

# Sports

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## Jansen suits us quite fine

Sometimes you wonder what it's like to be the best in the world at something. Anything at all.

Horseshoes, high finance, cooking, quadratic equations, whatever. How does it feel to be the no-questions-asked, knockout champion of the planet, the one

who does it better than anybody anywhere can or ever has?

Dan Jansen must have wondered that once in a while when he was a little kid racing his brothers around West Allis. And

then he went out and did it.

He strapped on his skates and beat the Russians, the Germans, the Japanese, the Norwegians, even the daffy Dutch at what is clearly their own game. He set the records, won the medals and capped it all with one of the most dramatic, pressure-filled performances in American Olympic history.

He left himself without an encore after winning the gold medal last winter at Hamar, so now he's walking quietly off the stage. Jansen's retirement announcement this week is no surprise. He would have made worldwide headlines only if he'd decided to keep skating.

He's simply done everything there is to do in his sport, and it wears you out to think of the endless effort and staggering commitment it takes for anyone to be able to say that.

But that's not the best part of his career. The best part from a strictly smug, parochial, chest-thumping point of view is this: He's all ours.

And now that he's going out on his own terms, on top of the world, we know he always will be.

You just don't get to say that very much anymore. At least not on the sports pages.

The loyalties of local heroes may be constant, but their addresses are changeable. Paul Molitor would always be a Brewer... until he wasn't anymore. Henry Aaron hit his most historic home run for the Atlanta Braves. Sidney Moncrief finished his career in Georgia. Even Vince Lombardi left for Washington.

But nobody could deal Dan Jansen away from Wisconsin, and it would never occur to him to demand a trade. He never negotiated, let alone renegotiated, never claimed that the home team was anything but fair with him.

Big market, small market, it didn't matter. It was his market.

He's changed suburbs, but not his outlook. Unlike the basketball star who came here from New York and left for Los Angeles,

Milwaukee is exactly what Jansen is about. Friends, family, honest effort, clean fun.

With a little luck and the right management, he figures to become one very prosperous ex-athlete. Combine his accomplishments, looks and self-effacing manner with that internationally televised victory lap holding baby Jane in his arms, and you have a formula that a Madison Avenue lap would need years to cook up.

That's fine. Who would you rather see cash in, Dan Jansen or Dejon Sanders? Who do you think is more likely to be changed by fame?

You get no jewelry, no trash talk, no end zone dances from this superstar. Incredibly, you do get the occasional apology.

When Jansen slipped in the 500 meters at Hamar, it had to break his heart. It also left him wide open to the self-appointed experts who might have seen a half-dozen speed skating races in their

lives but were instantly qualified to judge a world champion's ability to handle pressure.

A typical reaction to that kind of treatment might be a snarl or a sulk. Jansen's reaction was to tell Milwaukee he was sorry for letting it down. And then he picked it right up again a few days later.

There may have been times when a multimillion-dollar cleanup hitter apologized to his town for a bases-loaded strikeout or an NBA conglomerate center said he was sorry for blowing a free throw, but it seems to have escaped recorded history.

Jansen's apology was public and sincere. It was also unnecessary. And totally Dan Jansen. He expected a lot from himself, and he never forgot where he came from.

Maybe Charles Barkley is right, and people shouldn't look to athletes as role models. But they do, anyway, and when they find somebody like Jansen, they feel very lucky. When they find him here, we all feel very proud.

There's no reason to stop feeling that way now that he's retired.

There will be a brand new world's fastest speed skater next season, because Dan Jansen has taken himself out of the race. But there will never be a greater champion.

**Dale Hofmann**



Sports columnist

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