick, spokesman for O.C. Tanner, the company that designed the medals for the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City, said some criticism is to be expected.

The Salt Lake medals depicted an athlete bursting out of a rock, and Gostick recalled how Mitt Romney, head of the Salt Lake Organizing Committee, got "some pushback" initially from the International Olympic Committee.

But the design had the approval of the athletes themselves, some of whom said they wanted "to feel the weight around our necks," Gostick said. The medals ended up being the heaviest in Olympics history at 20 ounces, two to three times heavier than past medals.

So how did O.C. Tanner executives view the Torino design? "A few didn't know if they liked it or not" at first, Gostick said, but they came around once the firm's chief designer, Allison Van Vranken, declared: "I love it."

Van Vranken recalls criticism of her own design, including some who said the athlete depicted on the medal looked "like an alien coming out of fire."

"Sometimes it takes a little bit of explanation," she said, including pointing out that Winter Games medals are supposed to be unique to each host.

But, she added, "we always respond based on our own experience. If your experience is bagels and doughnuts, then maybe you'll see that."

What do this year's athletes think? Spokespeople for U.S. Winter Olympics teams contacted by MSNBC.com said they hadn't heard any comments one way or the other.

"Nothing from this men's hockey side, honestly," said Dave Fischer, spokesman for the U.S. men's hockey team.

## **If you were a winner ...**

The couch critics are much more vocal.

The anonymous writer of a personal blog titled "It's So Fantastic!" praised the Torino designers but wondered what an athlete winning a medal might think.

"If I were an Olympic athlete, would I want to win one of these medals when all my life I have been dreaming of a solid gold circle around my neck?" the writer asked. "I guess at that point, it's like birthing a baby — the medal is beautiful no matter what shape,

size or color.”

Another blogger was far less philosophical, closing with this Homer-esque afterthought: “Mmmmmm ... doughnuts.”

© 2006 MSNBC Interactive

© 2006 MSNBC.com

URL: <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/10740157/>