

Making the Most of Your Opportunities

A Media Guide

**for Athletes
and Their Coaches**

Updated July 2008

Note: Only the text has been updated and as such, the positions and titles were accurate at the time of original publication in 1998

Making the Most of Your Opportunities A Media Guide for Athletes and Their Coaches

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Many thanks,
Sheila Robertson
CAAWS Communications Consultant
August 1998

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INTRODUCTION

Because we believe that media attention is a critical element of the high-performance sport experience, CAAWS has developed **Making the Most of Your Opportunities: A Media Guide for Athletes and Their Coaches.**

Our goals are to help you to feel comfortable, poised and articulate in your dealings with the media, to learn the fine art of effective self-promotion and to raise your media profile.



Marion Lay

Making a team is eloquent testimony to drive, determination and dedication. It also signals success—success in developing the skills and mental attitude to place you among the best, success in handling the rigours of training and competition.

Making a team also brings responsibilities, as you become a role model to youngsters in every corner of Canada. Reporting your endeavours is the job of the media and, for many of you, this sudden thrust into the limelight can be distracting.

However, just as you have trained to excel in your event, you can also train to get the most from your interaction with the media. With training, you will be able to present yourself to the media as the dynamic, skilled, educated and accomplished individual you are. Through polished performances in front of the cameras, on radio and in the print media, you will raise the profile of yourself and your sport.

This potential of the media is equally true for coaches. Who better than you to describe the rigours of training, the unique characteristics and attributes of your athletes, the difficulties endured en route to personal success?

Coaches themselves are often the focus of media attention. The ability to develop the talent, teach the skills and nurture the mental toughness essential to high-performance sport attracts media interest in and of itself. The coach who works well with the media has learned to appreciate its vast reach and understands that smooth relationships can even improve an athlete's performance.

Finally, developing a media profile offers a unique opportunity for all of you—women and men, athletes and coaches—to speak out about the tremendous value of sport to girls and women. It is a subject that for too long has been overlooked. All it takes is a simple sentence or two to make a strong point. That's what kayaker Caroline Brunet, Canada's triple world champion, accomplished when she responded to a reporter's question like this: "The women should have the right to race the same distances as the men. ... This is 1997, and women should have the same rights as men."

Powerful words, widely reported.

All of you, I am sure, hold strong opinions about your own experiences in sport, and we encourage you to speak about those experiences to the media. As individuals whose goal is excellence, you are powerful inspirations. May your experiences in sport be happy and rewarding.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marion Lay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marion Lay

CAAWS Chair

Bronze Medallist, 1968 Olympic Games





Canadian Association for Women
and Sport and Physical Activity

Association canadienne pour l'avancement
des femmes du sport et de
l'activité physique

www.caaws.ca

Making the Most of Your Opportunities: A Media Guide for

Athletes and Their Coaches is a bible for the inquiring athlete and coach.

Whether you're defending champion or have just barely squeaked into the team, this book contains gems of information you can use to your advantage.

Thorough preparation for competition includes finding out everything you can about the situations you will encounter. The information in this guide—collected from athletes and coaches, journalists and communications experts—will go a long way towards making you feel comfortable and in control when meeting the media.

Seize every chance to promote yourself and your sport by giving a good interview—that is, by being honest and colourful in your answers and by clearly articulating opinions. Check out the typical questions on page 33. Why not kill some time while travelling and simulate an interview with a teammate? At the very least, you'll get a laugh out of it.

You've trained very hard to get as far as you have in sport. At this point, most of the competitors in your event probably have quite similar physical skills. So your performance will depend largely on how well you deal with the situation emotionally.

Dealing well with the situation at a sport event or championship includes recognizing that the media are there and are interested in you. Canadians care about what you're doing. Have you thought through what you will say? Perhaps you've already been taken by surprise.

Learning a bit about what makes the media tick is like knowing things about your competitors: it puts a human face on them and makes you ready to deal with whatever they throw at you. Unlike your competitors, however, the media are **not** out to get you! This Guide tells you what they **are** out to get.

Enjoy your experience!



Alison Korn

Master of Journalism Student
1997 World Rowing Champion
1996 Olympic Silver Medallist



Alison Korn



*The Canadian Olympic Committee(COC)
is committed to helping athletes achieve
excellence in sport, and beyond!*



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Sport can be a powerful vehicle for human development. To achieve this goal, we must live by and promote a set of noble principles both on and off the field of play.

THE COC BELIEVES IN THE FOLLOWING CORE VALUES:

EXCELLENCE

We believe in the right of all people to pursue their personal levels of excellence.

FUN

We believe in sport being fun.

FAIRNESS

We believe in fairness on and off the field of play, as characterized by equality, integrity and trust.

RESPECT

We believe in free and open communication and respect for the views, role and contribution of all.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

We believe that the short and long term physical, social, mental and spiritual well-being of all should be enhanced through appropriate behaviour and practices. We also believe that the visual and performing arts complement sport in the development of that well-being.

LEADERSHIP

We believe those who participate in sport have a responsibility to teach and apply the values of the Olympic Movement, involving others in the Olympic experience and inspiring and empowering them to reach their potential.

PEACE

We believe in sport as a vehicle to promote understanding and harmony within and among nations.



Canadian high-performance athletes and their coaches are often apprehensive when confronted by the media. The reporter may be viewed as an adversary, interested only in digging for the sensational or negative story rather than focusing on the performances of the athletes or the team or the results of the day.



Currie Chapman

Even if this perception may be correct, the interview process doesn't have to be a dreaded experience. Rather, it can be an exciting opportunity. **Making the Most of Your Opportunities** will show you the way.

A score, ranking or time is the external measurement of high-performance competition, but what fascinates the reader or audience are the emotions, relationships or circumstances that have crafted those results. With this in mind, a media interview is a real opportunity for you—as an athlete or coach—to promote your sport, your program and yourself or your athlete. **Making the Most of Your Opportunities** provides the insight and understanding for you to reach a level of comfort with the media.

Having worked at both ends of the mike through six Olympic Games, first as a coach and, later, as a member of the media, I have come to realize that potentially your biggest fans and followers are the media. They want to portray a winner in their reporting, but winning isn't always measured solely by results. The outstanding contributors to this media guide will help you to realize this distinction. They illustrate clearly how athletes and their coaches can and should respond to the media under a variety of circumstances.

All successful athletes and coaches plan for everything—except media relations—about their sport performance, down to the most minute detail. By following the expert advice in **Making the Most of Your Opportunities**, you can solidify the final link to success through your newly acquired insight and understanding of the media. Once you've absorbed this understanding, you will be in complete control of your own performance and legacy as an athlete and as a coach.

Don't miss this opportunity!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Currie Chapman".

Currie Chapman

Acting President, Canadian Professional Coaches Association





CHAPTER 1

**Brought to You
by CAAWS**

CAAWS: The Driving Force Towards Equity in Canada's Sport System

by Sheila Robertson



The roots of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) reach deep. They go back to the late 19th century when Canadian women first began to invade the male preserve that was sport. They grew through 1925 when Alexandrine Gibb founded the Women's Amateur Athletic Federation and for the first time gave women in sport an official voice. They have reached up through every decade of the 20th century, each distinguished by magnificent performances by dozens of Canadian women.

What has that athletic success to do with CAAWS? Don't the many Olympic medals and world championship titles indicate that all is well in the world of Canadian sport?

"... designing a sport system that fully involves women."

No. The successes have been misleading.

For much of Canada's sporting history, athletic success notwithstanding, women have been consistently under-represented in all facets of sport, more often frustrated and mute than flourishing and articulate.

To change this one-sided face of Canadian sport, CAAWS was created in 1981 by leaders of national, provincial and local sport and physical activity groups. At a meeting in Hamilton, Ontario, they agreed to work together to secure gender equity for girls and women in Canada's sport and active living communities.

Today, CAAWS and its partners are designing a new sport system, one that

- ◆ *fully involves women as leaders, coaches, officials, athletes and participants*
- ◆ *weaves equity into the governing structures*
- ◆ *offers girls a complete range of opportunities and choices*
- ◆ *assures full and fair access to resources*

The CAAWS approach to change is grounded in partnerships. CAAWS leaders

- ◆ *chair the 36-member Harassment and Abuse in Sport Collective*
- ◆ *offer leadership workshops to women in sport at the national and provincial levels*
- ◆ *play a key role in On the Move, a cross-country program for inactive teenage girls*

CAAWS works to increase awareness of the importance of gender equity within Canada's sporting community, the media and the public at large.

CAAWS participates in decision-making at all levels of the sport community. Nationally, it contributes to the development of Sport Canada's Funding and Accountability Framework. Working through regional networks, CAAWS helps develop and implement policies that support and complement the national approach. At every level, CAAWS celebrates outstanding achievement through the bi-annual Breakthrough Awards, and the annual announcement of its list of the Most Influential Women in Sport and Physical Activity.



Synchronized swimmers Penny and Vicky Vilagos face the media

As well as developing this book, CAAWS has commissioned ground-breaking reports on harassment and abuse in sport, eating disorders, legal rights and responsibilities, and girls playing on boys' teams and has developed a gender equity handbook that is widely used by sport associations across Canada.

A leader on the international scene, CAAWS participates in major world conferences, including the World Conference on Women and Sport sponsored by the International Olympic Committee, the historic Women, Sport and the Challenge of Change conference, where the Brighton Declaration was drafted, and the subsequent World Conferences on Women and Sport. CAAWS was also instrumental in founding WomenSport International.

The CAAWS of the future will wear a different face. Yet while it matures, grows and keeps pace with evolving demands, CAAWS remains true to its founding principle of securing gender equity in sport and physical activity in Canada. CAAWS has a record of accomplishment and dedication. Fulfilling our mission is only a matter of time.





CHAPTER 2

**The Steps To
Successful
Media Relations**

Media Relations: A Two-Way Street

by Sheila Robertson

Despite the phenomenal growth of women's sport, coverage in newspapers and on radio and television remains largely devoted to men's sports. And when women athletes are the subject of reports and commentary, they are sometimes referred to in words that treat them differently from men, often in ways that downplay or trivialize their achievements.

A favourite example: *"She is a comely nubile with hazel eyes, a glowing complexion and a decidedly feminine grace. There's no hint of testosterone in her nature."* That's goaltender Manon Rheaume as described by *THE TORONTO STAR*.

Admittedly, that quote dates from 1994, but Rheaume constantly attracted commentary on her looks.

Most members of the media agree that sports commentary and reporting, like the use of the English language in general, should reflect the fundamental equality of women and men, both on and off the field. Athletes, coaches and the media share the responsibility for ensuring that this equality of reporting happens.

"Their sporting achievements give them a potent platform."

A few years ago, CAAWS offered the media a few suggestions, which have since gained widespread acceptance. It's good advice for athletes and coaches, too:

- ◆ *Just as male athletes are generally referred to as "men" or "young men", refer to female athletes as "women" or "young women" and not as "girls", unless they are under 12 years of age. In our opinion, athletes should not be referred to as "ladies". However, if the sport is known as Ladies' Golf, for example, it is of course appropriate to use that term.*
- ◆ *Avoid descriptions that place too much emphasis on physical appearances or skills not related to athletic performance.*
- ◆ *Avoid the use of inappropriate nouns, adjectives and adverbs when describing athletes. Inappropriate words include "moody", "shapely", "curvaceous", "well-built", "cute", "pixie", "bouncy", "coquette" and "jockette". Also to be avoided are words that suggest weakness, such as "indecisive", "out of control", "shaky" and "panicked".*

Sometimes, women athletes use less-than-flattering terms to describe themselves to the media. Some seem uncomfortable using powerful descriptors that adequately reflect their athletic attributes—words such as *"dynamic", "powerful", "agile", "gutsy", "leader", "aggressive"* and *"swift"*. They forget that their sporting achievements give them a potent platform—for discussing the drive and determination with which they pursue their sporting dreams, for turning more and more girls on to sport and for challenging the attitude that women can't go the distance.

◀ **An informal media moment for former alpine ski star Ken Read**



Gymnastics coach Alex Bard encourages a young athlete.

As important role models for young Canadians, your impact is profound. You reach thousands of youngsters, and their parents, too.

Your message can be something as simple as, *"Being involved in sport is important for both girls and boys"*, or you can follow the example of some top athletes who used their media platform at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games to reach out to girls and women.

During a post-game interview, basketball player Lisa Leslie, 1996 Olympic gold medallist, looked straight into the

camera and said, *"I want to say something to the young girls who are watching—you can dream your dreams, and you can do everything I have done."*

1996 Olympic swimmer Amy Van Dyken challenged the notion that it is not feminine to be muscular: *"Nowadays it's cool to be able to bench press your husband."*

Male athletes can also use their media platform to encourage girls and women to take up sport. Cycling silver medallist Brian Walton spoke effectively of the impact a woman athlete had on his life: *"Back in '76, I was just a young kid in Halifax and I lived on the same street as [swimmer] Nancy Garapick. She won two bronze medals, and I got to see them. I've always dreamed of winning an Olympic medal, and now my dream has come true."*

Softball standout and Olympic gold medallist Dot Richardson made the point when she said, *"One of my greatest joys is knowing that my five nieces have an exciting future. I want them to have the same opportunities as my five nephews. I'll do anything I can to make that happen."*

No one expresses the value of girls and women in sport better than Canada's great rower Silken Laumann, who said, *"One of the most valuable things that sport can do for us as women is to give us the confidence to discover our dreams for ourselves and then develop the confidence to explore those dreams."*

Women athletes are no different from their male colleagues in the skill, dedication and courage they bring to their sports. The challenge is to tell your stories as effectively as possible and to do your part in portraying your own achievements accurately.



Mastering Media Coverage

There is a widespread belief that Canadian athletes who are not hockey players or race car drivers receive media coverage only once every four years, and even then only if theirs is an Olympic sport.

Although this is the truth for most sports, it doesn't have to be. As you read your favourite daily newspaper, you may notice that some Canadian athletes and their sports receive steady yet unspectacular coverage.

Are the media playing favourites? Is it just plain luck? Hardly.

The coverage has likely been generated by none other than the sport's national federation. Often, the federation has hired professionals—either a full-time employee or a company like Canadian Sport News (CSN)—to publicize its sport and its athletes.

In the main, however, sport federations remain inexcusably in the dark about the importance of media relations. Meanwhile, the handful that have media savvy reap the benefits. Public exposure of their sports soars and sponsorship dollars are garnered.

“Sports federations remain inexcusably in the dark about the importance of media relations.”

THE PUBLICITY GAME

by Louis Daignault



Like every sport, the publicity game is played by strict rules. Those rules are set by the media.

Rule number one is to provide the media with what they want. Guess what? Are you sitting down? The media want stories about Canadian athletes. That's the absolute truth, and CSN has thousands of non-Olympic Games clippings to prove it.

Perhaps the toughest task is to deliver the information to the media properly so that it will get into the newspaper or mentioned on the television or radio sportscast. That's why the sports in the news have hired experts such as CSN, which has spent years developing specialized media lists and gaining professional credibility.

So now you're probably asking yourself, if the media is so interested, why don't they cover Canadian athletes themselves? Answer: In a capitalist society such as Canada, newspapers and radio and television stations are no different from any other business. The objective is to make as much money as possible.

What sells newspapers to sports fans in Canada—when there are no Olympics—is professional sport, specifically the National Hockey League, major league baseball and professional football. Secondary sports such as curling, tennis, golf, auto racing and basketball also have important pockets of followers, which can affect advertising, sales and viewership.

**Sport physiotherapist
Carrie Smith and
sports personality
Don Cherry**



Canadian Olympic Association

Louis Daignault is editor of *Canadian Sport News*, a publicity service specializing in amateur sports. In 1997 he was named among the 25 most influential people in Canadian sport by *The Globe and Mail*.

Over one million Canadians tune in to *HOCKEY NIGHT IN CANADA* every Saturday night, and three times that watch important play-off games. The annual Grey Cup football game is the most-watched Canadian television show, with over 3.5 million viewers. The Labatt Brier curling final draws a television audience of one million.

In other words, live television sports strongly influence what's in the newspaper the next day.

Unfortunately, most amateur sports don't benefit from live broadcasts of their championship competitions. In fact, most events attract just a handful of spectators, generally family and friends of the competitors.

But that doesn't mean that the media and public are not interested. Each medium is committed to being an integral part of its community, and sport is a key indicator in the quality of that commitment. Which brings us to rule two in the publicity game: Athletes and coaches should be aware of their local media and develop a working relationship with them.

One way to establish a relationship is to get in touch with local media regularly. Provide schedules; call the media before your team departs for a competition; let them know the who, what, where, why and how of the competition. The results should be sent to the media as soon as possible after the competition—preferably the same day—whether those results are good, bad or indifferent.

Rule three is for the coach to be part of the publicity team. Although the media are usually more interested in stories on athletes, the coach is in many instances the most important source of information. A coach can provide an insider's view of an athlete—personality, strengths, weaknesses and characteristics—and of the sport—rule changes, statistical information, news and views. Often a reporter will work the story around the information provided without quoting or even crediting the coach—making the reporter sound like the expert.

There will be times when your media efforts may seem fruitless, but if you are persistent and consistent, then you can expect to get a fair share of media coverage. And most journalists are interested when Canadians make an impact on the international scene, whether it's in archery or sailing ... or even hockey.

What appears to be a complex game is really quite simple. The winners are the athletes and coaches who are willing to master the who, what, where, why and how in the distribution and quality of information.



Getting It Done the Freestyle Way

When I was asked to contribute to this guide, I went directly to the source of our media success—Grant McDiarmid. As marketing manager for Owens Corning, he decided to sponsor the Canadian National Freestyle Ski Team; he ended up building a partnership that has far exceeded the usual duration of a corporate sport sponsorship.

by Mary Fraser



“The key to a successful media relations program is to do all the things that we ended up doing,” says McDiarmid.

So what did Owens Corning do to establish a media program that has been touted as amateur sport’s best? Perhaps the first thing to recognize is that Freestyle’s media relations began as a sponsor-driven program. Owens Corning considered media relations to be 75 per cent of their entire sponsorship package. Their number-one priority was to have their name and logo in the print media and on television, providing a platform for advertising and promotions that would in turn create an abundance of hosting opportunities.

“The athletes have a tremendous understanding of how important media are to them, both personally and professionally.”

In other words, the objective was corporate brand recognition. The vehicle was Freestyle.

Having chosen their sport, Owens Corning found they had to educate their athletes. Media training became an integral part of Freestyle’s public relations program. Working with public relations firms and with former athletes now in sport broadcasting, our athletes are taught how to prepare for interviews, how to deal with difficult questions and how to develop corporate messages, sport messages and personal messages. In the past few years, media training has been conducted during the off-season, usually during a summer training camp. Our objective is to work with the athletes in an environment where they are relaxed and rested and where they feel comfortable asking questions. There’s a refresher course before the first World Cup of the season.

Now that we’ve been with Owens Corning for more than a decade, our younger athletes have the luxury of watching and learning from the seasoned veterans. They are exposed to media and hosting events year-round, giving them a level of comfort during the competitive season.

Perhaps the biggest misconception about my job is the idea that, because I do media relations for a winter sport on a World Cup tour, I work only in the winter. Not so. Most of Freestyle’s media program is implemented during the summer and fall.

In summer, we do media training, bring headshots up to date and develop new story lines for the coming season. Our ideas focus on specific questions:

Alpine skier Cary Mullen reacts for the Japanese media



Canadian Olympic Association

- ◆ *What's at stake for our team this season?*
- ◆ *What personal challenges do individual athletes face?*
- ◆ *What are the events to watch?*

This information is accumulated and summarized in an annual media guide that is distributed in the fall to all Canadian sports media. We include broadcast television footage (B-roll) of our higher-profile athletes to provide all local and national television stations with the option of showing our sport on their news broadcasts throughout the winter. In a perfect world, we'd have satellite broadcasting at all World Cup events; failing perfection, B-roll provides television stations with some footage and opens the door for a telephone call after a World Cup win when we're far from home.

The off-season also provides opportunities to promote our athletes when they are not under the pressure of competition. News conferences and media tours have been a major part of our media relations program and have proven successful at launching the competitive season every fall.

Anyone who has ever worked in media relations knows the fear of planning a news conference without knowing if anyone will show up. Freestyle has effectively dealt with this issue by incorporating performances into our news conferences. Admittedly, our sport lends itself to that type of activity: It's easy to dazzle when you have elite athletes performing double twisting double back flips on a trampoline. Over the years, locations have varied from school gymnasiums to company plants to shopping malls in downtown Toronto. We put on a show, draw a crowd and invite the media.

Satellite footage is available at both World Cups held in Canada, and a Canadian Press (CP) accredited photographer is booked for the first month of the winter tour, when the team is in Europe. We also hire a CP writer, who files after every competition throughout the season. Newswire photos have proven to be an essential and successful element of our media relations program and tend to increase the number of stories that get picked up in Canada throughout the winter.

While on tour, I provide each World Cup press centre with Canadian team information. I'm on the hill with the athletes in the finish area to ensure that interviews are conducted in the proper order of priority. After competitions, I take the athletes to the press centre, where I provide colour commentary to CP, arrange telephone interviews for athletes with the Canadian media and ensure athlete accessibility to the television networks covering the event. Results are

Mary Fraser
is media
relations
officer with
the Canadian
Freestyle Ski
Association.

distributed to the media, and I follow up at the end of each World Cup competition in preparation for the following week.

In spring, it's time to reconnect with all the media we contacted during the World Cup season. Our annual media audit is a great help in determining our strengths and weaknesses. One reporter told me he was prepared to give us a first-class rating solely because he had never before received a call from a sports organization asking what could be improved.

The only way to know if the media are getting what they want and need is to ask them. I've been told that the success of our program lies in our willingness to go to the media and do our very best to get them what they want and need.

Our goal has been to develop relationships with media and maintain them through consistency. One reporter wrote, *"I wish other sports put in even half the time that you guys do to keep us informed and get the athletes in touch with us."* The media have come to expect things from us, and it's a standard that we strive to maintain.

But the greatest strength of our program has yet to be mentioned. ...

I have yet to meet an athlete who hasn't given 100 per cent to her or his sport and sponsors. The partnerships that exist are solid and respectful. The athletes have a tremendous understanding of how important the media are to them, both personally and professionally. They are willing to do whatever I ask of them, and in return, I do my best to keep my demands within reason, respecting their moods and schedules. Our program could not succeed without their cooperation.

I remember being up one night with Jean-Luc Brassard. We were in Japan and he had just won the world championship. The win was followed by drug testing, news conferences and autograph signings. By 10 o'clock that evening, Jean-Luc had not managed even to change his clothes, much less have a shower. Every other athlete had long since gone to bed. But time zones have no respect for a weary athlete, and we knew we still had a long night ahead of us. We spent the next four hours on the phone, making sure no one was missed. In between dialling, I apologized for how long everything was taking. Jean-Luc held up his hand and said, *"Hey, it's just part of it. Now, who do we talk to next?"* ❖

A Media Opinion of the Freestyle Approach

I have no criticism, only compliments. The program is outstanding, efficient, co-operative and helpful. As a result, the television program, the athletes, the sponsors and the sport all benefit. ... Freestyle should be used as a model for many of the amateur sports media programs. The sport excels in dissemination of information and athlete access. It is very media friendly and extremely well organized. The athletes are articulate and approachable. They seem to feel that the media are friends, and not enemies to be avoided. They are well-schooled in how to do interviews and very good ambassadors for their sport.

MIKE BRANNAGAN,
producer, CBC Sports

Achieving Media Visibility

How does a Canadian athlete carve a profile with the media, at home and abroad? Given the sea of information available to the media, the name of the game is proactive promotion.

by Lorraine Lafrenière and Sheila Robertson

Coaches, too, can benefit from developing a media profile. For the many who tend to shy away from the spotlight, the suggestions in this chapter should at least be considered. For the coach who wants to develop a proactive and effective style, the steps outlined for athletes adapt easily.

“With visibility comes responsibility.”

Begin by visualizing what kind of prominence you want to achieve, and then focus on the steps to get there. Don't just think about it—write down your goal and then write down each step you must take to achieve it. Be realistic. Tailor your goals to your sport career. Are you a provincial-level athlete? Focus on your province's media. Are you a high-performance athlete on the lookout for sponsorships? Focus on national dailies, television and radio. Whatever your level, never forget your hometown outlets.

Just as you assess your athletic progress on a regular basis, assess and re-assess your media relationships. Success will not come overnight, and you will not be successful at each attempt. Sound familiar? Using the same perseverance and energy you apply daily in your sport can help you achieve your media goals.

Understand, though, that with visibility comes responsibility. Once you establish a promotional program, be prepared to maintain it, in good times and bad. Nothing throws a bigger monkey wrench into media relations than ignoring the media when things don't go as you planned. In fact, that is the exact time to follow up on all of your commitments. By doing so, you achieve a distinctive, professional relationship with the media.

PREPARING YOUR OWN MEDIA KIT

One of the most important tools for the media-wise athlete is a personalized media kit. Hometown media outlets, which usually take a keen interest in local athletes, are likely to put well-prepared and interesting material to good use. Larger outlets keep good material on file, particularly if the biography offers tidbits designed to whet a reporter's interest.

Update all the contents of your kit at the beginning of each season, and keep your results and personal data current throughout the year. As you build a profile in the media, you can adapt the contents to contact potential sponsors.

A successful media kit does not have to be expensive or slick. What counts is the material inside. As much as possible, use a fact-sheet style, with the material for each topic presented neatly on a single page: It's easier for you to prepare

and for someone else to read. If you will be handing them out in person, insert the material in a simple folder with large interior pockets on either side (you can buy them at your local stationery store). Put background material on the left side and your competitive history on the right. You can also provide this material to be downloaded from your website, or burn it to CD/DVD for distribution.

Here are the things that should be in your media kit:

- ◆ **A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE** (see the samples in the Appendices) in two formats—a summary and an in-depth biography. Essential information includes your full name (and pronunciation for the electronic media), address and phone number, age, height, birthplace, hometown, coach and competitive highlights (which must always include best results, education, awards, special interests, community activities, work experience, hobbies, famous relatives, and so on).

A coach should also list successful and developing athletes, with a few words on the competitive history of each.


If you don't wish to publicize your own telephone number, arrange for someone else, such as your coach or your sport's media relations expert, to be your media contact. Working out a system that ensures that reporters get the service they require can make the difference between a good story appearing in the next edition of the paper, or no story appearing anywhere. Tell your contact what the reporters require and what deadlines they are facing. Ensure that your contact has a back-up person.

- ◆ **A BACKGROUNDER OF YOUR SPORT.** The best stories about you will be prepared by reporters who have a working knowledge of your sport. Foreign reporters often specialize in one sport, but their Canadian counterparts tend to be generalists—in other words, their editors expect them to cover a great many sports, and they often lack the time to learn the ins and outs of yours.

Include a paragraph on the history of your sport, a description of how it's played, who the top athletes are, where it's played, the best countries and major competitions. If your sport federation has a brochure, ask for a supply.

Provide contact numbers for both your provincial association and the national federation. The more information you provide, the better, so try to include contact names and numbers for your forthcoming competitions in Canada and abroad.

- ◆ **PHOTOS.** Invest in a good-quality head-and-shoulders shot for the print media and a colour slide for television. Make sure your name, the sport and the date of the photo are on the back. If possible, include a recent action shot as well.
- ◆ **NEWS CLIPPINGS.** Including clippings in your media kit should be done for only two reasons—you're an athlete or coach who has received local or provincial exposure and you're trying to promote yourself at the national level, or the material adds another dimension to your biography. Ask



yourself, “Does this clipping enhance my bio, or not? Is the information important to me and my career?”

- ◆ **SCHEDULE.** Include a competition schedule that lists locations, dates, a contact person and telephone number, training times (that are open to the media) and travel dates. Be sure to translate the schedule into your local time zone or use eastern standard time. Whichever you choose, be consistent. If your sport has a media relations employee, coordinate your activities with that person and make sure that he or she has your media kit on hand and is aware of your promotional activities. Media people do not appreciate being contacted twice about the same person and event. If you're competing abroad or at a major provincial or national competition in the near future, let the media know how to reach you personally for comment; e-mail, for example, can be an effective and inexpensive tool. Arrange with local media to be available to take or make a telephone call at specified times after each game or race. Above all, always fulfil any commitments you make to the media. If the unexpected comes up, make alternative arrangements.
- ◆ **SPONSORSHIPS.** Include a list of your corporate sponsors and contact names and numbers, if applicable. Send a copy of your media kit to your sponsors along with a note telling them who has received it. If you are just starting the search for corporate sponsors, your media kit doubles as an excellent mail-out introduction to the corporations you wish to attract.
- ◆ **A GOOD “CAAWS”.** The media will be interested in knowing if you support gender equity in sport, take a strong interest in fair play or oppose the use of performance-enhancing substances by athletes. Contact the relevant organization and ask for a promotional brochure to include in your media kit.

Review your media kit carefully. Ask for your coach's opinion of the contents. You may also want a friend or teammate to offer comments. This material creates an impression of you: Make certain it is accurate.

DISTRIBUTION

Distribution of either your hard or electronic copy, is as important as the information you've put together. In other words, take the time to thoroughly research who needs to get your kit. All your hard work will be for nothing if the material doesn't get into the right hands. Tailor distribution to your sport's season, but make sure it is in the hands of the media several weeks before competition begins. If sent too early, it will be put aside and probably lost. If sent too late, other athletes or sports may have taken the spotlight.

As when preparing the contents of your media kit, make sure the distribution also matches your level of competition. In other words, if you compete at the local level, focus on local media; if you are on the national team and compete abroad, focus on national and international media. Never, we repeat, forget your hometown and provincial media outlets.

DEADLINES

Timing is everything! It certainly is one of the keys to getting along with the media.

Deadlines are important to understand because the level of urgency felt by the reporter often shapes the interview.

Different media have different types of deadlines:

◆ *Magazine interviews require lots of time and are generally conducted in a relaxed and laid-back manner. These interviews are in-depth and time-consuming.*

◆ *Daily newspaper reporters work to a daily deadline, which means they don't have much time. Interviews are usually only a few minutes long; sometimes all the reporter needs is a quick quote. It's not hard to feel the pressure these reporters work under.*

◆ *Today's newspaper deadlines often include a short story filed immediately for the website, so responding to a print reporter in a timely manner is critical to ensuring a story appears.*

◆ *Weekly newspapers also have a deadline, but it is neither as urgent as the daily's nor as relaxed as the magazine's.*

◆ *For radio interviews, the story is usually being told the same day, or the day after at the latest. Usually the reporter just wants a few strong sentences.*

The reporters show up at the competition, get what they want and then they're gone.

◆ *Television also works to a daily deadline. Again, they're looking for a few good quotes from several people along with footage of an athlete in action, talking to the coach or warming up.*

PENNY JOYCE,
Swimming Canada Natation

Ask your sports federation will provide you with a list of media outlets or help you to find them. You can also reference the internet listing for the media outlet to get contact information. There are also services available that list all print outlets and radio and television stations in Canada. Your federation may subscribe to them, or copies may be available at local libraries. Note the medium's name and address and the sports editor's name, phone, fax and e-mail addresses. The lists are published quarterly; bring your contact list up to date appropriately. Include weekly as well as daily newspapers and radio and television stations that cover local sports.

BUSINESS CARDS. While not a necessity, business cards are a good investment. They slip easily into a reporter's file and are quickly accessible. Carry the cards with you and hand one out to all the reporters you meet, telling them that you are always available if they have a question about you or your sport. Ask for their business cards and keep them on file so that they will be included when you distribute your material.

FOLLOW-UP. Include a cover note with each media kit and let the recipient know that you will be in touch. When you do call, ask if the reporter needs any additional information or has any questions.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Keep your list of e-mail addresses current. Communicating with the media by email is both a timely and inexpensive way to provide biographical updates, competition results and training and competition schedules.

Monitor your own press coverage on the internet. Keep track of what gets printed after your competitions. Monitor the various sport sections so that you are up-to-date on news in your sport as well as in the rest of the sport world. As your public profile grows, you will be asked a wider variety of questions and will be expected to have opinions.

Having your own website allows you to communicate directly with both media and fans who follow your sport. It can be time consuming to maintain, but it allows you to post photos and comments as soon as possible following a

competition, or keep people informed of your training progress. Just remember that media may follow and incorporate your comments into profiles, so don't post anything on your blog, website or social sites such as Facebook, that you would not want repeated in a media story.

STAYING IN TOUCH

To be truly successful at developing visibility, it is important to stay in touch with the media even when the peak competition season is past.

Establish relationships with the media who cover your sport regularly. Ask how they prefer to be contacted (by phone, fax or e-mail). Find out what interests them. Don't wait for them to call you if you have a news item you think is important. Media always appreciate hearing from you, even if they are unable to print your information or results. Don't be offended if they don't have the time to discuss your results—most must meet difficult deadlines using limited resources. Don't make the mistake of calling for a chat. Your relationship with the media should always be on a business footing.

If you decide to stay in touch with the media, remember that this commitment must be maintained not only during your best performances, but also at times when things did not go as you planned. Timely reporting of your results and issues is what makes the difference when developing and maintaining your relationship with the media.



Interview Tips

Dealing with the media is not an addition to your sport career; it is an essential part of it. That is why interviews should be welcomed as opportunities to discuss your career and your sport.

PREPARE AND PRACTISE

by Sheila Robertson and Lorraine Lafrenière

First, give some thought to the kinds of questions you might be asked. You could even ask the reporter beforehand. If rehearsing your answers makes you feel more comfortable, do so; in any case, have a general idea of how you want to respond to avoid sounding stilted and uneasy. Coming up with responses should not be difficult, as your sport is something you know very well.

“You are always on record.”

If you're an athlete, consider developing four or five key points of things that are important to you and your sport—the role of women in sport, or the financial strains of being a high performance athlete, or the intensity of your training. If you're a coach, you might want to elaborate on the special demands of the profession. Embellish your responses with facts about these topics and find creative ways of introducing them into the conversation.

Before beginning your interview, find out as much as you can about the reporter—the agency, the agency's and reporter's reputations and the reporter's knowledge of sport (yours in particular). If the reporter is new to your sport, keep it in mind when answering questions. Terms that are second nature to you may be foreign to the reporter and the target audience. Develop alternatives to sport-specific words and acronyms. For example, instead of saying, “CWSA” (Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association), say, “our national wheelchair sports federation”.

Next, give some thought to the information you're prepared to share and tailor your answers to accommodate the knowledge of the reporter. Take the time to explain your sport's intricacies. As speed skaters prepared for the 1998 Olympic Winter Games, for example, the media were fascinated by the new clap skate. Plenty of coverage of the sport was generated by that topic.

If you have a sponsor, wear their logo or find a way to work them into the conversation. For radio or print media, practise delivering a sentence or two, no more, that mentions the sponsor in a casual and comfortable way. If government funding has helped you to stay in your sport, mention it.

The more you get used to being interviewed, the easier it becomes and the more you will sound like you. Use the sample questions at the end of this article to practise with a friend or teammate. If you have access to a video camera, play-back can be invaluable because it allows you to assess your performance. The key to success is to remember to be yourself.

THE INTERVIEW

- ◆ *Arrive on time. Keep all of your commitments and always let the reporter know if you are unable to keep an appointment.*
- ◆ *During the interview, take your time. Don't feel pressured into answering a question immediately.*
- ◆ *When you've given your answer, stop talking and wait for the next question.*
- ◆ *No matter what a reporter is looking for, you can help the reporter and yourself by giving a "golden quote"—a keeper, a great line, a great story. A good quote can make a story; a great quote goes even further—and think what it does for you! Compelling personal stories increase your profile and those of your team and your sport.*
- ◆ *Remember that you may be sitting with just one person—the reporter—but you are actually speaking to many people. Never underestimate the impact a reporter can have. Ensure that everything you say is accurate. Discuss only those issues that you know well. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so in a straightforward manner. Offer to put the reporter in touch with someone who can help.*
- ◆ *We can't say it enough: There is no such thing as "off the record". You are **always** on record. Never say anything you are not willing to see in print or hear on the sports news.*
- ◆ *Keep your cool. Some reporters deliberately frame questions in emotional tones. Don't let it work.*
- ◆ *Be energetic in your answers. An enthusiastic response shows that you enjoy your sport and feel confident. Long pauses or a flat monotone may suggest a lack of interest, indecision and insecurity. Give something of yourself in your answers. What you do is interesting: Try to make it interesting to the reporter and it will come across to the audience.*
- ◆ *Don't hesitate to mention something you think will add to the reporter's knowledge of you and your sport.*
- ◆ *Think fast; talk slowly. This tip is especially important for television and radio interviews. If you talk too quickly, your point may be lost or misunderstood.*
- ◆ *Because time is limited and you don't have the luxury of explaining terms, avoid technical jargon, including acronyms.*
- ◆ *Use simplicity. Short, to-the-point answers are better than answers that are lengthy and complicated. But don't hesitate to provide additional information if you think it might increase the reporter's knowledge of you and your sport.*
- ◆ *Don't get side-tracked by a reporter's agenda. She or he may have an opinion about your results, your coaching or how the team should have done. It's up to you to deal with the media in a positive way. Avoid arguing; concentrate on being positive. State your point of view and stick with it.*

- ◆ *Be yourself. If you're a funny person, be funny. If you're quiet, answer the reporter quietly. If you try to become a different person during an interview, you'll become nervous and tense. Be confident.*
- ◆ *Be conscious of what you are saying. Listen carefully to the questions that are being asked. Try to avoid controversy or any comment that may be misconstrued. If you are going to make a controversial statement, be sure you can back it up during and after the interview.*
- ◆ *If the reporter tries to get you to say things you don't want to say, bridge back to your main message by using such phrases as*
"That's not the real issue; the real issue is ..."
"There's an equally important concern, and that is ..."
"There's another issue to consider ..."
- ◆ *Remember that interviews are a great opportunity for you to promote yourself and to thank your sponsors, family, friends and coach.*
- ◆ *Thank the reporter for the interest in you and your sport. You are newsworthy— otherwise, the media wouldn't be interested in you—but politeness goes a long way in developing your reputation as a "good interview".*

SPECIAL TIPS FOR THE BROADCAST MEDIA

It's no secret that the broadcast media play a very large role in influencing how the public interprets, or misinterprets, the information being presented. That's why it's important for athletes and their coaches to consistently project a positive image.

With this in mind, any exposure gained through the broadcast media, whether live or taped, should be approached thoughtfully and tactfully.

For a television interview, dress appropriately and always look at the reporter. Ignore the cameraperson; it's that person's job to find the best angle, and it's yours to supply the best answer. Once you've developed confidence, you will automatically glance at the (fixed) camera, and therefore at your audience, in a natural manner. If you are doing a *"double-ender"*, that is, speaking directly to a camera and hearing questions through an earpiece, focus on one spot on the camera throughout the interview. Try to maintain eye contact with the camera. You will come across in a much more confident and professional manner.

Ask if the interview will be live or taped.

Strive to sound calm and confident. Rapid speech is a sign of anxiety; if an audience detects nervousness in your voice, they are bound to be distracted and uncomfortable. If an interviewer purposely tries to throw you off balance, make every effort not to sound intimidated or annoyed. The audience will respect you and your comments even more if you maintain your composure. Try to avoid slang and such verbal hiccups such as "yah", "eh" and "um".

The media suggest that you treat every mike as live. During a televised competition, broadcasters often place live microphones in the venue to pick up the “sporting sounds” of the event. These include crowd sounds, coach’s comments from the bench and bickering from the penalty box. As a result, it is possible for athletes’ comments and vocal sounds to be broadcast (and later reported by the print media).

Sample interview questions

The media is a competitive business. Local newspapers are rivals every bit as much as the big-city dailies. And they are all in competition with the local radio and television stations. Each outlet wants to be first with the story.

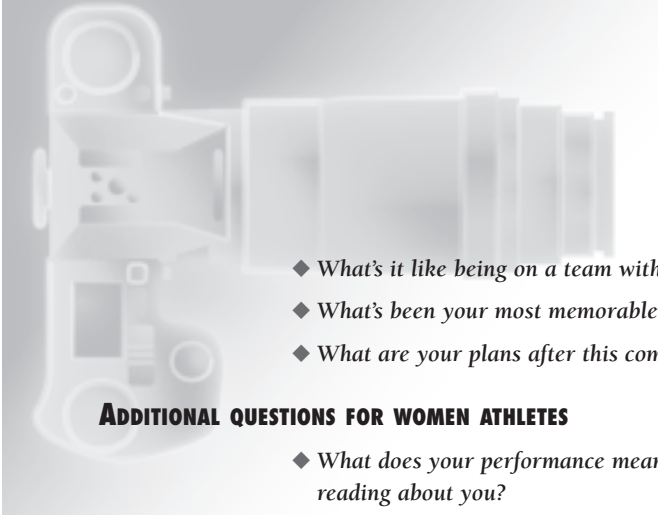
If you are involved in an important story, almost certainly you will have to deal with the ripple effect. Once an item hits the papers, everyone will want to be in on the story, and each journalist will want to outdo the other in telling it. In other words, expect lots of calls and lots of questions.

If the story has a negative spin, be prepared to give your side, but very carefully. Be particularly careful if you are asked to clear the air and make sure you tell the same story, truthfully, to each reporter. Consistency is important.

QUESTIONS FOR ATHLETES

The following are examples of questions the media may ask you in an in-depth interview. They may seem simple and straightforward, but if you offer thoughtful and interesting answers, a small sidebar might become a lead story. Thinking about the answers before an interview will help you feel comfortable and well prepared:

- ◆ *What attracted you to your sport?*
- ◆ *What do you get out of competing at this level?*
- ◆ *What are your other interests?*
- ◆ *What do you think you would be doing now if you weren’t competing?*
- ◆ *What are your goals in school/work/sport?*
- ◆ *How do you feel about going to the Olympics/Paralympics/Canada Games/worlds/nationals?*
- ◆ *What are your chances of winning a medal? Who’s your competition?*
- ◆ *Who’s helped you along the way? Family, friends, a mentor?*
- ◆ *Who’s your coach? What’s he/she like?*
- ◆ *Who supports you?*
- ◆ *Do you have a sponsor? How do you get by financially?*
- ◆ *Describe your training regimen. How much do you train?*

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- ◆ *What's it like being on a team with (name of high-profile athlete)?*
 - ◆ *What's been your most memorable race/game/event?*
 - ◆ *What are your plans after this competition?*

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR WOMEN ATHLETES

- ◆ *What does your performance mean to girls who are watching, listening to or reading about you?*
- ◆ *Do you believe that girls and women who are interested in sport have enough role models?*
- ◆ *Do you think that women athletes enjoy the same opportunities as male athletes?*
- ◆ *Does the media cover women's sports fairly?*

QUESTIONS FOR COACHES

Experienced coaches suggest that the media are most interested in a coach after a major race when the day's performance comes under intense scrutiny. At such times, the atmosphere is usually emotional, often tense and occasionally elated. Here are some examples of what to expect:

- ◆ *Give us a rundown of how you expect the team to do.*
- ◆ *What are the strengths/weaknesses of the team?*
- ◆ *How tough is the competition? And how well prepared is your team?*
- ◆ *Was there any special preparation for the tournament? Please give us the details.*
- ◆ *Considering the results today, how well do you think the athletes were prepared for competition?*
- ◆ *What went wrong today, coach, and how are you going to fix it?*
- ◆ *The Swiss did extremely well; what are they doing better than we are?*
- ◆ *Enough excuses. How are we going to get back on top?*

THE SCRUM

From time to time, often immediately following your competition, you may find yourself involved in a scrum—surrounded by a question-calling cluster of reporters, with mikes and tape recorders thrust toward your face. The questions in a scrum call for short, to-the-point responses.

To do well in a scrum, athletes should be aware of their stats (their best and worst performances), who the top competitors in their sport are at the national and international levels, who the world champions and world record holders are and any other pertinent information about their event.

Athletes should also be aware of past stories written about them. If there has been a doping infraction, trouble with a coach or some other incident with a

negative side, you should expect questions about it.

Don't use reporters' names during a scrum; if you do, no one else in the electronic media will be able to use your answer.

Here are the types of questions that you may be asked in a scrum:

- ◆ *Was your performance up to expectations?*
- ◆ *What was the key to your success tonight?*
- ◆ *You appeared to flounder at the half-way mark. What went wrong?*
- ◆ *How important is this result for you leading up to the Canada Games?*
- ◆ *Were you nervous? And how did you deal with it?*
- ◆ *How did you prepare?*
- ◆ *What was going through your mind during a key moment in the competition?*
- ◆ *What did the coach tell you just before you got on the blocks?*
- ◆ *What was her message in the dressing room?*
- ◆

***Coach
Les Gramantik
with
decathlete
Richard
Hesketh
and pole
vaulter
Mike Steen***



Mike Redwood for Coaches Report

Dealing with Difficult Issues

Because they are the eyes and ears of their audience, reporters have a responsibility to report issues as well as results. You may not agree with what they have decided to investigate or how they go about it, but that is not your concern. You are being interviewed because you have agreed to provide honest, well-thought-out answers to the questions.

"No COMMENT"

by Lorraine Lafranière

The golden rule of never saying "*no comment*" does not mean that you have to provide an answer to every question thrown your way. When you believe it is inappropriate to answer a question, then say so, but provide an explanation as well. The key is to set clear boundaries for your opinions and areas of responsibility. For example, if you are asked a question about rumours that your coach is about to be fired and you don't wish to comment, then say so: "*My job is to focus on my athletic career and performance. If you are interested in discussing Coach Smith's career, you can speak with our national federation.*"

Don't respond to a question by repeating it in the negative. Reporters are skilled at zeroing in on the best quote or sound bite. For example, if you are asked, "*Have you ever been sexually harassed by Coach Smith?*", do not say, "*No, I was not harassed by Coach Smith.*"

Rather, use positive language: "*My athletic career with Coach Smith has been a positive experience. He has provided me with the expertise and guidance I needed to develop to this level.*"

Speak only for yourself. Speak on behalf of your teammates only if the question deals with something that you have discussed together and agreed on an answer to.

"Speak only for yourself."



WHEN TO TALK OPENLY

The media can provide excellent vehicles for influencing change. If you are asked to comment on an issue that you believe needs to be aired, weigh your comments carefully. Ask yourself the following questions:

- ◆ *What are my motivations for discussing this issue?*
- ◆ *Are my comments based on fact or rumour?*
- ◆ *Who will I affect by discussing this issue?*
- ◆ *How does discussing this issue affect my future?*

If any of your answers are negative or fuzzy, think again before talking about the issue to a reporter. If you believe that speaking out is the best avenue for constructive change, if you have exhausted all other avenues, if your sport will benefit, and if your motivations are for the betterment of sport and for all the individuals involved, then proceed, but proceed with caution.

GENDER ISSUES

For female athletes, gender issues may come up repeatedly. If you are competing in what has long been considered a male sport, you may be asked if it is an appropriate activity for girls and women. Your answer could be: *“Girls and women should have the right to participate in every sport, including those in which women have not traditionally participated, such as football, wrestling, rugby and our national sport, ice hockey.”*

But why bother, the reporter might ask. Why is it important for girls to play sports? Here are some possible answers:

“Girls and women who play sports have more self-esteem, more positive body images and less depression and are more likely to graduate from high school. Their marks are better and they have less risk of breast cancer and osteoporosis.”

“Sport is where boys have traditionally learned about teamwork, goal-setting and the pursuit of excellence in performance. These are critical skills when it comes to success in the workplace, which is important for both men and women.”

Questions about sexual orientation are frequently asked of coaches as well as athletes, and much more often of females than of males. Your answer could be, *“A person’s sexual orientation is a private matter that has nothing to do with participation in sport. It is inappropriate to judge an athlete, or her or his athletic performance, based on sexual orientation.” **

OTHER COMMON ISSUES

The following scenarios are presented as examples of difficult issues that could come up in an athlete’s career. Instead of providing stock answers, we offer questions that we hope will help you to clarify your thoughts. Think about how these circumstances would affect you and your teammates. Think about how you would answer questions about these issues and who your answers could affect. How you react and what you say in the tough times will stay with you throughout your career.

Your team is losing consistently and there are rumours that your coach will be fired. Is this issue outside your focus as an athlete, one of many distractions that does not directly involve you? Does answering the question force you into an area that does not concern you? Is it appropriate for you to comment?

The top medal prospect quits, and the media are suggesting that this undermines the confidence of the remaining athletes on the team. Does the decision of one athlete affect the others and how they will train and perform?

* Adapted from “A SPORT LEADER MEDIA HELPER”, published by the Women’s Sport Foundation

The star player overreacts during a crucial game and throws a tantrum. The coach then loses her temper and behaves aggressively towards an official. Is it right for you to publicly judge a teammate's or coach's actions? Is the goal of sport to strive for excellence, understanding that mistakes may be made along the way?

Rumours of sexual abuse in your sport are about to make the headlines. Two athletes accuse their coach of sustained abuse and press charges. Do you have personal experience or knowledge of the situation? If you do, what are your motivations for discussing the situation publicly if due process is under way? What is the best course of action to benefit the people involved?

A teammate is under investigation for taking performance-enhancing drugs. What are the protocols set up by your sport and the investigating body for confidentiality? Is this situation outside your area of focus? How does your discussing the issue affect the case and the future of the athlete in question?

A player collapses and dies. His parents accuse sport officials of negligence. Understanding the pain of loss is part of sport; judging how bereft parents react to loss is not. Whether or not negligence is part of the issue, is it not up to the sport federation to follow due process? If you have some information that may assist the investigation, where is it best directed to ensure that all the facts are reviewed and a responsible decision made?

A team member is charged with a felony. Do you see yourself as a role model for children and youth? Do you have strong opinions about such actions? What message do you want to deliver about your beliefs? Has the accused been treated fairly? Is this behaviour typical of the accused? Do you know all the facts?

A popular player is cut from the team. To create a successful team, athletes, coaches and administrators all have roles to play. What is your role?

"THAT'S NOT WHAT I SAID ..."

From time to time, an article will appear that you believe is misleading, erroneous or unfair. In assessing how to react, begin by asking yourself why you are unhappy:

1. *Does the article have factual errors?*
2. *Does the article include an opinion I disagree with?*
3. *Does the article contain a slanderous statement?*
4. *Am I quoted inaccurately?*

- 1** A factual error is the easiest issue to deal with. First, check that you provided the correct information. Then make a friendly phone call to the reporter, mention that an error has been made and ask for the opportunity to state the facts.
- 2** If the issue is an opinion you disagree with, there may be little you can do, particularly if you have been talking to a columnist. It is a columnist's job to state opinions, and you won't always agree with what is written.
- 3** A slanderous comment is an extreme situation and rarely occurs in sport. It may be difficult for you to assess the situation objectively. Before doing anything, discuss the comment frankly with someone you trust. If you believe the comment is a serious infringement of your rights, contact a lawyer and discuss next steps. Do not call the reporter yourself.
- 4** Inaccurate quotes happen often. With most reporters use a tape recorder; many others do not. In any case, a tape recorder is no guarantee of accuracy.

If you are misquoted, and the quote is controversial, you can take two steps. First, discuss with the reporter what, in your opinion, went wrong. Second, if a retraction is not printed and other reporters are calling you about the issue, work with your sport association to prepare a news release that states the facts.

Whatever the issue, ensure that everyone connected to you, especially your coach (or athletes), sport association and sponsors, are aware of the real story. Don't assume that people will know that you "couldn't have said such a thing". In the case of sponsors, write a factual, non-confrontational letter that spells out your concerns. Include a copy of the offending article and make sure a copy goes to the reporter involved.

COMPLAINTS

Every medium has a mechanism for hearing complaints that you, as a member of the public, may have about its organization or its journalists. A telephone call to the newspaper or the radio or television station in question will provide you with information about the complaints process. For print media, your complaint usually goes through a provincial press council; for electronic media, through the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).



**Distance swimmer
Corinne Liedtke**

Canadian Sport Images





CHAPTER 3

**The Media's
Perspective**

Athletes and the Print Media

For many athletes, the mainstream sports press is a large, dark, ominous entity.

by Scott Taylor

Fuelled by obscure journalistic policies, staffed by vicious yet highly trained university graduates who never even played checkers and administered by multinational corporate boards that have no idea what an athlete goes through to reach an elite level of competition, the mainstream sports press is untouchable and completely out of touch.

Right? Wrong! Nothing could be further from the truth.

POLICIES? Not unless reporting on the events and participants that are interesting to a large cross-section of the public is considered a policy.

REPORTERS? Some are postsecondary grads; some are not. Some never played a lick; others have played sports at the professional level.

MULTINATIONALS? Well, yes, for the most part. But never does a corporate executive make a telephone call or send a fax or e-mail about a story or story idea.

The fact is, almost every sports department in every city in North America is run autonomously by a sports editor. In most cases the sports editor is an administrator or layout copy expert who depends daily on the input of the beat reporters and columnists.

BEAT REPORTERS have one or two basic assignments and they pretty much stick to their territory. Get to know the reporters who are assigned to your sport on a full-time or semi-full-time basis. They can do a lot to help you. Unfortunately, they can also make your life more difficult than necessary if you ignore them or behave in an immature way around them.

COLUMNISTS are the hit-and-run writers of a sports department. When there appear to be problems, when there are issues to be discussed or when there is a particularly good story, the columnists show up.

There's one thing that every athlete and coach should remember when dealing with either beat reporters or columnists: They are just people.

They all have families. Some have kids doing exactly what you're doing. They are approachable. They usually care deeply about what and whom they write. At least, the good ones do.

No matter what you think, they want to know when you do something good. But they also want to know when things don't go well. They are in the information business. The truth is what matters most. If you know the truth, it is probably in your best interest to tell it.

“How you treat the media is, in reality, how you treat the public.”



◀ **Pair figure skaters Kristy Sargeant and Kris Wirtz in a post-event media scrum**

Usually, when you read something you know to be false, it wasn't written that way because the journalist wanted it to be wrong. It was probably written that way because the journalist didn't ask you or because the person she or he did solicit for information either failed to tell the truth or didn't know the truth.

Stories don't materialize out of thin air. Most stories are a reaction to an event or series of events. Stories and columns aren't meant to create public opinion, but to respond to it.

Many athletes—like almost all people—believe that there is a positive or negative slant to the news. That isn't true, because very few news stories would be considered positive at the best of times. If life carried on the way it was supposed to, there would be no need for newspapers. As it is, there seems to be a lot of work for reporters.

The sports page, however, can be a positive oasis in the lurid world of hard news. More often than not, the sports page contains "*soft news*"—features on athletes, a heartfelt story about a comeback or adversity overcome or just a cute, bright short item. There is still space for a lot of smiles on the sports page.

But young athletes should understand that the best stories are controversial stories. More often than not, these are stories with two or more sides. Your ability to deal with losing, being cut or benched, watching a teammate get released or becoming involved in a misdemeanor off the field will probably best determine how you deal with the media.

10 TIPS TO A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRINT MEDIA

1. *When an interview is requested, it is in your best interest to take a few minutes and do it.*
2. *If you are in a rush to get to another appointment, politely decline the request and arrange a better time, usually later the same day.*
3. *Answer all questions directly, politely and in complete sentences. Using hip, modern vernacular may be "cool", but a writer who doesn't easily understand can make you look like a bozo.*
4. *If you don't feel you can answer a question, decline politely. Just say, "Sorry, I'd really like to answer that, but I can't. I hope you understand." Most reporters will say they understand, even if they don't.*
5. *When reporters introduce themselves to you, remember their names. Reporters are no different from you. They have egos and they like it when you remember their name and use it when answering questions.*
6. *No reporter will try to "get you". Sometimes columnists will be critical of your play. That's what they get paid for. If you have a problem with something that's been written about you, seek out the reporter or columnist*

quickly and find out the problem. A columnist, for instance, can dislike you one day and love you the next. Daily newspapers are just that—daily. What is news in the morning is bird cage litter that same night.

7. *It is unlikely you've been misquoted. Journalists often clean up quotes. They'll correct grammatical mistakes or blatant errors of syntax on your behalf. Unfortunately, comments can often be taken out of context if you haven't been perfectly clear.*
8. *Be sure your brain is engaged before pulling your mouth into gear.*
9. *When reporters talk to you after a loss or a bad personal performance, they aren't there to make your life miserable; they are there to get your side of the story. Your life will be a lot less miserable if you accommodate them.*
10. *Always be respectful, and respect will be returned.*

Remember: The media won't change your career, but by having a good relationship with them, your career will be much more enjoyable.

Keep in mind who the members of the media really are. The only difference between the people in the seats and the people in the press box is that the people in the press box have access to the dressing room. How you treat the media is, in reality, how you treat the public.

10 MEDIA MYTHS

1. *"It's the media's fault." Whenever a sports team is in a slump or a politician is making really stupid decisions, true losers blame the media.*
2. *"Ignore them and they'll go away." Wrong. Ignore them and they'll come down on you like a sledgehammer.*
3. *"They're just disinterested observers." If somebody in the media profession actually lived alone in a cave in the woods, had no friends, no independent thoughts and no ego, he'd be a disinterested observer. Almost all media members live exactly the way you do and have lots of friends, lots of biases and huge egos.*
4. *"What's your policy on ...?" Sorry, there are no policies in life and there are no policies in the media game. Media outlets cover the events that have the broadest appeal to the public, or they publish the most interesting stories of the day. Anybody in the media who says, "Sorry, that's our policy," is just trying to kiss you off. The trouble with policies is that they are made to be discarded.*
5. *"He likes that (team, player, league) and hates us." There is a chance that's true, but if so, there is definitely a reason for it. If a rival is getting what you perceive to be better coverage, find out why. It's human nature to want to be well treated. Chances are that your rival treats the reporter better or at least provides more information.*

Scott Taylor is a veteran reporter with the Winnipeg Free Press.

6. *"We need some publicity."* To the media, there is no such thing as publicity. You either are news or you're not. Publicity is something you pay for. Always keep in mind that a story about you or your event won't even be read if nobody cares about it.
7. *"The press is so negative."* Sorry, there is no such thing as positive or negative. Always remember that the media is nothing more than a reflection of public opinion, as diverse as that opinion may be.
8. *"The media doesn't cover amateur sport."* There are actually two myths here. The media does cover amateur sport; unfortunately, it might not cover yours. Second, the mainstream media covers anything that is popular with a broad readership, listenership or viewership. If the public isn't interested, neither is the media.
9. *"Oh, they'll never put that in the paper."* Don't be so sure. Watch what you say. You may read about it the next morning.
10. *"All they want to do is stir it up."* While a nice controversial story helps gain readership, that's never the motive. The motive is the truth. The motive is answering the questions the public wants answered. And if the athlete or coach doesn't want to answer them, you'll let rumour and innuendo live forever.



Defining a Good Story

One of the things that has driven sportswriters around the bend of late is the penchant of sport organizations to put their athletes through formal media training so that they come out spouting boring, lacklustre answers like trained seals: *"All I want is to swim/run/play my best."* *"I'd like to thank my sponsors, Blah Blah corporation and Blah Blah industries."* *"I'm just happy to be here."*

by Wendy Long



It is as if someone has told them not to rock the boat, not to criticize, analyse, praise, condemn or say anything that points to how they really feel about the event. It's boring and it's not real life. They're real people doing some extraordinary things, and what they say or do can inspire and move others if it's honest and comes from the heart.

It doesn't have to be controversial. Something like, *"I've dreamed about being at the Olympic Games for much of my life and now it's come true"*, can strike a chord with many a reader. I recall when Cam Cole (with *THE EDMONTON JOURNAL* at the time) and a bunch of figure skating writers became so fed up with skaters saying, *"I just want to skate my best and stay focused"*, that they all had T-shirts made saying, *"I just want to write my best and stay focused."*

"An honest assessment of how they feel or what has happened is important."

What I'm saying is that athletes and their coaches don't necessarily have to spill their guts, but an honest assessment of how they feel or what has happened is important.

Some athletes score huge brownie points with the media because they take the time to explain certain things. Felix Belczyk, the ski racer, was very good at explaining why certain gates on a course were crucial, why it was important to be fast on a certain section, instead of just saying, *"I lost the race because I made a mistake at the fifth gate."*

Not only does it make for better copy, but it also helps to educate the media. Athletes and their coaches have to remember that reporters are sometimes sent out on assignments in sports they know nothing about. Educating them makes for better stories and fewer errors.

There will be foolish questions. Sometimes they are asked because the uninformed sports editor back in the office has ordered the reporter to ask the question. Sometimes it means the reporter doesn't know much. And that hated question, *"How does it feel?"* is often genuine: People who have never competed at a major event, but perhaps want to win a skiing gold medal, will live out some kind of a fantasy through the skier. These people really do want to know what it felt like to be the fastest to cross the finish line, to see Canada's flag raised and so on.

Wendy Long is an award-winning sports reporter with the Vancouver Sun. She has covered the World Cup ski circuit, the Winter Olympic Games, two Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games.

We know it's a *"tremendous"*, *"awesome"*, *"fabulous"* feeling, but reporters need the athlete to articulate that feeling for the reader. The same goes for a disappointing result. How an athlete handles defeat can sometimes make a more compelling story than how he or she reacts in victory.

Some athletes and their coaches feel that they don't have to talk to the media. Maybe, but reporters represent the people who would love to ask questions of the athletes personally. They can't, because they have real lives and real jobs, but they are taxpayers, and I think that an athlete who is accepting government funding has some obligation to speak back to the general public.

Sometimes, reporters also have to ask the tough questions:

- ◆ ***"Why did you test positive?"***
- ◆ ***"What happened today after you raced so well last week?"***
- ◆ ***"Are you pondering retirement after this result?"***

The job requires that we ask these questions, and we probably hate asking them as much as you hate answering.

Not all reporters are monsters. When you cover athletes from their first high school victory to their Olympic medal, it is tough not to see them as human beings and be glad or sad for them at pivotal moments in their careers. It is also true that what constitutes a good story may differ in the respective minds of editor and reader. The old newspaper dictum, *"bad news sells"* still seems to apply, with the tragic death in 1997 of Diana, Princess of Wales, proving that point.



The role of CBC Television Sports

Inform, entertain and educate. It sounds simple enough, doesn't it?

On many days during an important event, I try to remind myself of that.

Any rights-holding broadcaster should understand that their role in a multisport games, whether the Canada Games or the Paralympics, is to bring a viewing nation closer to what is going on at the event.

by Doug Sellars



For the CBC, the role means providing enormous amounts of event coverage sprinkled with features and interviews that will bring viewers a more fulfilling television experience. We endeavour to create situations that will make viewers want to see more, to cheer, to care about the competitors and to see them compete.

In essence, we are Canada's eyes and ears at every multisport games for which CBC holds the rights.

Our number-one problem is keeping all our constituents happy. Although we program to the majority, we never forget the minority. Simply put, every sport is important and deserves its time in the sun. Certain sports will always get more of the limelight because they are more popular with the viewers. Viewer popularity will always influence coverage. Nonetheless, as broadcasters, we try to bring the less popular sports to television in an informative and entertaining way. They will then have a chance to grow.

From an event presentation side, informing and entertaining viewers is fairly simple. The broadcaster ensures that the announcers associated with any particular sport are competent and knowledgeable about the sport and can make viewers feel like part of the action while they are watching and listening.

It is also imperative that the announcers and programmers not assume that the audience is familiar with the sport. Even the most popular of sports will have new viewers during a major games. It is with this knowledge in mind that the broadcaster must take steps to ensure that viewers are educated about the sport they are watching. This can be as simple as a feature preceding or during an event that explains the basic rules and concepts of the particular sport.

The athletes are the most important part of any games. Without you, there is no competition. The same can be said from the broadcasting side: Broadcasters must recognize the importance of the athlete in the overall presentation of any games.

For a viewing audience to become excited about the events they are watching, they must feel a personal attachment to the athletes. This can only be accomplished if the broadcaster has been able to spend time with athletes and then

“We’re not in the play-by-play business. We’re about stories and issues as well as immediate information and results.”

Doug Sellars is executive producer of Olympic programming for the CBC.

has the opportunity to present your stories to the viewing public. We present your stories in several ways, such as through a video profile. The intimate profile allows viewers to see you in a different light, a light that allows them to feel more at home with you. Learning something about the trials and tribulations of a high-performance athlete lets viewers feel more empathy towards you.

The athlete's role. Athletes need to understand their role in conveying this message to viewers. If you are closed off to the public, you create no goodwill with the viewing audience. If you are open and accessible, you will find much of the viewing public on your side. Elite athletes, in particular, should make sure that they are ready to get their message across when the broadcaster comes along.

Openness is important not only when athletes' time is sought before an event, but also when the competition is on. When athletes turn their backs on the viewing public during an event, the audience comes to its own conclusions—and they may not be positive.

Athletes must be aware of this danger. It is up to you to control your own destiny. No one likes to talk when they have had a bad day. But whether it is right or wrong, athletes have no choice—you must find the courage and strength to face the viewing public. And remember that honesty is always the best strategy. Sugar-coated answers to an interviewer's questions are easily detected by a viewing audience.

In the end, both broadcasters and athletes must try to remember that it takes both parties to bring a positive broadcast experience to the viewing public. For the health of the broadcast and the sport, it is vital that athletes, coaches, sport federations and broadcasters continue to talk and to find ways to understand each other. If there is no connection between these groups, there will be no interest from the viewing public.

For any of us ever to think that the viewing public is not important would be a huge misunderstanding of the importance of the general populace of our country.



Capturing a special moment on the Spirit of Sport Tour



Women In Sport: SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, SPECIAL ADVICE



Brian Williams,
CBC Television's
Olympic
Games host

In talking about the kinds of questions the media may put to women athletes, women's hockey comes to mind more than anything else. It is the best example because, unlike skiing, tennis or track, hockey was a new sport for women at the 1998 Olympic Winter Games in Nagano. It aroused a special amount of interest because of its newness and because our national sport strikes a nerve in this country like no other sport does.

The first comment of many journalists was, *"It's great—different from the men's."* Then they kept talking about it in that vein, asking questions like, *"Do you skate as fast as the men?" "Do you hit as hard as the men?"* In other words, instead of looking at women's hockey for what it is—a fast-paced, exciting sport with great spectator appeal—they constantly compared it to men's hockey.

When we cover a ski race, we don't say, *"I don't think Kate Pace Lindsay was as fast through that section as Edi Podivinsky was yesterday."* We accept women's skiing as just that—women's skiing, and very entertaining in its own right. It's the same with tennis. And we certainly don't do it in speed skating. Have you ever heard Catriona LeMay Doan's performance compared to Jeremy Wotherspoon's? I suppose it's because journalists are more familiar with these sports that they understand and accept any differences.

When women are asked to compare their sport to men's, they say, *"Look, ours is a different sport from the men's sport. I really can't compare it to men's because I don't play the men's game. I can only tell you why our game is good entertainment and worth watching."*

The word *"entertaining"* is key.

It is clear to me that we must accept sport—men's and women's—for what it is. Enjoy the competition and the entertainment it provides.

By the way, the reason Don Cherry is such a big supporter of women's hockey is quite simply because it is *"great entertainment"*.

The use of the word *"girl"* to describe a female athlete raises some interesting questions. Before I hosted the Olympics on CBC, I was told that we would be talking about women's hockey and

women's track and field—not ladies' hockey, not girls' track. When I asked why, I was told, *"Not all women are ladies, anymore than all men are gentlemen. You don't call it gentlemen's hockey; so why would you call it ladies' hockey?"* It's a good point, as long as athletes and broadcasters remember that some sports do use *"ladies"* officially, as in the Canadian Ladies Golf Association.

Often the solution is simple. When I asked the women hockey players how they preferred to be addressed, they said, *"Why don't you just call us players?"*

What concerns female athletes more than anything is being treated with the respect they deserve. It all comes down to stereotypes. We must go beyond stereotypes—whether of gender, race or religion—and accept others for who they are. For so many women athletes, it's just plain great to watch.

At Nagano, for example, people like Eric Lindros and Wayne Gretzky were at the women's hockey games, cheering madly (just like Geraldine Heaney and her teammates cheered on the men). Their support confirmed the credibility of the women's game. When interviewed, the men didn't talk about the differences; they just talked about what great hockey it was.

Certainly journalists ask tough questions. They have a job to do, and a lot of their success depends on the questions they ask. But it also depends on the answers they get. The best answer is always the honest answer. Sports federations often complain about the lack of coverage they get compared to, say, professional hockey. Then, when they are scrutinized, they complain again. My response: *"If you want publicity for your sport, if you want to be on the sport pages, you have to be prepared to be critiqued, and when you're asked questions, you've got to be prepared to give more than the standard jock answer. Don't give that nonsense; always give a straight answer."*

My advice to athletes and coaches when talking to the media: Be honest. Answer the questions in a straightforward manner. If you don't know the answer, say so. If you don't want to talk about it, say you don't want to talk about it. Don't ever lead the media on. That's what will get you into trouble.

TSN and the Canada Games

TSN's approach at the Canada Games, both in how we cover the events and in how we interview the athletes, differs from what happens at most other major competitions. We won't shy away from news stories; obviously if there is a doping infraction, for example, we're going to report it. But we look at these Games as a building block for athletes who are being primed to move into high-performance sport. In other words, they haven't yet hit the limelight.

by Rick Chisholm



So our relationship is that of a partnership between TSN and the Canada Games. It's almost like being a host broadcaster, whose role is to work with the organizers to put on the best possible Games, to supply the best possible pictures to the world media. We take our host broadcaster role very seriously, and that means making the Canada Games look as good as they possibly can for television.

The athletes are young, and in a lot of cases it's their first time on a large stage. So we encourage them to tell their stories in a comfortable way, rather than bombarding them with questions. We're there to help them tell their stories.

We'll help the process through a video we've developed to help them feel at ease and become "media friendly". Many of them are quite intimidated by the media, and I can understand that. Most of us do not enjoy being interviewed, and athletes prefer to compete and let it go at that.

They don't want to be bothered by the media. We developed the video to show the athletes why they should be bothered, why it is important to tell their story, and how easy it really is. We used announcers who actually go to the Canada Games, so that they are familiar to the athletes. We used footage showing athletes who were shy and didn't give good answers along with others who felt comfortable and gave interesting answers. It's graphic when you see it side by side.

**"... be yourself.
If you are, you'll
give a good
interview."**

Athletes need to understand that the audience wants to connect with them; that's why they're watching. If they don't connect, they won't stay with it—that's a proven fact. Athletes also need to understand that to tell their story is not bragging. They need to understand the importance of a well-rounded answer.

Time and time again, we stress, **be yourself**. If you are, you'll give a good interview. Viewers always accept people who are themselves.

The best advice I can give to an athlete is, try to ignore the cameras. Remember that you're there to compete. Don't let the cameras divert your attention from what you've trained for—think of them as spectators in the crowd.

Think of media relations as part of your experiences as an athlete. Think of it as something you want to do as well as you do everything else. The reality is that the media is a huge part of your life as an athlete. Train for it like you train for your sport, and you'll have little to worry about. ❖

Rick Chisholm is executive producer of TSN's coverage of the Canada Games.

CBC Radio Sports in Action

For over 60 years, CBC Radio has been telling our listeners about Canadian sporting achievements—at the Olympic Games, at world and national championships and in the backyards of our nation.

Knowing who we are and what we're all about could be helpful to Canada's high-performance athletes and coaches, for as you achieve sporting excellence, you attract public interest, and that is where we come in.

WHO WE ARE

by Phil Dugas

Depending on where you live, one of our CBC Sports casters brings you the sports on your local CBC Radio One morning show. They deliver more than 40 live sportscasts each morning to the entire country.

On Sunday afternoons, Canadians across the country tune in to *THE INSIDE TRACK*, one of the finest sports magazine programs you can find anywhere. The program is hosted by Robin Brown and features reporter Teddy Katz. It has won national and international awards for its documentary work. It has dealt with racism, drug use, abused and controlled athletes and sports ethics. High-performance athletes have been profiled and interviewed as much as anyone in the program's history, and so have many of their coaches.

Radio Two also airs some sports programming, but only in abbreviated packages.

WHAT WE'RE ABOUT

Painting pictures is our specialty, but our role in radio has evolved. We're still your eyes and ears at multisport games, but we provide context and perspective to the events both in and around whatever we happen to be covering.

We're a story-driven organization, not an event-driven one. CBC Radio is public radio. It's commercial free. News and information programming, including sports, is free of sponsorship as well. It's important to know that we're not in the play-by-play business. We're about stories and issues as well as immediate information and results.


We're not an all-sports radio station and we don't cater to a sports-mad audience. Our job is to keep perspective—to treat stories with fairness and journalistic integrity. Boosterism is not what you should expect from us.



WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

As with most media, we want to get a piece of your time as often as we can. However, we do understand the time and energy constraints of athletes and coaches, especially during a multisport games or major competition.

Our interviews aren't usually live, and sometimes we're looking for more than



just a moment of your time. We know your time after an event is scarce, but we're never looking for a quick answer to, *"How do you feel?"* Instead, we are interested in ...

- ◆ *"What's going through your mind at this moment?"*
- ◆ *"What have you gone through (physically or emotionally) to get here?"*
- ◆ *"What was going through your mind during your race/event? Right after you finished?"*

These questions all deserve thoughtful responses.

We've worked hard to eliminate clichéd interview clips from our broadcasts. We'd rather run no tape than run a cliché. We've all heard them:

- ◆ *"I'll take it one day at a time"*
- ◆ *"We gave it 110 per cent."*
- ◆ *"Our backs are against the wall."*
- ◆ *"Oh, I don't know. ... It hasn't sunk in yet."*

These kind of answers don't captivate our audience and often enhance negative stereotypes about athletes and sports reporters.

A weak clip isn't judged solely by the cliché meter. Sometimes it's simply someone

- ◆ *steering away from the question*
- ◆ *avoiding a question*
- ◆ *giving a good answer, but to the wrong question*
- ◆ *putting a happy spin on every situation*
- ◆ *giving a standard answer that seems to work in many situations, no matter what the question*
- ◆ *giving a blanket statement rather than a candid answer to the question*

Sports jargon can also turn off a listening audience, so we avoid putting that kind of tape on the air, as well. Combine jargon with numbers or acronyms and we've got serious problems; for example, *"I knew I had to be 42.50 at the last interval, 42.60 at worst, so when I saw 43.10 up there I knew we wouldn't get the record, so I said, 'Let's keep going and get a P.B.,' and we did."*

One thing is certain, you won't get many good answers without good questions. In other words, you're not the only one who must be prepared and able to think on your feet. We must be, as well; we have to be able to ask questions that make you think and challenge you to provide a strong or heartfelt answer. That's our goal.

Longer interviews. We know it's difficult for you to grant time for a longer

interview, but we'll be looking for them from you from time to time and possibly from the key people, especially your coach, who surround you. We plan many of these before you go to a competition or after you return, but certainly requests will come during the event as well.

Aside from the many personal aspects of you and your craft, we may tackle broader issues:

- ◆ *the political power of the athlete*
- ◆ *the power of the American television rights-holder*
- ◆ *the power of corporate sponsors*
- ◆ *new world powers in sport*
- ◆ *athletes' rights*
- ◆ *athlete-coach relations*
- ◆ *the effect of dream teams at multisport games*
- ◆ *the balance of sport and education in Canada*
- ◆ *trendsetters, cheaters and innovators*
- ◆ *how new technologies affect sport*
- ◆ *drug use and abuse in your sport*
- ◆ *the importance of Canadian medals to the athletes, the coaches, the government, the sponsors and the public*

These are just a few examples of issues we may approach you about, but perhaps you have something interesting to bring to our attention. If that's the case, we'd like to hear about it. CBC Radio Sports can be reached at (416) 205-6492.



Phil Dugas is
executive
producer of
CBC English
Radio Sports.

**Olympic
champion
backstroke
Mark
Tewksbury**



Canadian Sport Images

A Career in the Making?

I read with great interest the articles written by my colleagues for this Guide. I agree that neither the media nor athletes can achieve their objectives without some collaboration. But I'd like to offer a few observations from my 20-year career, particularly to athletes who have visions of a post-sport career in the media.

by Paul Rivard



My ideas may not please some athletes, coaches, agents, parents or officials; however, they may strike a chord with others.

I went to school to become a journalist and a reporter. Today I am a communicator by trade. I have covered or hosted all kinds of events—from the Olympic Games to the Stanley Cup finals, from bowling to cyclotourism—for a national radio agency (NTR), for a private television network (TVA) and for weekly magazines such as *7 JOURS* and *DERNIÈRE HEURE*.

“My ideas may not please some athletes, coaches, agents, parents or officials.”

Regardless of the importance of the events I have covered, one thing was clear: I tried (and, I must confess, did not always succeed) to remember **who** I worked for. And this **who** could not be me, my colleagues or my bosses. The **who** was the public—the listeners, the viewing audience, the readers.

In general, the media present the news with class; however, on occasion they seem to treat their clientele as if they were idiots. In some private electronic communications companies, decency takes a back seat to sensationalism. Sensationalism grabs the attention of the audience and sensationalism sells. It's a vicious circle, especially for those whose stories are being told.

IMAGE AND THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE ATHLETE

At a certain stage in your athletic career, you may become the subject of an article, a photograph or a television interview. Your gestures, your facial expressions and mannerisms, your words, your state of mind—all become public. Media attention may be an aspect of being an athlete that you would like to avoid, but dealing with it is an obligation that goes hand in hand with the exposure it brings to your sport and the encouragement it provides to youngsters who admire you.

From the other articles in this Guide you learn that it is important to make yourself available to the media, that being available increases your profile, that your high profile and positive image are important to attracting a sponsor and that financial security will give you a chance to concentrate on your sport while easing the financial burden on yourself and your parents. It's another circle, but this one is not necessarily vicious.

Two names come to mind—biathlete Myriam Bédard, double gold medallist at Lillehammer, and judoka Nicolas Gill, bronze medallist at Barcelona.

Let's acknowledge the fact that during the months and years before the Olympic triumphs of these two athletes, few people watched or read about biathlon or judo. Suddenly, however, their successes brought unexpected exposure to both sports. Young people had two new heroes, and the ranks of biathlon and judo grew accordingly.

SPORTS THAT RECEIVE THE MOST MEDIA COVERAGE

I think we would agree that Gill is as accomplished as moguls star Jean-Luc Brassard. We know, too, that Olympic speed skating silver medallist Susan Auch and Olympic diving bronze medallist Annie Pelletier both worked very hard for their successes. What is not equal about these athletes is the amount of coverage they received.

The simple fact is that some sports are easier to cover and look better on the television screen. Of all the media, television has done the most to change the sports world during the past two or three decades. Where would major sporting events, particularly the Olympic Games, be without television? Television has made the Olympic Games huge, because of the incredible amounts of broadcasting money involved and because television is the only medium that allows the public to come face to face with its heroes.

Why do certain sports receive little or no exposure outside the Olympic Games? Simply because television has decided against investing the time and money necessary to ensure sustained coverage of these sports between Games. So when the window of opportunity opens every four years, smart athletes and their coaches realize that television exposure can lead to sponsorship opportunities. They look at the media differently as they begin to understand the importance of developing media know-how.

AND AFTERWARD?

Generally, there are two groups of athletes—those whose success or personality brought them a great deal of media exposure and those who have been paid little attention. The first group includes Ken Read, Gaétan Boucher, Sylvie Bernier, Karen Percy, Pierre Harvey, Carolyn Waldo, Sylvie Fréchette, Nathalie Lambert, Jean-Luc Brassard and Annie Pelletier. Most either won important medals or were the best Canadian in a sport where we rarely excelled (as was the case with cross-country ski star Pierre Harvey).

At one time or another, all of these athletes were analysts of their sport on major television networks. Some adapted well to their new environment and gained the respect of the profession's regulars. Others were less fortunate, because the medium that hired them was less interested in their abilities and more in

cashing in on their fame to increase ratings. The result for the athlete, more often than not, was mixed reviews and a less-than-enjoyable experience. As Sylvie Fréchette says, her career as an interviewer with the TVA television network did not enhance her image. Now, as choreographer for the famed Cirque du Soleil, she has made an excellent career choice.

Nor is every athlete as fortunate as Annie Pelletier, who is now learning the television trade. Instead of being thrown on-stage as an interviewer, she is being given the chance to first master the tools of the trade. Congratulations to Pelletier, her agent and her employer for behaving wisely.

Olympic diving gold medallist Sylvie Bernier is an athlete who has made it in the media. At first she was abruptly plunged into the media scene without proper support. However, it wasn't long before she showed that determination and intelligence are more than a match for media obstacles. After a rocky start, she began at the bottom giving reports for a Montréal radio station during the Seoul Olympics. She also worked at several Games as a volunteer communications staffer for the Canadian Olympic Association. For the Lillehammer Games, she paid for private lessons with an experienced television reporter to learn how to build an interview into a professional, humane report. Today she is an outdoors, health and family reporter with the TVA morning show *SALUT, BONJOUR!* and has a strong following among the show's viewers. In fact, Bernier is ranked as one of the 200 most admired women in Quebec.

Paul Rivard, who was with TVA for many years, is now with TSQ.

YOU REALLY HAVE TO THINK THIS ONE THROUGH

I'm not advising against a post-sport media career. Just think carefully before making such a choice. The impact of the media is great, and so are the rewards—if everything falls into place. On the other hand, the price of failure is heavy. So if a media representative offers you a contract on a platinum platter, telling you this is the chance of a lifetime, a chance to get some return on those 15 years of training and hardship, seek advice before signing anything. Talk it over with other people in the media business. Invite a trusted media contact for coffee and ask about the flip side of the media coin. It may be the most important conversation you ever have as you start your post-sport career.





CHAPTER 4

**What's What in
Canada's Sports
Media**

Defining Media Outlets

Canada's **sport media** consist of **reporters** and **columnists** who work for daily or weekly newspapers, wire services and magazines such as *MACLEAN'S*; **broadcasters** whose beat is radio or television; and **photographers** who work either for a newspaper or for an agency. **Freelancers**, a common feature of the sport media scene, sell their stories or photos to various media outlets, nationally and internationally.

Begin by understanding the lingo.

WIRE SERVICES

by Lorraine Lafrenière and
Sheila Robertson

Canadian Press (CP) is the national news-gathering not-for-profit cooperative owned and operated by the daily newspaper industry. CP was founded in 1910 to provide a flow of news across the sparsely populated regions of the country. Most daily papers belong to CP, which also runs a French-language service, **La Presse Canadienne**. CP also runs a photo service for Canadian newspapers.

Broadcast News (BN) and **Nouvelles Télé-Radio** (NTR) are the broadcasting arms of CP and La Presse Canadienne respectively, providing voice clips for radio stations across the country.

Countries around the world have wire services that supply copy, voice and photos nationally and internationally. For example, **Associated Press** (AP) is an American-based cooperative news-gathering agency supplying more than 45,000 newspapers and radio and television stations worldwide. Among the more common national and international agencies are **Agence France Presse**, **Reuters** (a news service based in Britain) and **United Press International**.

NATIONAL NETWORKS

There are two national networks in Canada.

The **Canadian Broadcasting Corporation** (CBC) and its French-language counterpart, **Radio-Canada**, are publicly funded. Their mandate is to provide coverage across Canada that is relevant to all Canadians. Their news divisions are the English-language **Newsworld** and **Réseau de l'Informations** (RDI), the French-language all-news cable channel of Radio-Canada.

The **Canadian Television Network** (CTV) and **TVA**, its French-language counterpart, are privately owned. CTV has an all-news cable channel, CTV Newsnet. Rogers owns and operates Sportsnet while CTV owns The Sports Network (TSN) and its French-language counterpart, Réseau des Sports (RDS). Both are all-sport networks.

Canadian radio listeners are served in English by **CBC Radio**, through Radio One and Radio Two, and in French by **Radio-Canada**. Many cities also have all-sport radio stations, which focus attention on the professional sports teams in their region, but will cover amateur and Olympic sports during their competitive seasons.

DAILIES

Canada is home to two large newspaper chains. The CanWest Chain owns more than 30 newspapers and has a target audience of about two million readers. Included in the CanWest Chain are the *SUN* (Vancouver), *THE PROVINCE* (Vancouver), *THE CALGARY HERALD*, *THE EDMONTON JOURNAL*, *THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR*, *THE OTTAWA CITIZEN*, *THE SUDBURY STAR*, *THE WINDSOR STAR*, *THE GAZETTE* (Montréal), *THE CAPE BRETON POST*, *THE CHARLOTTETOWN GUARDIAN*, and *THE ST. JOHN'S EVENING TELEGRAM*.

The **Sun Chain**, with a readership of more than one million, owns, among others, *THE CALGARY SUN*, *THE EDMONTON SUN*, *THE TORONTO SUN*, *THE OTTAWA SUN*, *THE FINANCIAL POST* and *THE LONDON FREE PRESS*.

The two English national newspapers are *THE GLOBE AND MAIL* and *THE NATIONAL POST*, while *LE JOURNAL DE MONTRÉAL* is the most widely distributed French language newspaper.

WEEKLIES

Canada has more than 1,000 weekly newspapers. A weekly is sometimes referred to as a local paper and is an excellent place to start generating interest in amateur sport.

RADIO

There are more than 500 radio stations in Canada, many of which are experiencing challenging times. With diminishing numbers of reporters able to attend competitions, the stations rely increasingly on telephone interviews and the athlete's and coach's initiative in contacting them.

WEBSITES

Every major media outlet in Canada now has a website that complements what appears in print, on radio, or on its television broadcast. With the convergence of so many different media, the same reporter may write a column, interview you on video, and post a blog commentary. These sites will archive material for varying lengths of time, so be aware that your comments could be read or heard by people for a very long time. The sites also allow for additional material to be published, giving reporters an additional outlet for interesting anecdotes and short stories. Off-beat comments, or the way you handle questions, or some other small pieces of information may also find their way into a journalist's blog. These blogs are widely read, and are often filed live from the site of an event, giving readers the flavour of the event in new and different ways. Instead of merely short sound bites, websites often will host the longer version of an interview for radio or television. ❖

**Distance
swimming
champion
Greg Strepple**



MediaSpeak

by Sheila Robertson

ANCHOR	an on-air person for a television news broadcast who reads the news and introduces items delivered by reporters
ANGLE	the approach a reporter takes in writing a story
BACKGROUNDER	a story or news release that summarizes the background of a current news item
BREAKING NEWS	news that is developing at the moment
BYLINE	the name of the reporter writing the story
DATELINE	the place and date of an article's origin
DEADLINE	the time a story must be ready
EDITORIAL	an expression of opinion that appears on the editorial page, separate from news stories
ENG	electronic news gathering
FEATURE	a current article, but not hard news
FIVE Ws	who, what, when, where, why; the major questions answered in the lead of a well-written news story
FOR BACKGROUND OR NOT-FOR-ATTRIBUTION	reporters can use the information but not name the source
HARD NEWS	reports presenting the facts of an event objectively and in descending order of importance
LEAD	the beginning of a news story, often but not always containing the five Ws and how
LEAD STORY	the most important article on page one
MOBILE UNIT	television broadcast equipment used outside a studio
MUG	a head and shoulders photograph
NEWS CONFERENCE	a meeting arranged specifically to provide information to the media
ON THE RECORD	everything you say can be quoted and you can be named
OFF THE RECORD	a practice that has been used to give a journalist essential background information that you do not wish to make public. Some media interpret "off the record" to mean that the information may be published if it is not attributed to the source; others interpret it to mean the information cannot be published at all. To avoid any misunderstanding, always speak "on the record".

PRIME TIME	when television has its largest audiences and highest advertising rates
SIDEBAR	a feature appearing in conjunction with a news article, giving human interest or historical aspects of the story
WIRE COPY	stories supplied to newspapers by such news services as the Associated Press, Canadian Press and Reuters ❖



CHAPTER 5

**Taking Charge
of Your Own
Media Relations**

Personal Reflections on You, Equity and the Media

I have spent most of my life in sport. As an athlete competing in track and field, I made two Olympic teams and I was a bronze medallist in the 1500m at the 1978 Commonwealth Games.

by Penny Werthner

Now, as a sport psychologist, I work closely with many national team athletes. At Nagano in 1998, I was with the short track speed skating team and the women's hockey team, and at Atlanta I was with the canoe/kayak team. I am also deeply involved with CAAWS.

“I wish I had known how to take control of that interview.”

All athletes whose goal is excellence have worked long and hard to reach their goals. For some, your goal is to make an Olympic or Paralympic team. Others are determined to set a personal best. Still others intend to win a world championship medal. Whatever your goals, being on a national team tells the world just how much you have achieved and how hard you've worked. It singles you out and makes you a really important role model for all young Canadians, girls and boys.

It also brings you a lot of media attention.

Because you are an influential role model, it is important to take some time to plan what you want to say to the media when you are interviewed.

There are two factors for both female and male athletes to consider: first, how woman athletes have traditionally been portrayed by the media; second, how you can effectively reach the youngsters of Canada with a positive message about sport.

Let's first talk about how the media has tended to portray women athletes.

We know that women competing on national teams are no different from the men in the skill, dedication, courage and years of hard work they bring to their sport.

Media coverage should reflect these characteristics, but all too often it doesn't. Let me tell you a personal story.

Before the Montreal Games, a reporter asked me how someone *“so small, so petite, so delicate”* could be on an Olympic team. I'm not sure how I responded, except that I was wishy-washy. Later, I thought, *“He never asked me how fast I run; how good I am; how I got to be that good. Nothing, in fact, about my performance. It was all about my appearance.”*

I wish I had known how to take control of that interview. I would have talked about how hard I trained, my speed and power, the injuries I had overcome, the constant support of my parents, the miles I ran to get to the Olympics, the records I had set along the way and my great coach. It was a lost opportunity, on both sides.

And my story is anything but unique.



◀ **Short track speed skater
Nathalie Lambert**

Most athletes would prefer that the media forget about their appearance and concentrate on their skill, their strength and their accomplishments, and I think most readers, listeners and viewers would prefer that sort of information. It would certainly paint a more accurate picture of who and what Canada's athletes are, effectively and realistically.

Here's what athletes and their coaches can do.

Begin by being aware of the situation. Certainly, not all of the media portray athletes in an unseemly manner. In the last few years, many Canadian sports reporters and broadcasters have made serious and successful efforts to avoid writing or speaking in the manner I describe above. To help the process along, during interviews,

- ◆ *talk about yourself as an accomplished athlete*
- ◆ *talk about your training; mention specifics—the hours you spend in the gym, in the rink, on the hill*
- ◆ *talk about the complexities of modern training*
- ◆ *talk about the fun you have, the self-esteem sport develops, the challenges you meet, the thrill of victory and how sport makes you feel*
- ◆ *mention the number of years you have devoted to your sport, battling injuries and setbacks*
- ◆ *talk about how and why you got involved in sport and about your early years as an aspiring athlete*
- ◆ *talk about who inspired you: your mom, your dad, your sister or brother, a friend, a supportive coach*
- ◆ *talk about how important it is for girls to participate in sport*
- ◆ *tell a personal anecdote or two. I am reminded of the terrific track athlete who started out in swimming and wasn't very good, and the star gymnast who switched to diving. Kids love to hear these stories, and so do the journalists on the lookout for a different angle.*

These are all important and fascinating points to make with the media. Not only will there be better and more accurate reporting of you and your sport, but the public's perception of what you do will be based on fact, not fantasy.

Your message will reach the millions of Canadian youngsters—and their parents—who watch your competitions and cheer you on.

Penny Werthner is a practising sport psychologist working with athletes and coaches at all levels.



Media Relations as Practised by a Coach

An interview with Al Morrow, national coach of Canada's women's rowing team



Al Morrow

For some strange reason, I started reading newspapers when I was about seven. I come from a musical and political family—my mother was a voice teacher and my brother's the mayor of Hamilton, Ontario—so I didn't have a background, environmentally or genetically, in sport. We got *THE GLOBE AND MAIL* every morning and *THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR* at night, and I can remember scanning the sports pages and being able to

which came in polyyard. The point is that I always had an idea.

My first Olympic exposure was in 1964 when I was 14. I vividly remember listening to coverage of the Tokyo Olympics on CBC Radio. Roger Jackson and George Hungerford won gold in pairs rowing, and that was probably the first time I heard of the sport. It was the time of Doug Rogers, who won a silver medal in judo, and our great runners, Bill Crothers and Bruce Kidd. Something about their exploits attracted me.

So my early exposure to the media was reading, listening to and eventually watching sports, and this experience was really enjoyable.

The next thing that shaped my opinions of the media happened when the 1976 Olympic rowing team—I was spare on the men's eight—was training on Burnaby Lake. We planned a major interview opportunity with many team members present and invited the Vancouver media. No one showed up. That's when I realized that media relations are not that easy.

When I started coaching, I remembered that incident when I first approached the media. I made my first cardinal rule: *"Communicate 100 per cent to the media. It is my responsibility; not theirs."*

When I joined the University of Victoria's rowing program as a coach in the late 1970s, I analysed the situation and realized I wanted to make rowing a household word. To do that, I had to make information available to the media so that they would understand it on their terms.

For even the smallest regattas, I hand-delivered news releases to Victoria's five media outlets. I always drew attention to any stars who were entered and gave a contact name and number. When journalists showed up, I made sure they were met, preferably by me, so that they would get good and accurate information. After the regatta, I would go to my office, type all the results and deliver them to the outlets. I got into a lot of Monday morning papers, not an easy thing to do.

The point is that I worked on it. Anytime I thought something was unique or newsworthy, whether human interest or hard results, I sent out a release. The system got so good that before long, the Victoria media were phoning me for results.

"No one showed up. That's when I realized that media relations are not that easy."

A lot of people in sport only want media coverage when they win. Another rule I've always followed: *"Don't just report the good stuff."*

I learned a lot over the years and was able to establish really good rapport. The media learned to trust me, which leads me to another major rule: *"Create a bond of credibility by providing good and relevant information."*

One of my pet peeves is when coaches make up their minds that the media are putting pressure on them. How many times do you hear, *"We felt great pressure from the media,"* or *"The media misquoted me."* Those sorts of statements reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship.

During the 1997 world championships, at a meeting of the women's team, I said, *"Tomorrow some of you will be interviewed by the media. It is your choice how you project yourself. If you come third and you're really disappointed, and you stand on the podium slumped over, hands in pockets, looking dejected, keep in mind that CBC Television is picking up the feed to show next week. Ask yourself now what you want tomorrow's image to be, because you will live with that image of a momentary emotional reaction forever. You are free to act any way you want. Just ponder how that will be."*

I think many coaches are reluctant to give such advice, first, because they don't know how to and second, because it seems like the coach is telling the athlete what kind of person to be. Also, coaches are technical by nature and don't want to bother athletes with the after-race business. I think my job as a coach is to help them be better people, and that goes way beyond the race to how they conduct themselves in the other parts of their lives.

I treat interviews as though we are two people sitting in the kitchen, having a friendly conversation, and I suggest that my athletes do the same. It is also wise to remember who is listening to you. Technical detail loses the audience; you need to talk in general terms that people will understand.

I have heard so many athletes (and coaches, too) give bad interviews, say really dumb things, use terrible body language, and I believe it's my job as a coach to prepare people for everything they may encounter, including the media, who often ask difficult questions.

Whenever I do an interview with a reporter I don't know, I ask what kind of questions they're going to ask, and if I'm not comfortable with some of them, I say so and offer suggestions. Nevertheless, you do get asked questions that are awkward or irrelevant, so the secret is to be alert. It's all right to say, *"I'm not quite sure how to answer that, but my opinion in general on that topic is ..."*

Although I no longer handle media relations directly (because Rowing Canada now has a media relations officer), I continue to believe in its importance. It is quite simple: The media can be a great ally, free promoters of our sport, if I do a good job. It doesn't cost me anything more than time.

Why A Media Interview Request Protocol: Swimming Head Coach Dave Johnson Explains — A conversation with Sheila Robertson



WHY DID SWIMMING CANADA DEVELOP A MEDIA PROTOCOL?



Dave Johnson

Invariably, in any major games setting, there's such a cross-section of abilities on the part of the athletes and coaches and an equal cross-section of abilities on the part of the media that if we don't work within a framework, the media are confused about who is the best person to answer a specific question.

Often in the past questions would be put to people who thought they were informed. Their answer would turn out to be off base. But, with no malice intended on anyone's part, their information ended up appearing as the position of the Canadian team. To avoid that confusion and to try to provide a protective umbrella over the team that allows coaches to coach and swimmers to compete, we've uncluttered the process. At Swimming Canada, the lead spokespeople are our chief executive officer and our president; if the topic is the national team program, it's me; when we're talking about athletes and how they felt they performed, the answers are provided by the respective swimmer-coach tandem.

In situations where we cross the line about such topics as drugs in sport, the athletes do need to be informed, because they are our front-line representatives. If they are uninformed, then we are not doing a really good job of promoting our sport in a positive fashion. That's why we covered every parameter when we set up the media protocol. We also understand that the media need their stories, and if you want coverage and exposure, you had better be prepared to play on a professional level.

WAS THERE ANYTHING SPECIFIC THAT SPARKED THE DECISION TO HAVE A MEDIA PROTOCOL?

In their efforts to scoop each other, we used to find various media in the locker rooms talking to the swimmers. The swimmers had no space where they could find privacy.

We also had situations where the team spokespeople might be coaches, who often framed their remarks based on how their own athletes performed. Consequently, it was a bit of a biased position. It is important that people who speak on behalf of the national team are seeing the bigger picture. That's what we've tried to anticipate with this strategy.

HOW HAVE THE MEDIA RESPONDED? DO THEY EVER SUGGEST THAT YOU'RE BEING CONTROLLING?

We don't restrict access, not at all. We work as cooperatively as we can with the media, and a large part of this is because of our media relations expert, Penny Joyce. She has an excellent working relationship with the media and they know that if they need something, they can get it. If they can't get the story, they are told immediately; we don't wait until it is time for them to file. Common courtesy and respect are the operating axioms.

YOU ALSO PROVIDE MEDIA TRAINING TO YOUR NATIONAL TEAM, DON'T YOU?

Yes, and you'll remember that we started back to 1976 when we did mock interviews with you as team information officer and sport psychologist Brent Rushall. That was when we really became aware of the need, and we were pretty good with it into the '70s, but slackened in the early '80s. Since the late '80s, we've been building on our efforts.

We are a high-profile sport, and it is important that when our athletes go into the public forum they are able to present themselves professionally. If they can come across as being very confident and capable, it reflects very positively on the sport and has an impact on the support and sponsorship side of our endeavours.



**Swimming
Team Media
Interview
Request
Protocol**

1. The media request is directed to the team media attaché.
2. The request is communicated to the team leader or head coach.
3. The team leader or head coach receives approval for the interview from the swimmer's staff coach.
4. The time and place for the interview are established so that everything is as convenient as possible for the swimmer.
5. The team leader or head coach responds to the media attaché.
6. The media attaché responds to the reporter and sets up the interview.

TEAM SPOKESPERSONS

On team's overall performance:
head coach

On swimmer's performances:
swimmer's staff coach or, if not available, head coach

*On behalf of Swimming
Canada Natation:*
**chief executive office
or president**

On controversial issues:
**head coach or chief
executive officer**

Sport–Media Relationships: Basic Rights and Responsibilities of Athletes and Coaches

Athletes, coaches and media personnel are in the same business: producing sport. However, the needs and desires of athletes and coaches as **newsmakers** can be vastly different from the needs and desires of the **newsgatherers** and entertainment media.

by Margaret MacNeill



It is important to practise media skills and to acquire a basic understanding of the sport–media relationship before arriving at major events. Just as time and concerted effort is spent to train the body for high performance, so too should the athlete and coach hone interview and public relations skills.

Unfortunately, because the media often ignore national teams outside major event periods, athletes and coaches may arrive unprepared to deal with media pressures and may harbour misconceptions about the role of the media. The Athletes' Rights and Media Relationships Project that I conducted in 1994, for

example, found that most national athletes believe that the media should be cheerleaders and that they should equally cover the full range of sporting events. Members of the media responded to this finding by reminding athletes and coaches that media primarily cater to their editors, producers and audiences.

Still, the media are invaluable for telling your story, promoting your sport, and investigating pressing issues of the day. It is important, therefore, that you understand your rights when dealing with the media and are sensitive to the responsibilities of being a public figure on the national or world stage.

“Open discussion with the media is always your right; open discussion with your team is your duty.”

BASIC RIGHTS OF ATHLETES AND COACHES

In Canada, all people have the fundamental human right to freedom of expression.

However, it is unlawful in Canada to promote hatred against a group of people, to unfairly harm someone's good reputation or to dishonestly spread malicious gossip. You have the right to protect yourself against libellous words and depictions of your image displayed in public locations (which includes media coverage).

Canadian laws and charters may not protect you while competing in other nations or protect you from inappropriate media coverage outside of Canada.

Be mindful of your contractual obligations:

- ◆ *Have you signed away your full freedom of expression?*
- ◆ *Are you expected to refrain from making public criticisms of your team?*
- ◆ *Do media first have to contact your media attaché, press chief, team leader, agent or coach before interviewing you?*
- ◆ *Do you have the right to contact the media without first clearing the request with your sport's officials?*

Carefully study your contracts before signing them. Be aware of your obligations regarding contact with the media, clauses permitting your image to be used in future promotions and limits on individual expression, body language and fashion. Ask a lawyer to double-check that team contracts, sponsorship agreements and employee contracts do not conflict.

Contact your team's media attaché or press chief to learn about the specific media protocol for your team, your temporary living quarters and competition venues. Request insights about the treatment you can expect from media from different countries and about where the media will be located at your venue. Ask for interview tips to enhance your media savvy.

Talk openly with your team members and officials about hot issues that the media might be interested in. Clarify who should deal with certain topics if you do not want to. In the Athletes' Rights project, it was revealed that 25 per cent of athletes regularly withheld information during media interviews because they feared punishment from their coaches or sport federations, yet these athletes were not actually sure if officials were worried about information or opinions becoming public. Honest discussion with the media is always your right; open discussion with your team is your duty.

BASIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF ATHLETES AND COACHES

Know your rights and obligations as a team member or official under contract and as a national figure in the public's eye.

Express yourself honestly. Just as you expect your good reputation to be upheld in media coverage, you are responsible for all comments you utter in public or to the media. Both you and the media outlet that publishes a libellous comment can be held accountable.

Be aware of your physical safety around the media.

- ◆ *If media equipment or personnel are dangerously situated in your competition venue or training spaces, the coach should contact venue personnel or sporting officials.*
- ◆ *Watch your step around cables, cameras and cranes in media work areas.*
- ◆ *Be careful of the "push, shove and shout" that may occur in media scrums after high-profile events (or because of fans or paparazzi in public areas). Get advice from team leaders when considering strategies for your media game plan. Request extra security escorts if you need a greater degree of separation from the media and spectators.*
- ◆ *You are not obliged to reveal personal information such as your home phone number to the media. Control your privacy for reasons of safety and to prevent harassment.*

TREAT THE MEDIA KINDLY—THEY ARE HUMANS, TOO! Although you may feel the pressure of competition, the media have their own headaches to deal with at major sporting events, including tight deadlines, security checks, technological breakdowns, transportation problems and access to venues and people. ❖

Dr Margaret MacNeill is a member of the Faculty of Physical Education and Health at the University of Toronto.



APPENDICES

Milestones in the History of Women in Sport

by Sheila Robertson

- 1900** Women are included on the program of the modern Olympic Games, competing in archery, golf, and tennis; Britain's **Charlotte Cooper** becomes the first women's Olympic tennis champion; American **Margaret Abbott** wins gold in golf.
- 1905** Over the next 35 years, the **Edmonton Grads** win 502 of 522 basketball games and four world championships.
- 1912** Australia's **Sarah "Fanny" Durack** shocks the world with her one-piece bathing suit at the Olympic Games in Stockholm.
- 1922** The Fédération sportive féminine internationale organizes the first Women's Olympic Games in Paris; in one day alone, 20,000 spectators watch 18 world records broken in track and field.
- 1926** **Alexandrine Gibb** spearheads the formation of the Women's Amateur Athletic Federation of Canada (WAAF) to initiate international competition for Canadian women; the second Women's Games are held in Sweden, with entries from 10 nations.
- 1928** **Florence Bell, Myrtle Cook, Fanny (Bobbie) Rosenfeld** and **Ethel Smith** win the 400-yd relay at the Olympic Games; **Ethel Catherwood** takes gold in the high jump; several women collapse at the end of the 800, and the event is declared dangerous to women and banned until 1960; **Dorothy Prior** is the first Canadian woman to compete in Olympic swimming events; staging the only feminist boycott in Olympic history, British women stay away from the Games to protest the lack of women's events.
- 1930** The third Women's Games are held in Prague.
- 1934** The fourth and last Women's Games are held in London.
- 1936** The Women's Games are cancelled in exchange for a nine-event Olympic program for women.
- 1938** **WAAF** (Ontario) starts the first coaching development scheme for women.
- 1948** **Barbara Ann Scott** wins the Olympic figure skating title; at the Olympic Games in London, track and field star **Fanny Blankers-Koen**, a mother of three, is called "*The Marvellous Mama*", and the subtitle says, "*Fastest Woman in the World Can Cook*".
- 1952** American diver Juno Irwin wins an Olympic bronze medal while three-and-a-half months pregnant with her second child.
- 1956** Skier **Guiliana Chenal-Minuzzo** of Italy is the first woman to take the Olympic oath at the Opening Ceremonies.
- 1965** Olympic swim champion Donna de Varona becomes the first female sportscaster on American network television.

- 1966** Sex tests (gender verification) for women are adopted in international sport.
- 1971** **Debbie Brill** becomes the first woman to high jump six feet.
- 1972** Cross-country skiers **Sheila** and **Sharon Firth** are the first Aboriginal women to represent Canada at the Olympic Games.
- 1973** **Snooky Seely** sets a world record in shot-put at the Stoke Mandeville Games.
- 1975** Women tennis players win pay parity at the US Open.
- 1976** Women's rowing becomes an Olympic event 76 years after men's rowing; women's basketball becomes an Olympic event 36 years after men's basketball.
- 1980** Canada's first Female Athlete Conference is held; Fitness and Amateur Sport Canada establishes a Women's Program.
- 1981** **Abby Hoffman** is the first woman to be elected to the executive of the Canadian Olympic Association (COA); later that year she becomes the first woman to be director of Sport Canada; 87 years after its founding, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) admits its first woman member; CAAWS is formed.
- 1984** The first women's Olympic marathon takes place (men first competed in the event in 1896); women's cycling, synchronized swimming and rhythmic gymnastics are added to the Olympic calendar.
- 1987** **Betty Baxter** founds the National Coaching School for Women.
- 1988** **Justine Blainey** wins the right to play in the all-male Ontario Hockey Association when the Ontario Human Rights Commission rules that girls and women cannot be barred from competing in male sports and on male teams; tennis returns to the Olympic Games, although fewer women than men will be allowed to compete; **Carol Ann Letheren** is the first woman chef de mission of a Canadian Olympic team.
- 1991** **Carol Ann Letheren** is the first woman president of the COA; later that year she becomes the sixth woman to be named to the IOC; **Judy Kent** is the first woman chef de mission of a Canadian Commonwealth Games team.
- 1992** Judo becomes an Olympic event for women, 28 years after it became an Olympic event for men; the Canada Games Council adopts wide-ranging gender equity principles; Canada's women's wheelchair basketball team captures the gold medal at the Stoke Mandeville Games and at the Paralympic Games in Barcelona.
- 1993** The IOC adds women's soccer and women's triple jump to the Olympic calendar—men began playing Olympic soccer in 1900 and first contested the Olympic triple jump in 1896.
- 1994** Biathlete **Myriam Bédard** becomes the first Canadian woman to win two Winter Olympic gold medals; the IOC confirms that women's ice hockey and women's and men's curling will join the Winter Olympic program in 1998 at Nagano, Japan; the Commonwealth Games Women in Coaching Program gives 10 Canadian women international coaching experience along with coaching positions at the 1994 Commonwealth Games.

- 1995** The IOC announces its intention to move quickly to promote “**the presence of women within sport and its technical and administrative structures**”.
- 1996** At the Olympic Games in Atlanta, 3,626 women compete—32 per cent more than in Barcelona—in part due to the recognition of women’s soccer, softball and triple jump as Olympic events; the athletes on Canada’s Olympic team number 154 women and 153 men; **Molly Killingbeck** is the first woman to coach Canada’s 4x100m men’s relay team at an Olympic Games; Canada’s women’s wheelchair basketball team repeats as Paralympic champions—the team has recorded 25 consecutive wins since 1990; Egyptian handball player **Hanan Eid** is forced to take a sex test at the All-African Games to prove she is not a man; women’s pole vault is on the program of the European Indoor Track Championship, the first time the event has been held at a major international championship.
- 1997** The IOC extends the women’s field hockey tournament at the 2000 Games from 8 to 10 teams, moving closer to the men’s total of 12 teams; the IOC approves new women’s events for Sydney, but does not raise the limit on the numbers of athletes competing; when women first played at the Games in 1980, six teams were in the tournament; for the first time, 50 per cent of the chef de missions at the Canada Games are women; **kayaker Caroline Brunet** becomes the first woman to win three gold medals at the world championships.
- 1998** The Second World Conference on Women and Sport is held in Windhoek, Namibia. Canada is chosen to host the Third World Conference in Montreal in 2002.

Extracted from “MILESTONES IN THE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN SPORT”.

**Gymnast turned
television
commentator
Elfi Schlegel**



Sample Biographies

ATHLETE **CATRIONA LEMAY DOAN**, 26, Saskatoon, Sask., Sprint

CURRENT STATUS 1998 Olympic 500m champion and 1000m bronze medallist; first woman to skate below the 1:17.00 mark in 1000m; won silver at 1997 world sprint championships; current Canadian sprint champion; won gold and silver at 1996 world sprint championships; won six World Cup medals in 1995; healthy after injuries during 1994/95 season; still managed four top-10 World Cup finishes; arts and sciences student, University of Calgary; nine years on national team; outstanding all-around athlete; competed in athletics at 1993 Canada Summer Games; a speaker with Athletes in Action; coached by Derrick Auch

BEST TIMES **500m** 39.35 **1000m** 1:20.34 **1500m** 2:07.19 **3000m** 4:37.12

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

YEAR	EVENT	DISTANCE	RESULT
1998	World Sprint Championships	500m	1, 1
	World Single Championships	500m	1
	Olympic Games	500m	1
		1000m	3
	Olympic Trials	500m	1
	World Cup Final Standing	500m	1
1997	Canada–U.S. Challenge	1500m	1 (WR)
	World Cup	500m	1 (WR), 1
		1000m	1 (WR), 2
	World Cup	500m	1, 2
		1000m	4, 1
	World Single Distance Championships	500m	17
		1000m	13
	World Cup Standings	500m	7
		1000m	13
	World Sprint Championships	500m	2, 4
1000m		10, 10	
overall		5	
1996	World Single Distance Championships	500m	5
		1000m	16
	World Cup Standings	500m	3
		1000m	14
	World Sprint Championships	500m	1
	500m	2	
1995	World Cup Final Standings	500m	11

YEAR	EVENT	DISTANCE	RESULT
1994	World Cup Final Standings	500m	9
	Olympic Games	500m	33
			<i>(crashed on a turn)</i>
	World Sprint Championships	500m	7, 12
		overall	10
1993	World Cup Final Standings	500m	5
1992	World Cup, Nagano, JPN	500m	3

COACH **LAURA FARRER**, Coquitlam, B.C., Field Hockey

CURRENT STATUS Provincial coach, British Columbia's Women's Field Hockey Federation; Assistant coach, Field Hockey Canada; working on 3M NCCP Level Four; working on doctorate in psychopedagogy, University of Ottawa; certified mental trainer; CPCA charter member; coach representative, BC Sport Science Committee, Canada Summer Games

EDUCATION Master's degree in the psychology of sport; bachelor's degree in psychology

AWARDS

1997	Petro Canada Scholarship, Canadian Olympic Association Entrance Scholarship, University of Ottawa
1996	Elite Coach of the Year, Field Hockey Canada
1995	National Apprenticeship Program Grant
1993	Dean's Award, Queen's University
1988	All-Canadian, CIAU
1987	Joan Livesay Award, UBC Thunderbird Field Hockey Club

POSITIONS HELD

1996	Head field hockey coach, Queen's University
1991	Provincial coach, British Columbia's Women's Field Hockey Federation
1995	Coach, York University's Varsity Team 3M NCCP Level 4 apprentice coach
1994	Assistant junior national coach, Field Hockey Canada
1993	Instructor, teaching assistant, Queen's University

Resources

Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity

202-801 King Edwards Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 6N5
Tel: (613) 562-5667
Fax: (613) 562-5668
E-mail: caaws@caaws.ca
Website: www.caaws.ca

Athletes CAN

Suite 301 - 1376 Bank Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1H 7Y3
Tel: (613) 526-4025
Toll Free: 1-888-832-4222
Fax: (613) 526-9735
E-mail: athcan@idirect.com
Website: www.athletescan.com

Canada Games Council

701-2197 Riverside Drive
Ottawa, Ontario
K1H 7X3
Tel: (613) 526-2320
Fax: (613) 526-4068
E-mail: canada.games@canadagames.ca
Website: www.canadagames.ca

Canadian Centre for Ethics and Sport

350-955 Green Valley Cr
Ottawa, Ontario
K2C 3V4
Tel: (613) 521-3340
Fax : (613) 521-3134
E-mail: info@cces.ca
Website: www.cces.ca

Canadian Olympic Association

Website: www.olympic.ca

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Montréal (Québec)
Canada, H1V 3N7
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85 rue Albert Street
14th Floor Ottawa, ON
Canada K1P 6A4
Tel: (613) 244-2020

VANCOUVER

3585 Graveley St., Floor 7
Vancouver, BC
Canada, V5K 5J5
Tel: (604) 678-2555

Canadian Paralympic Committee

CPC National Office
85 Albert St., Suite 1401
Ottawa, Ont. K1P 6A4
Tel: 613-569-4333
Fax: 613-569-2777

Vancouver Office
3585 Gravelly Street, 7th Floor
Vancouver, BC V5K 5J5
Tel: 604-678-6240
Fax: 604-678-2554
E-mail: info@paralympic.ca
Website: www.paralympic.ca

Coaching Association of Canada

141 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 300
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5J3
Tel: 613-235-5000
Fax: 613-235-9500
E-mail: coach@coach.ca
Website: www.coach.ca

Sport Canada

15 Eddy Street
8th floor,
Gatineau, PQ
K1A 0M5
Tel: (819) 956-8151
Fax: (819) 956-8006
Website: www.pch.gc.ca/progs/sc/index_e.cfm

ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

CBC Ombudsman

Vince Carlin
P.O. Box 500, Station A
Toronto, Ontario M5W 1E6
Tel: (416) 205-2978
Fax: (416) 205-2825
E-Mail: ombudsman@cbc.ca
Website: www.cbc.ca/ombudsman

Telephone Directory

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