


# ATHENS 2004: THE GAMES RETURN TO GREECE

## Introduction

### Focus

This *News in Review* module reviews the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, with a special focus on Canada's participating athletes. It also looks at some of the history of the Olympic movement, ancient and modern; sports issues raised by the Games; and the potential for Canadians to make their mark in future competitions.

 Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

There is no other event like it. Every four years, for two full weeks, athletes from around the world come together to participate in a celebration of athletic competition and fair play. In 2004, 11 099 athletes from 202 countries took part in the Athens Olympics. It is estimated that four billion television viewers from around the world watched at least some of the competition that took place in 28 different sports.

### The World at Athens

There are many reasons why the Olympic Games attract so much attention. First of these is the level of competition; the Games really do bring together the best athletes in each sport in head-to-head combat. Second, there seems to be something for every sports fan. There are team sports like baseball and basketball as well as individual sports like swimming and track. Sports with clear winners, like weightlifting, take place side by side with judged sports like gymnastics and diving.

Most important to many viewers, however, is the international aspect of the competition. Some countries view every medal won as a source of national pride, and defeat as a source of national shame. Many countries have initiated a practice of giving large cash rewards to their athletes who win gold, silver, or bronze medals. Some even define the overall quality of their national sports program in terms of how well they do in the medal count at the Games.

The Athens "Top Three" were not unexpected. First was the United States, with 103 total medals, 35 of them gold. Russia followed with 92 medals, 27 of them gold. But the emerging sports

power was China, host of the next Summer Olympics, in 2008 at Beijing. The Chinese national sports governing bodies decided to invest heavily in almost all Olympic sports, and their athletes were rewarded with 63 medals, of which 32 were gold. Many commentators fully expect to see China in the number-one position at the Beijing Games.

### Canada at Athens

For many Canadians, the Athens Olympics were a major national disappointment. Typical of the commentary is this statement in a column by Robert MacLeod in *The Globe and Mail* (September 2, 2004): "The 2004 Summer Games . . . were an abject failure for Canadian athletes, who won only 12 medals, the nation's lowest total since winning 10 at the 1988 Seoul Olympics." He goes on to list the most disturbing results:

- ". . . four world champions who failed to win a medal in their specialty . . ."
- ". . . only three top-eight finishes in swimming, its worst Olympic performance in 52 years."
- "In terms of total medals, Canada tied with Bulgaria for 19th place. Canada's total of three gold medals was matched by Turkey, Thailand, Poland, New Zealand, and Spain."

Needless to say, these results will be analyzed by Canadian athletes, sports officials, coaches, sport psychologists, and journalists for some time to come.

MacLeod's article looks at the opinions of several psychologists. Many believe that the disappointing results are largely due to our best athletes not being psychologically prepared for the

**Quote**

“There is something about the Olympics that matters deeply to Canadians. A country that has good relations with almost every other nation in the world naturally believes in ideas like peace, and friendship, fairness and diversity.” — Alexandre Despatie, Olympic diver (*The Bell Summer Olympics 2004 Viewing Guide*)

stresses of competition at the Olympic level. It is certainly true that an Olympic gold medal has a prestige value even beyond a world championship. For some, the competitive pressure might prove overwhelming.

As Canada looks to the future of Olympic competition, and especially with the 2010 Winter Olympics being held in Vancouver and Whistler, B.C., some very fundamental questions are being asked:

- What should be the basic goals of a national Canadian sports program?
- How important is Olympic competition to our national sports program?

- How can we best support our athletes with the limited resources we have available?
- Where should Canada make its major investment—elite or recreational sports?
- Are there some sports that mean more to Canadians or in which Canadians are best equipped to succeed? Should we limit our support to those sports we identify as “best bets?”

If Canadians expect to do well in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the answers to these questions will have to come quickly.

**For Reflection**

1. Did you watch any of the Athens 2004 Olympic competitions? What were the highlights in your opinion?

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2. How important for you was Canada’s participation in the Games? Is it important for all Canadians that our athletes succeed in future Olympics, especially Vancouver in 2010?

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3. Should governments in Canada provide more funding for Olympic athletes? Explain.

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## Video Review

While viewing the video, try to answer the questions on this page. You might need a few minutes after viewing to confirm your responses with your peers.

### Did you know . . .

One Canadian, a Calgary teenager, managed to place a "Lucky Loonie" near the base of an ancient column at Olympia Greece? However, the luck that it may have brought Canada's hockey teams at Salt Lake City was not so evident at Athens in 2004.

### Part I

1. How long ago did the Olympics begin? \_\_\_\_\_
2. When and where were the first Olympic Games of the modern era held?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How many athletes did Canada send to Athens? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What event marred the Games from the point of view of many Greeks?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How many medals did Canada win at the 2004 Olympics? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Which athlete represented Canada's biggest disappointment of the Games?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Describe two security breaches that were of concern to Olympic officials.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What ancient traditions were broken at Olympia in 2004?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What are Kotinos? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Which country appears to be the next powerhouse in the Summer Olympics?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Part II

Match the Canadian Olympian with his/her sport. Draw a line from the athlete to his/her sport.

#### Athletes

Perdita Felicien  
Kyle Shewfelt  
Lori-Ann Muenzer  
Daniel Igali  
Adam van Koeverden

#### Sports

Kayaking  
Cycling  
Wrestling  
Hurdles  
Gymnastics

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## *Olympic History: Fact or Fiction*

How much do you know about the history of the Olympic Games? Try your hand at the true or false questions. Circle what you believe is the correct answer. The answers follow the last question—but don't peek! Medals earned for correct responses include—Gold (9-10 correct), Silver (7-8) and Bronze (5-6).

1. The five Olympic rings are an ancient Greek symbol for the Olympic Games. **T F**
2. The Greeks held a marathon at their ancient games to commemorate a soldier's 26-mile (41.8-kilometre) run to report victory of the Athenians over the Persians at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. **T F**
3. One of the running events in the ancient Olympics required athletes to run in a full suit of armour. **T F**
4. The Pentathlon is a five-event competition common to both the ancient and modern Olympics. **T F**
5. Drivers who won chariot races in the ancient games often received no recognition for their victory. **T F**
6. Participation in the Olympics automatically brought great honour to an athlete. **T F**
7. The oval running track was invented at Olympia. **T F**
8. Even wars stopped for the ancient Olympic games. **T F**
9. The Olympic torch and the lighting of the Olympic flame are a modern development. **T F**
10. All the events at the ancient Olympics had rules that were strictly enforced. **T F**
11. Bonus! In the modern Olympics, every host country has always won at least one gold medal during the Games on its home territory. **T F**

### **The answers, please...**

1. **False.** The five rings were a 1913 invention by Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics. There were five rings for the five modern Games that had already taken place; a sixth would be added for Berlin in 1916; and one for each subsequent Olympiad. When the 1916 Games were cancelled because of the First World War, de Coubertin changed the meaning of the rings to represent the five continents, which remains their meaning until today.

2. **False.** The race does commemorate Phedippides' run between Marathon and Athens to report victory and warn of approaching ships, but it is an invention of the modern Olympics. Today's distance was first run in London in 1908, and became the standard in Paris in 1924. The 1908 length was set at 26 miles (41.8 kilometres), to cover the distance between Windsor Castle and White City Stadium. An extra 385 yards (352 metres) were added so that the race would finish in front of King Edward VII's royal box.

### Further Research

For brief highlights of the modern Olympic Games, a good place to start is [www.cbc.ca/olympics/history](http://www.cbc.ca/olympics/history).

For information on the ancient Olympics, visit [www.archaeology.org/online/features/olympics](http://www.archaeology.org/online/features/olympics) and [www.perseus.tufts.edu/Olympics](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Olympics).

3. **True.** Competitors ran between 384 to 768 metres in full sets of armour weighing about 27 kilograms. The race was believed to build the strength and endurance needed for military service. Other races, like most competitions, were held in the nude.

4. **True.** But the events are quite different. The Greeks competed in discus, javelin, jumping, running, and wrestling. The Modern Pentathlon was a creation of de Coubertin, who wanted a competition that would demonstrate both the moral qualities and physical skills of the ideal athlete. It consists of pistol shooting, épée fencing, swimming, riding and cross-country running.

5. **True.** The prize went to the owners, not to the drivers, in the equestrian events. Many owners hired jockeys or drivers, and did not need to be present at the games to win. As a result, even a woman could be declared the victor of a chariot race, though women were not allowed actually to compete in the games.

6. **False.** The only athletes who were honoured at the ancient Olympiads were the winners. There were no second- or third-place awards, and the poet Pindar describes athletes who had lost their competition as having to slink home by back alleys. Winners received only a laurel wreath as their reward, but victory also brought them great fame throughout Greece.

7. **False.** The Greeks ran on a rectangular field with stone markers at either end. These were both starting markers and turning posts that competitors ran around before returning to their starting position to finish the race.

8. **False.** While an Olympic Truce was proclaimed every four years for the games, it only guaranteed safe passage to Olympia for athletes and spectators. Wars often continued in the region throughout the games.

9. **True.** The Greeks had no ceremony similar to the modern running of the torch and lighting of the cauldron. The first lighting of the flame took place at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, presided over by Adolf Hitler. It has become one of the best-known features of the Games. Thousands now participate in the carrying of the torch across the continents prior to each Olympic Games.

10. **True.** But those rules might be very few. For example, in the pankration, a combination of boxing and wrestling, only biting and eye gouging were prohibited. You could punch, kick, strangle, hit your opponent in the groin, or break his fingers.

The match did not end until one person surrendered or was unable to continue to fight. Some matches even ended in the death of one of the participants. Fighters were immune from punishment if the death was unintentional. Those who cheated by biting and eye gouging were flogged.

11. **False.** Sadly, Canada is the only country not to earn a single gold medal during the Games it hosted, and this happened twice: Montreal in 1976 and Calgary in 1988.

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## *Highs and Lows of 2004*

### Further Research

Extensive information on the 2004 Games, including news stories and a full set of results, is available at the official Athens 2004 Web site at [www.athens2004.com](http://www.athens2004.com). Their list of highlights is at [www.athens2004.com/en/highlightsofthegames](http://www.athens2004.com/en/highlightsofthegames).

### Further Research

Learn more about the Paralympics and the Canadian Paralympic athletes at [www.paralympic.ca](http://www.paralympic.ca).

As at every previous Olympics, there were many stories that became identified as highlights of the Games. Not all of these were happy stories, and some contained both positive and negative elements. Here are some, both Canadian and international, that received special attention.

1. The Olympics hadn't even begun when two of Greece's most famous athletes and medal hopes, Kostas Kederis (gold medal winner at Sydney) and Katerina Thanou (silver medallist at Sydney), failed to appear for a mandatory drug test. They even apparently faked a motorcycle accident as an excuse for missing the examination. Ultimately, both withdrew from competition before they were ejected by the International Olympic Committee. Greeks were horrified.

2. One of the most anticipated swimming races in history took place on day three of the Olympics. Australian Ian Thorpe, Dutch swimmer Pieter van Hoogenbrand, and U.S. swimmer Michael Phelps met in the 200 freestyle. Thorpe came from behind to beat van Hoogenbrand by half a second, with Phelps third. Canadian Rick Say was sixth in one of the strongest groups of eight swimmers ever brought together. In the overall medal competition, Phelps went on to win six gold and two bronze; Thorpe received two gold, a silver and a bronze.

3. Judoka Friiba Rayazee and runner Robina Muqimyar made Olympic history by being the first Afghani women to compete in the Games.

Muqimyar, wearing old track pants and donated shoes, set a national woman's record and achieved her goal of not running last, by beating one other racer.

4. After a week at the Olympics, Canada had managed to win only two medals, a bronze in women's synchronized diving and a silver in women's trampoline. In the face of constant criticism, Diane Cummins, the Canadian champion 800-metre runner, begged people back home to "just love us. We don't want to fail," she said, "and if we fail, we don't want you to make us feel like we disappointed you. Nobody wants to disappoint anyone" (*Toronto Star*, August 22, 2004).

5. Like the Olympic Games, the Paralympic Games are held every four years, and in the same venue. This year they will be held in Athens September 17-28. Two events, however, took place as demonstration sports during the Athens Olympics: the men's wheelchair 1500-metre race, and the women's wheelchair 800 metre. The women's gold medal was won by Canada's Chantal Petitclerc, who also set a new Olympic record.

6. On day nine came Canada's first official gold medal, a gold on the floor exercise in artistic gymnastics. It was won by Kyle Shewfelt of Calgary. This was the first Olympic medal won by a Canadian in this sport. However, as a result of a controversial decision by the judges in the vault competition, Shewfelt was denied a bronze medal that many felt he deserved. This decision was one of many questionable ones

**Quote**

"This is what the Olympics is all about—to do things that you can't even imagine." — Nikos Pollas, Greek sprinter, *Toronto Star*, August 7, 2004.

in this year's gymnastics competition that led several commentators to suggest throwing all judged sports out of the Olympic Games.

7. Demonstrating once again that Canadians are usually good at emerging sports, Tonya Verbeek won a silver medal in the first Olympic women's wrestling competition. Verbeek had not found it easy to make the national team, and it took two attempts before she qualified for Athens. Victory was sweet.

8. Another first: Sprint cyclist Lori-Ann Muenzer, 38 years old and the oldest woman in the competition, won Canada's first-ever gold medal in cycling. Muenzer says she knew it was her competition to win: "It didn't matter if I was leading or I was following. This week, this is the fittest I've ever been, the fastest I've ever been, the strongest I've ever been and also the smartest I've ever been. Today was the day to put it all together" (*Toronto Star*, August 25, 2004).

9. Canada's hopes for another gold were dashed when hurdler Perdita Felicien fell only 13 metres into her 100-metre final. A tearful Felicien apologized to Canadians for failing to

live up to their expectations. In turn, Canadians proved that they do love their athletes by flooding her with e-mails praising her grace in defeat. She remains "Canada's darling," and many believe she will be on the medal podium in Beijing in 2008.

10. Kayaker Adam van Koeverden surprised many observers by winning a bronze medal in the K1 1000-metre race. He returned the next day to win Canada's third gold medal of the Athens Olympics in the K1 500-metre race. Van Koeverden, 22 years old, thus became Canada's first multiple medal winner since the 1996 Atlanta Games.

11. A record number of athletes—23—were disqualified during the 2004 Athens Olympics for doping violations. International Olympic Committee officials point to this number as proof that the new kinds of testing they have instituted are finding the cheats and, in many cases, keeping them out of the Games altogether. Critics say that it is only an indication of how important drug use is in elite sport. Several of the athletes who failed their drug tests were medal winners. These included the Russian woman who won the shot put, a showcase event held at the site of the ancient Olympics in Olympia.

**Activity: Read All About It!**

All of these highlights were feature stories in newspapers throughout Canada. The challenge for newspaper editors is to get people to actually read the stories. One of the ways they do this is by creating headlines that grab the reader's attention. Broadcasters often use the same technique at the beginning of newscasts. For the next 10 minutes, come up with as many attention-grabbing headlines as you can for each of these stories. Compare your headlines with those of other students in your class. What qualities do you think the best headlines have in common?

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## *The Elephant in the Room*

### Did you know . . .

In 1972, at the Summer Olympics in Munich, terrorists seized the Israeli wrestling team, and 11 athletes were killed as security forces attempted to free them?

With all the talk of peace and global unity, it is easy to forget that the 2004 Olympics in Athens also represented the largest security operation in the history of the world. This was the first Summer Games to be held after the September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York. While athletes competed and fans celebrated, nervous security officials watched their every move and prayed that no acts of terrorism would take place. They had to prepare for the unthinkable and make sure that it did not happen. Fortunately, there was no terrorist attack on the Summer Games. This does not negate the fact that the events in Athens were watched by an army of soldiers, police, and security agents supported by the most sophisticated technologies available.

In order to protect the Olympic Games:

- Greece spent almost \$42-billion on security operations for the two-week event.
- 70 000 police and soldiers were assigned to patrol the Games.
- Officials used a \$400-million communication and surveillance system to link police, armed forces, and other services.
- NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a military alliance of which Canada is a member) provided surveillance planes, sea patrols, and emergency response forces.
- Security forces flew a 60-metre blimp equipped with high-resolution cameras and highly sensitive chemical agent “sniffers” over Athens.
- Three AWACS planes (Airborne Warning and Control System) patrolled the skies of Greece. These are the types of planes most recently used in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Greek military units manned anti-aircraft missile sites outside Athens.
- The U.S. Sixth Fleet was close at hand, on standby.
- There were 1 500 security cameras constantly keeping an eye on the events and sites.
- The Athens airport, once noted for its loose security, is now one of the most secure airports in the world.
- Units specializing in weapons of mass destruction were organized and set to go.
- Some claimed that U.S. special forces were deployed under cover to protect U.S. athletes.

## Responding

1. Given the high cost of security for Olympic events, do you think it is still worthwhile to hold these Games? Explain.
2. The 2004 Summer Games did not get the usual influx of tourists, possibly because of fears of terrorist acts. Would you personally go to an Olympics event if terrorism was still a concern? Explain.

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## **Drug Problems**

### **CBC Archives**

Some important historical moments in the history of drugs in sport are in the CBC Archives at [archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-41-1409/sports/drugs\\_sport](http://archives.cbc.ca/IDD-1-41-1409/sports/drugs_sport). A useful glossary of drugs is at [www.cbc.ca/sports/indepth/drugs/glossary/dictionary.html](http://www.cbc.ca/sports/indepth/drugs/glossary/dictionary.html).

A Canadian played a pivotal role in making the world aware of how pervasive drug use was in Olympic sport. Runner Ben Johnson, the “world’s fastest man,” thrilled Canadians by winning the gold medal in the 100 metres at the Seoul Olympics in 1988. Equally stunning was the stripping of his medal a few days later when it was revealed that he had tested positive for a banned anabolic steroid.

### **A Bit of History**

Doping, if one includes substances such as alcohol and cocaine, has been with us for many years. Athletes in sports like boxing and cycling used these types of drugs as both painkillers and as stimulants to give them a bit of an edge. But it took a scientific approach to doping to demonstrate how effective it could be.

Olympics previous to Seoul had included amazing performances by Eastern European—and especially East German—athletes. Many observers suspected they were using drugs. After the end of the Cold War, information came to light revealing that this was indeed the case. In East Germany, the doping was systematic. Many of the athletes did not even realize that they were being doped. Some of the athletes suffered serious, even fatal, damage as a result.

By Seoul it was clear that not just the Eastern Bloc was using drugs to enhance performance. Athletes from a variety of nations—even Canada—were failing drug tests. Canada responded by creating a special inquiry, led by Justice Charles Dubin, into the use of performance-enhancing drugs in sports. The

most important conclusion of the inquiry’s report was that the use of such drugs had been common in Canada for years: Johnson had probably been using them since 1981. The reason more athletes were not caught was because drug testing was done only at competition, by which time all traces of the drugs had left the athlete’s system. What was needed was more out-of-season testing.

As a result of the inquiry, by 1990 Canada had become a world leader in testing its athletes for banned drugs, and a crusader in getting more nations to do so. Nevertheless, it was a full decade before its greatest international success. The 2000 Sydney Olympics were the first in which athletes took an oath that included “committing ourselves to a sport without doping and without drugs.” Eleven competitors tested positive in those Games.

### **BALCO, Athens, and Beyond**

In 2003, tetrahydrogestinone (THG), an unknown (and previously undetectable) steroid, hit the headlines. The Bay Area Laboratory Co-operative (BALCO) was accused of selling it as a “nutritional supplement” to some of the top sports stars in the United States and other countries, including a number of potential gold-medal winners in track at the 2004 Olympics. Because of testing that can now detect this substance, many of these athletes were forced to give the Games a pass. Some have failed the new test and been banned from future competition; others have been forced to return awards or have been removed from the record books.

The Athens Olympics saw the most

**Quote**

"The human race is growing larger with each generation. We're just getting bigger and stronger and have better nutrition. Eventually we'll be able to beat drug performances with natural performances." — Dr. Brent Rushnall, professor of exercise and nutritional science, *Toronto Star*, August 29, 2004

extensive testing in the history of the Games. Before being allowed to compete, the world governing body of every participating sport had to adopt the world anti-doping code created in 2003. As a result, a single list of banned substances and a single set of sanctions for offenders now applied to all sports. All disputes are now to be resolved through appeal to one organization, the Court of Arbitration for Sport. At Athens, a record 23 athletes failed their drug tests or refused to provide samples.

The effectiveness of the testing at Athens would seem to be demonstrated by the results in track and field. Only one world record was tied, and one broken. Many experts believe that many of the existing records were set by doped athletes, and the whole record book should be thrown out.

The Games began with a huge scandal. Two of Greece's most famous athletes, sprinters Kostas Kederis and Katerina Thanou, failed to appear for random drug tests, and then apparently faked a motorcycle accident as an excuse. Both withdrew from the Games to avoid being denied places by the IOC.

**What Do You Think?**

Some sports authorities argue that it should be up to the athletes themselves in a particular sport to decide if performance-enhancing drugs are allowable. For example, athletes use training at high altitudes to increase their number of red blood cells just as those who take EPO, a banned steroid, do. Is one technique really better than the other? Should athletes themselves determine the rule?

**The World Anti-Doping Agency**

Canada remains at the forefront of the ongoing battle against drugs in sports. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) is located in Montreal, and its leader is Canadian Dick Pound. Pound, author of the book *Inside the Olympics*, sees both sport and the Olympic Games as providing an "ethical platform" for young people. One of the ways in which it will be able to do so is by banning all doping from competition. The drugs that WADA bans must meet at least two of the following criteria: they must be performance-enhancing, be harmful to health, and be against the spirit of sport. Pound is confident that public opinion is very much on his side.

The future holds real challenges for those trying to prevent doping in sports. It is expected that, by the time of the 2012 Olympics, the first athletes who have received genetic therapy to modify their performance will be involved in competition. At present, there is no way in which such genetic modifications can be tested.

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## *Funding Canada's Future Athletes*

### Further Research

The Canadian Olympic Committee's Web site is [www.olympic.ca](http://www.olympic.ca).

At an interview with the CBC following the Olympics, Jacques Rogge, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), expressed his concern over the number of medals Canada won in the 2004 Olympic Games. Clearly, Rogge suggested, Canada is not living up to its medal potential.

Statistically, it would seem that there is a problem with Canada's Olympic effort. Canada's total of 12 medals—three gold, six silver and three bronze—was the smallest since 1988. The three Summer Olympics previous to Athens had seen better results:

- Barcelona (1992), 18 medals, seven of them gold
- Atlanta (1996), 22 medals, three of them gold
- Sydney (2000), 14 medals, three of them gold

In Athens, Canada tied for 19th place with Bulgaria in total medals won. If only gold (first-place) finishes were counted, Canada was ranked 20th, in a tie with Turkey, Thailand, Poland, New Zealand, and Spain.

Four of Canada's world champions did not even make it to the medal podium in their championship event. These included the men's rowing eights, hurdler Perdita Felicien, and tower divers Émilie Heymans and Alex Despatie.

If Canadian Olympic officials had been disappointed by the country's performance at Sydney, what would they make of the Athens results?

Jacques Rogge was quick to identify funding as a problem, and announced that he would be coming to Canada to urge increased government funding for

athletes in Olympic sports. Rogge is especially concerned because Vancouver will be the host city for the 2010 Winter Olympics. The IOC always wants host countries to be competitive, because it generates more interest in the Games. Canada, he pointed out, has the dubious distinction of being the only country ever to host an Olympics in which it did not win a gold medal—and this happened twice, at Montreal in 1976 and Calgary in 1988.

### The COC Speaks Out

Chris Rudge, the chair of the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC), was quick to speak out. He had nothing but praise for the sport funding programs of British Columbia and Quebec. But he blasted Ontario, which had severely cut back its funding under previous governments. "The province of Ontario is a wasteland when it comes to high-performance sport and we all know that," he told *The Toronto Star* on August 30, 2004. Many television commentators had made similar comments during the broadcasts, pointing out that the province seemed to be underrepresented numerically on the Canadian teams. "We have to change the sport system in this country dramatically if we're going to move forward," says Rudge.

The COC's executive director of sport is Mark Lowry. While he hopes to see more government money invested in sport, he also talks about the need for a whole new national sports system. The new national model for high-performance athletics would have strong leadership at the top, and would

**Did you know . . .**

According to economists Andrew Bernard and Meghan Busse, a country with Canada's population and gross domestic product should be in the mid to high 20s in medals? — *The Globe and Mail*, September 4, 2004

target specific athletes and specific programs. The funding of 28 Olympic Summer Games sports is seen as not very realistic. It might be far more effective to concentrate on eight to 12 as Canada prepares for Beijing in 2008. Priority would always be given to those with the most practical chance of success. A COC panel is already at work assessing Canada's Winter Olympics sports, trying to identify those in which Canadians are best able to win medals. When seeking Olympic models, Canadians often point to Australia, a smaller country that has achieved great success in the Summer Olympics through a centralized program. The features of the Australian program that COC officials think would most benefit Canada are:

- a central agency to co-ordinate high-performance sport
- a system to channel money to targeted sports
- more technological and scientific study of sport
- the hiring of more coaches and sport experts

On the other hand, Canada's federal and provincial governments often talk of more funding for sports at the non-elite levels, especially in schools, to encourage more participation by all young people. Those who advocate this type of funding are also quick to point to Australia, where, they say, recreational sport has suffered. Indeed, the country has recently conducted studies that show an alarming increase in obesity among children.

Not everyone thinks more funding and centralization is crucial to Olympic success. Mark Tewksbury, the last Canadian swimmer to win a gold medal, is recommending that an outside expert be called in to examine the sport's governing body, Swimming Canada. Tewksbury believes that centralizing swimming in sports centres may actually have weakened competition, and that the old club system was likely far superior in developing a larger number of potential medallists. (For the first time in decades, Canadian swimmers failed to win a single medal in Athens. Most were even unable to register best times.)

## Discussion

Gather into groups of three or four to discuss the following questions. Be prepared to share your group's findings.

The future of Canada's Olympic hopes is bound to generate a great deal of discussion in Canada over the next few years. How do you feel we should prepare for the Beijing Games? Are Canada's Olympic results so important that we should revamp Canada's sport governing bodies to attempt to win more medals? Will an emphasis on elite sport deny funding and support to recreational sports? Are some sports more valuable than others because Canadians are likely to be stronger in them?

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## **Why Sport Matters**

Christie Blatchford is a writer for *The Globe and Mail* who spent the two weeks of the 2004 Olympics watching and reflecting on the efforts of Canada's athletes. Blatchford wrote an article for the August 28, 2004, issue of the newspaper in which she tried to make the case for increased government and public support for Canadian Olympic athletes. In it, she singled out kayaker Adam von Koeverden as an exemplar of what makes a great athlete and Olympian.

Athletes like von Koeverden, says Blatchford, "learn to share, strive and succeed; that failure one day doesn't mean failure the next; they discover

their limits, and how to either raise them through hard work, or to circumvent them with experience."

She quotes wrestler Laura McDougall of Calgary: "Athletes learn what it is to set goals and how to work toward them . . . how to be coached and accept feedback and process that information . . . how to be organized, prepared and diligent . . . [how to look] at the smallest of details while keeping the big picture in mind. . . ." McDougall continues: "All these things help in sport, but they also set you up for facing all aspects of life. They make you a better employee, student, daughter, mother, and friend than you may otherwise have been."

### **Your Response**

Do you share Christie Blatchford's enthusiastic promotion of sport as a builder of better people who will likely "make for a better community"? At a time when there is demand from so many different areas for government, corporate, and private funds, should we single out athletes for increased support? If we do, what kind of return should we expect on our investment: more medals, increased national pride, or simply better citizens?

In your notebook, prepare a brief letter—no more than 200 words—as a reply to Blatchford's ideas. Can sport play the social role that Blatchford feels it can? Are there other areas—music and the arts, for example—that can also teach the lessons she has cited? Are the majority of Canadians really interested in the sports that make up the Olympics? Be specific as to why Canada should or should not aggressively support its potential Olympic athletes.

### **Extension**

After editing your letter, consider sending it to *The Globe and Mail* Letters to the Editor page via e-mail: [letters@globeandmail](mailto:letters@globeandmail) or fax: 416-585-5085. Letters must be less than 200 words and include your name, address, and daytime telephone number.