February 2, 2011

Dear New York Times Editor,

I am writing you in regards to your New York Times interactive visualization entitled “Gold Medals in the Winter Olympics” ([http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/02/10/sports/olympics/winter-goldmedals.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/02/10/sports/olympics/winter-goldmedals.html)) published February 10, 2011. I am very impressed with the visualization techniques used to capture the gold medal winners for the Winter Olympics. For this reason, I chose to critique your visualization as a homework assignment for Dr. Ben Schneiderman's Information Visualization course at the University of Maryland.

At a very young age, I would anticipate watching various Olympic activities with my family because I was always involved in sports. Sometimes I’d find myself wondering who captured the gold medal during a particular year. I envision your interactive visualization helping people like me win some of those intense “friendly” debates with my competitive family members about who won a gold medal during any particular year at the Winter Olympics.

The user interface design of your visualization has several attractive features worth noting. The color scheme is simple yet effective throughout your design. Displaying the information with a consistent color scheme keeps the user focused and not wondering about what several colors mean. The use of icons for each winter sport at the top middle portion of the design in alphabetical order provides consistency by allowing the user to quickly identify the sport of their interest without reading each icon. As the user clicks on the left or right arrow, the gold medalist’s name and country is shown. In addition, a circle is highlighted on the map to visually show where the gold medalist’s country is located. Your tool also offers informative feedback when the user clicks the Olympic Winter sport icon or the left and right arrows that list the gold medalist and their country. This informative feedback lets the user know that they are correctly using your tool and making progress toward gaining the information that they seek.

I would like to kindly suggest some improvements to your visualization design. In order to make the user feel they are in control of the tool, I would suggest adding a text box that allows the user to search for gold medalists by name. They should also be able to search for a particular country. A radio button can be added below the search box with “name” and “country” and options. The radio buttons provide information to your system about the type of search information entered. Providing a search box with radio buttons will give the user more control over the information that interests them. In addition, the introduction sentence states that some countries have dominated Olympic events for years. Adding a simple comparison feature to support this statement would add significant value to your design. It would also be helpful to add links to secondary tasks. For example, providing a link that directs the user to another site that offers information about gold, silver, and bronze medal winners for the winter and summer Olympics would be extremely helpful for users seeking additional information.

In conclusion, I would like to personally thank you for designing a great tool that gives users the ability
to view the gold medal winners for the Winter Olympics. It was a great pleasure to evaluate your design.

Sincerely,

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