
Corporate Training:

Identity Construction, Preparation for the Sydney Olympic Games & Relationships between Canadian Media, Swimmers and Sponsors¹

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Global media mega sports events, like the Olympics and the soccer World Cup, have become orgies of both nationalism and commodification ('commodified nationalism' perhaps).²

Sport has long been a popular and profitable aspect of Canadian culture; yet, little scholarly attention has been devoted to national team "duties," athletes' rights, and to the *actual* relationships Olympic athletes have with media, sponsors, media attache's, and sporting organizations. Despite a long history of political-economic investigations into sport³ and a recent turn in critical sport studies toward issues of identity which have opened a space for the investigation of commodified sporting images,⁴ there has been little ethnographic research about relationships between those social actors and the (re)production of *corporatized* identities.⁵ Athletes and their images have often been employed to compete for a national audience. To understand how and why corporatized Canadian identities are produced around major sporting events, and to explore the consequences of cultural production for the people and institutions involved, this investigation critically examines the relationships and contexts of identity negotiation *in situ*.

Findings from the pre-Olympic stage of a larger project that investigated the contested production of national identities around and at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games are presented in this article. Contested notions of nationalism and regionalism, and other intersecting discourses produced within the sport-media-promotional complex -- such as commercialism, and the struggle to institute team cohesion as an image building exercise -- are ethnographically detailed and critically analysed. We argue that as elite sport has been forced to seek private sector funding at the high performance level during an era of federal fiscal restraint in Canada, a corporatized dis-

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course has become privileged in both the organization of the sport and the negotiation of key identities that Swim/Natation Canada (SNC) and the national team offer to fans on site and to the Canadian audience through media coverage and advertising. Branding exercises for the 'national team product' by sport officials and media skills training for athletes are two strategies that have been instituted to create the shift to corporatized discourse. Thus, nationalism produced in and through commodified elite sport, considering Andrew Wetnick's⁶ arguments, has become a form of *promotionalism* that has celebrated a commercial cluster of values infused with particular notions of sporting culture and nationhood that are then recirculated back through corporate communications. Commercial values such as competitive individualism in a team environment, success based on measurable achievement, and efficiency formed an anchor for national team-corporate sponsorships. Maritime Life, a title sponsor of Swimming/Natation Canada for example, upheld the same ideals of reaching for excellence through "teamwork, performance and achievement;" "As a financially strong, national life insurance company, we feel we have a natural tie with sport that Canadians of all ages, cultures and backgrounds can enjoy."⁷

Ethnographic insights about corporatized identities mediating the Maritime Life Olympic Swim Trials held in Montreal in May of 2000 and athlete media skills training seminars held at a national team training camp after the Sears Summer National Championships in August of 2000 are presented in five sections. In Section I we briefly outline critical cultural studies notions of national identity and discourse, and suggest that identities are always in flux as they are primarily reconstituted by promotional relations in and around the National Swimming Team. The team has come to be situated within a corporatized culture of high performance sport management in Canada. The methodological framework is presented in Section II. In Section III we examine the dialectical conflation of national and local identities during media skills training that served to shift team development from a mutually supportive exercise in team building for athletic performance, to a corporatized sense of team cohesiveness. In Section IV we argue that media skills training primarily supported SNC efforts to leverage the sponsorship value of the association by training athletes to interact with the media and promote SNC values, by cultivating relationships with media in a manner that attempted to address the different levels of interest in swimming by anglophone and francophone journalists, and by strictly enforcing SNC interview protocol. In Section V we provide a specific example of competitive media interactions in the press room as print journalists attempted to obtain an interview with an athlete caught between corporate reception duties, responsibilities for media relations, and a desire to privately celebrate making the national team. Finally, Section VI offers a number of conclusions regarding athlete-sponsor-sport-media relations and the reproduction of corporatized identities.

National Identity and Imagining Corporate Canada

Identities are always in flux. National, regional, class, gender, ethnic, and language-based identities, among others, are also fragmented and reconstituted by associations constructed through the media and the commodified sports industry.⁸ For example, the media's obsession with the technological angle on Speedo Fastskin© swimming suits leading up to the 2000 Olympic Games reified the bodies of athletes:

Australian Ian Thorpe became an aqua-dynamic machine and Canadian Morgan Knabe was depicted as an aggressive shark in international waters by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC).⁹ These full-length black suits were banned at the Canadian Olympic swimming Trials in May of 2000, but were permitted during the final Olympic qualifying championship in Winnipeg in August of 2000. In Montreal, and later in Sydney, the Speedo-clad bodies of swimmers served to commodify athletes into billboards for corporate interests, to become biomechanical testing sites for new technologies,¹⁰ and to act as sites where media attempted to reclaim past swimming glory by merging history with current assumptions of the team members being identified as young drug-free 'clean' Canadians.

Identities, including corporate and national, are difficult to define because they have multiple significations.¹¹ We adopt Anderson's definition of the nation as "an imagined political community."¹² Nationhood is imagined in Canada, for example, because members of this sovereign country may have a vision of their 'communion' with other citizens; yet, each Canadian will neither see, hear, nor meet most of the other inhabitants of the vast geographic territory. Memories of past sporting glory, beliefs about national or regional character, maple leaf symbols, and relationships that constitute elements of nation building are an amalgam of social practices, promotional strategies, and discursive formations. Communities, Anderson argues, "are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."¹³ In an ethno-culturally diverse country like Canada -- constituted by peoples with a variety of ancestral homelands, political positions, religious affiliations, genders, sexual identities, physical abilities, etc. -- there can never be a singular 'Canadian identity. Rather there are multiple identities. Therefore, as we have argued elsewhere, Canadian sport must also be wrapped up in a range of visions.¹⁴

However, the polysemic range of imagined 'Canadas' can be more narrowly contained in and through national broadcasts of sport, particularly when agreements with the International Olympic Committee permit only a single broadcasting rights holder for each nation, such as the CBC¹⁵ in the case of the 2000 Games, to exclusively produce and circulate what Stuart Hall would call a "preferred"¹⁶ vision of sport and nation. Dominant visions may embody popular practices, feelings, and structures. Yet they are always partially unrepresentative of the various constituents of the nation. Anderson's notion of the imagined community is helpful when theorizing and investigating the ways national identities are produced as a human creation; however, it has a number of limitations. On one level, as Homi Bhabha¹⁷ has observed, the notion of an imagined community ignores the disenfranchised and those marginalized in a national culture, such as the homeless, refugees, and some immigrant groups with diasporic identities in post-colonial Canada. On another level of identification, such as the case of cross border alliances between athletes that are part of indigenous sport circles, the notion of one imagined nation of Canada is problematic. Canada as a nation-state may have specific geographic borders, laws, and enshrined constitutional rights, but in this case nationhood has multiple meanings. Assuming for 'Canada' a monolithic meaning as an imagined community is problematic for researchers, media, and marketers alike¹⁸ because to distill the diversity of communities and identities in Canada into an assumed monoculture prevents an understanding of the complexity of identity constitution and its attendant implications. Furthermore, ethnographic research in local communities has demonstrated that some individuals and groups

pursue political activism through sport to conspicuously place themselves outside of the imagined nation. An example of this can be found in Catherine Palmer's¹⁹ recent study of Spanish pro-Basque supporters who attempted to sabotage the Tour de France. Palmer concluded that the imagined community is fragile and partial; still, Anderson's contention that national identity is "always a product of the human mind"²⁰ has been upheld in her research. Indeed, as Hall has argued,

nationalism has no independent existence outside of the social relations through which it is constructed. This also implies that the 'being' of which nationalism is said to be an expression – national identity – is a socially constructed phenomenon. Yet the effect of the social construction – the nationalist discourse – is conceived of as an impersonal object, containing the distinct historical subjects of national citizens. But the reproduction must still be made in practical social relations. This means that the mediation between discourse and practice – processes of social organisation – crucially involves a power over the construction and definition of these relations, and that nationalism as a socially employed discursive practice, which is conceived of as impersonal by subject-forming knowledge-power. Hence nationalism may be an 'official' or even 'banal' discourse of power at the same time as this discourse is always produced and reproduced relationally.²¹

We, therefore, contend that Anderson's notion of the imagined community has value for critical sport and media studies because it has opened a space to examine privileged identities, such as official visions of 'national' teams and corporate identities, as contested human practice and social constructions.

A major focus of this identity project is to study the struggle over and production of multiple layers of discourses about corporatized nationalism. Discourse, according to a critical cultural studies approach, is considered to be both a social process of making and reproducing meaning, *and* the product of making sense.²² In other words, discourse refers to both the *ideological power relation* involved in the act of communication and the product(s) of this relation. Thus, for example, the power relationship was evident in the employment of 'team cohesiveness' by coaches to pressure athletes to cheer for each other, to be loyal and committed to performance goals, and to mentor junior athletes in media savviness as they promoted Swimming/Natation Canada's and sponsors' values. The product included constructed narratives of 'excellence derived from clean performance' conveyed in media coverage and public relations. SNC, as an incorporated sport governing body, has been in competition with other amateur and professional sports for sponsorship funds. 'Clean' and 'healthy' were the sharpest promotional 'hooks' to attract sponsors and fans. SNC attempted to leverage the value of its 'brand' by promoting 'clean' excellence. With marquee events, such as the men's 100 metre sprint in athletics, hovering in the stale and tainted aura of Ben Johnson's positive doping tests since the 1988 Seoul Olympics, SNC believed it could capitalize on the long history of 'clean' drug tests on swimmers. Moreover, the timing to re-position swimming in Canada's high performance sports system was advantageous during the 2000 Summer Olympics, hosted by Sydney. Swimming has long been considered to be the national sport of Australia. To

activate 'partnerships' with sponsors, clients, and potential consumers in Canada, SNC engaged national team athletes in media skills training, press conferences, and public relations events that we examine in later sections.

The pursuit of private sector partnerships and sponsorships, as Donald Macintosh and Dave Whitson noted a decade ago,²³ has been part of a wider corporatization of high performance sport in Canada. Beginning in the 1980s, they argued, the organizational context of national sport organisations (NSOs) shifted to one that systematically had to attend to financial management and control due to pressure from Sport Canada at the federal level.²⁴ Since the 1990s, NSOs have been pressed to raise increasingly larger portions of their budgets from fundraising and corporate sponsorships, at the same time that more formal business and administrative credentials have been demanded for staff positions in NSOs.²⁵ With a three million dollar annual budget, about 40% of funding for SNC is now derived from government sources and 60% from sponsorship, fund-raising, and membership fees. As a non-profit organization, SNC came under tremendous pressure to create an image that would attract private sector monies to prepare for the 2000 Olympics. As a national sport organization, SNC received over a million dollars a year for organizational support from Sport Canada to fulfill "sport objectives shared with the federal government" related to national team programming, development of elite coaches and officials, and salaries for staff and coaches.²⁶ Within this context, the Canadian Amateur Swimming Association (created in 1909) changed its name to Swimming/Natation Canada in 1987 to present the official bilingualism of Canada's national swim team and system. The mission of SNC over the past few years has been to "promote excellence in swimming" across the nation.²⁷ SNC has boasted that for international competition, including Olympic, Commonwealth, and Pan American Games competition, Canadian athletes have won more medals in swimming than in any other sport.²⁸

The pressures to 'brand' sport with a particular set of values to enhance this NSO's position in both sporting culture and wider business sectors have emerged from the pressures to professionalize and corporatize the operations of amateur sport. The alignment of SNC's high performance goals and excellence assumed in the quality of sponsor's commodities, such as Speedo swimming attire, figured centrally in SNC's branding exercises.²⁹ In the current economic climate, sponsorship has offered sport the obvious benefits of funding support and publicity to sporting organizations and the people within them. However, as Victor Head,³⁰ Chris Gratton, and Peter Taylor³¹ have commented, there are a number of drawbacks that accompany the return on investment sponsors expect: (1) sporting organizations may have to relinquish a level of control over their image and promotional activities; (2) athletes are compromised by busy promotional schedules; (3) conflicts may arise between NSOs, that benefit financially, and individual athletes who may not directly benefit from sponsorship funds and/or are denied the opportunity to negotiate their own sponsorship deals due to exclusivity contracts; and finally (4) conflicts in objectives can harm the integrity of sport (e.g. by demanding rule changes, forcing athletes to compete wearing untested equipment, or promoting unrelated values). All of these limitations were evident in the relationships between SNC, sponsors, media, and athletes.

Methodological Framework

This swimming team case study was part of a larger ethnographic media project examining the political and cultural economies of producing national, regional, gendered, and other identities contested during the production of the Olympic Games as a mediated event. The qualitative methodological platform was informed by critical cultural studies, which was sensitive to the unequal but productive relationships of power constituting (and constitutive of) identity politics between people and the representations of identity found in sport media and marketing communications. This platform employed a crystallization³² of three techniques to study identity politics and relationships of power. Qualitative studies have often used triangulation to cross check findings using either a variety of data sources, multiple theories, and/or researchers examining the same phenomena, and/or multiple methods of gathering and analyzing data. However, cross checking has often been employed because of quasi-positivist assumptions that findings should be generalizable and have ahistorical reliability. However, in critical cultural studies, sport and media productions of sport are assumed to be socio-historical phenomena that are produced and reproduced within unequal relationships of power. Thus, data may be *provisionally* generalizable from studies of dominant sports to other hegemonic situations within the same historical juncture, but data is neither assumed to uphold positivist assumptions of replicability to demonstrate law-like validity, nor a constancy and reliability of data in terms of application to other social contexts. This research supports Laurel Richardson's notion of crystallization.³³ Crystallization assumes multiple angles of approach in research design, including the incorporation of inter-disciplinary frameworks of understanding, that can gather and represent data in a non-amorphous way. Three data gathering methods utilized in this study to reflect light on this topic from various angles included:

(1) *video-taped ethnographic observation* of (i) the 2000 *Speedo Spring National Swimming Championships* held March 8-11, 2000 in Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada, (ii) the 2000 *Maritime Life Olympic Swim Trials* held May 28 to June 4, 2000 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, (iii) the 2000 *Sears, I Can Swim, Summer National Championships* held July 30-August 6, 2000 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. and (iv) national team meetings and media skills training held in August 7-9, 2000 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada;

(2) *interviews* conducted at the Olympic Trials and national championships with athletes, coaches, and sporting personnel, as well as interviews with other key Olympic 'partners' such as print media journalists, television executives and commentators, sponsors, media attaches, and Canadian Olympic Association (COA) representatives in Toronto; and

(3) *broadcast textual analysis* of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) Olympic Swimming Trials, which aired on 10 and 17 June 2000.

Media Skills Training and Corporatized Esprit De Corps

Just as you train hard in the pool, you must train your media and public rela-

tions skills.

Tom Mayenknecht, The Media Institute.³⁴

As professional and high performance sport have become mega event industries, part of athletic training has begun to include sessions in media and public relations skills. The majority of Canadian teams that competed in the Sydney Olympics received media skills and public relations training that linked institutional missions to ‘individual branding’ of athletes by the Media Institute (a partnership of print journalist Tom Mayenknecht and former CBC radio sports announcer Fred Walker). Many high performance sporting associations in Canada have enshrined corporate mission statements in their business and strategic plans to help the participation base of their sport grow in terms of athletes competing and attracting corporate sponsors to fund high performance programs. As a result, all athletes and SNC personnel in the public eye have been expected to develop and polish media relations to present a cohesive national team identity as part of business and strategic planning. Athletes on the national team were expected to strive for excellence in an honourable manner and to be exemplar spokesmodels for title sponsors. Swimming/Natation Canada’s mission to promote excellence in swimming while maintaining a clean (drug-free) image meshed well with the ‘pillar’ of *Maritime Life’s* business philosophy: “to maintain superior financial strength . . . with a balanced approach between the goal of excellent return and the need to avoid unwarranted risk.”³⁵



Yet, to become newsworthy personalities, team members needed a ‘hook.’ Individual athletes, such as ‘free spirit’ Morgan Knabe attempted to re-articulate the ‘bad boy’ image of the late Victor Davis after receiving advice from CBC swimming com-

mentator Steve Armitage that, “amateur athletes need to separate himself or herself from the pack.”³⁶ Despite the possibilities of a variety of images emerging, the quest to uniquely package themselves was often reconciled with dominant commercialized national images of ‘the team’ promoted by SNC. Knabe, for example, often stuck out his pierced tongue at the end of interviews, yet never went as far as his hero by throwing tantrums on the pool deck in front of dignitaries and corporate guests. The main objectives of media skills and public relations training for the swim team were, “to create optimal conditions for shared learning while placing media relations within the context of the ‘job’ of being a high performance Canadian swimmer and member of Swimming/Natation Canada’s Olympic team.”³⁷ A corporate climate was created by SNC’s overall promotional efforts and media skills training to help athletes establish individual mission statements and to become their own ‘personal brand’ *within SNC* and national team culture.



After being schooled in workshops about the value of corporate sponsorships by Maritime Life representatives, and instructed by CBC sportscaster Steve Armitage³⁸ about CBC’s plans for Olympic coverage and how athletes should respond to typical media questions, athletes were advised “to be themselves.” But it was hard for athletes to be themselves when their lives on the team were tightly scheduled around training and competition, when media protocol restricted what they could say and to whom, and when rules about their social lives were made public through the media. Midway through the Montreal Olympic Trials, for example, Coach Dave Johnson told *Montreal Gazette* reporter Dave Stubbs about the abstinence rule. Journalistic license was employed by Stubbs to reinforce the coach’s power. Stubbs, a former communications manager for Swim Canada, concluded his article in a manner that legitimated athlete subjugation to coaching authority to post winning performances: “expect the distinctive leaf to swim nearer to the front in Sydney. Funny things happen when most of the horses buy into the system, and decide to pull the plow in one direction.”³⁹

A few days later, the *Globe and Mail* newspaper picked up on the story and published the headline, “Abstinence again golden rule for Canadian Swimmers.”⁴⁰ Reporter James Christie informed the Canadian public about the head coach’s ‘no sex’ rule for all national swim team athletes. Control of athletes’ lifestyles was subsumed under the coach’s slogan, “buying into the system” and was legitimated by the media. Again, it was hard for athletes to “be themselves” when official protocol limited athlete-media interviews to talk only about their personal background and performance, and when all national team athletes could wear only the official team uniform and live a controlled life at the Trials. SNC’s unfulfilled mission to promote excellence in swimming espoused the values of athlete-centeredness, integrity, accountability, fairness, equity, and equality.⁴¹



‘Being oneself’ with the media was at odds with the pressure to create team cohesion. The latter was the dominant rhetoric espoused in and around the national swimming team at the Olympic Trials in the spring of 2000. At the level of sport psychology, it was employed by Coach Johnson to provide a ‘holistic’ training environment for a number of reasons. First, team cohesion was employed as an organizational discourse that officially served to re-instill a sense of belonging and loyalty while athletes lived away from home. Second, it re-oriented athletes as cheerleaders for their teammates rather than foes, which they had been at regional club levels.⁴² Third, it helped athletes focus in the midst of a ‘media circus’ according to the head coach.⁴³ As swimmers met Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA) qualifying times for Olympic eligibility standards during the Trials, a team development process formally attempted to reconstruct their identities. Swimmers, with various ethno-cultural, class, gendered, and localized identities (e.g. they were from Salmon Arm, Fort McMurray, Moose Jaw, Oka, Saskatoon and more than 25 other hometowns) were soon urged to take on a particular image and value set of the commodified elite swimming world to frame the human interest stories they might have to share with the media during interviews and corporate clients during public relations receptions.

Team cohesiveness had the deeper corporatized connotation. Johnson adamantly underscored that his notion of 'team' included athletes, the staff coaches, medical staff, scientific support, SNC communications experts, media, *and* supporting sponsors. Athletes were managed by many levels of SNC professionals and were expected to cater to many SNC partners. At the Olympic Trials, corporate sponsors were prioritized. At the pre-Trials press conference, for example, Coach Johnson first thanked sponsors for their financial and technical support (such as the Speedo suits that national team members had been using to train). He then acknowledged the sponsors' contributions to the national team's *esprit de corps*.⁴⁴ Maritime Life, for example, had many corporate hospitality receptions arranged for their independent agents and clients over the course of the Trials, which were supposed to be one of the few "fun and social" events for athletes in heavy training.⁴⁵ Swimmers were expected to attend receptions, glad-hand, sign autographs, and convey a cohesive image of youthful achievers "to put them on the podium they truly deserve to be on."⁴⁶ Athletes unanimously desired greater corporate funding for the team and themselves, but the main podium they wanted to climb upon was "the medal podium not the reception head table."⁴⁷

A united front was demanded by media protocol around all issues except athletes' personal backgrounds or individual performances. A full cast of characters – loyal team players and free spirits, masculine and feminine youth, eastern and western Canadians, small town and big town heroes, Anglophone and Francophone Canadians, rookies and retiring athletes – provided the media with a variety of human interest stories and multiple affiliations with which potential audiences/consumers could identify. In Western Canada, for example, swimming supporters were assumed by the SNC communications team and the CBC to celebrate "the bashful and studious Curtis Myden (from Calgary) who wanted to become a research scientist,"⁴⁸ while Eastern Canada celebrated its athletic heroes by naming streets after athletes, like Marianne Limpert, as Fredericton did.⁴⁹ This supported the corporatized mandate guiding SNC, media and sponsors' work to reach a wider swimming participation base, audience, and/or range of consumers. Athletes were encouraged to be proud of their old home teams and retain multiple ties to their many communities, but had to do so in national team uniform endorsing SNC values.

The local/national dialectic was evident during the national championships and Olympic Trials as athletes and coaches strived to achieve national standing. For example, Coach Johnson tried to break down former club and zone affiliations' by demanding that pre-qualified Olympic national team members stay in uniform at the Trials to foster team cohesion; yet he encouraged them to be proud of their home clubs and communities in order to be ambassadors for SNC's elite program.⁵⁰ During a post-race interview at the Trials, for example, swimmer Joanne Malar waved at the camera and said, "Hi everybody at home in Hamilton and Calgary." Malar was born and raised in Hamilton whereas Calgary was her temporary home while she trained at the National Training Centre. In addition to national team photos, all the athletes from a particular region or province were photographed together in national team uniform at the Trials so that local, provincial, and national levels of swimming organizations could tailor their regional promotions yet still retain the anchor of SNC's official parade nationalism. Nationalist discourses were prioritized through the dialectical conflation of identities, as athletes' bodies were simultaneously marked by maple leaf

discourses and multinational corporate logos before other, more local, identifications were made available.



Media Protocol, Public Relations, and Producing the Image of ‘Clean’ Athletes

You can always tell an athlete who has been media-trained: they thank their sponsors first and have a hard time being themselves.

Robin Brown, CBC Radio⁵¹

Lead-up events to the Sydney Olympic Games, such as national championships and Olympic Trials, served various purposes for different stakeholders during Olympic preparations. They were opportunities for aspiring Olympians to qualify for Team Canada, for SNC and the CBC to bolster audience support, for sponsors to leverage the value of their brand in the Canadian marketplace, and a cultural opportunity for all to claim excellence by reclaiming past Canadian glory in the pool.

To professionalize the corporate communications portfolio and realize some of these opportunities. SNC’s staff expanded in recent years to include media relations and sponsor services personnel to protect the image of SNC and the sport of swimming in terms of event signage and other protocol. Penny Joyce, the Director of Corporate Communications and Media Relations for SNC, promoted the image of swimming as being, “clean cut, family-oriented, universal and honest.”⁵² The image of a clean water-based sport was meant to refer both to the literal level of being well-washed, to connotative levels of the innocence of school kids (most national team members were middle class Euro-Canadians attending University or high school), and

to a long history of national swim team members consistently testing negative for the presence of drugs.⁵³ An official image of Swimming/Natation Canada being 'squeaky clean' was frequently pronounced in comparisons to the Chinese team and swimmers from other nations. The results of past drug tests and a sanitized image of 'innocent and victimized' Canadians were utilized to mediate the knowledge and expectations conveyed to national team members by SNC personnel. The image of a drug-free team was also heralded by the media personnel at the Trials, who for example, lamented the loss of a gold medal for Marianne Limpert and a bronze medal for Joanne Malar at the 1996 Atlanta Games to Michelle Smith of Ireland. Smith was later charged with contaminating a urine sample with whiskey, presumably to avoid a positive test for a banned substance. Past potential victories could not be fully claimed without official IOC interventions into the record books, but a history of clean performances was still marketed.

SNC's official promotional plan was extensive. It included regular reporting of results, submitting photographs and stories to the Canadian Press through Canadian Sport News, team media training by CBC and print reporters, one-on-one rookie media training at camps before major competitions with Penny Joyce, creating media-specific guides, preparing in-depth profiles on athletes and team officials, hosting pre-competition press conferences, and building a website with live broadcasts.⁵⁴ Coaches, sporting organizations, and the Canadian media have recently collaborated to school national athletes in media and public relations skills. With a few exceptions, the media has usually ignored amateur athletes outside of major international competitions. Thus, the reciprocal familiarity does not obtain at the same level as it does in the media's relationship to professional athletes.

Still, Swimming/Natation Canada is now considered to be one of the most media-savvy amateur sport organizations in the nation.⁵⁵ Formal media skills training for athletes and strategies for the active cultivation of relationships with reporters are well established. A bilingual staff of media, public relations, and communications people has consciously tried to be as professional as possible in terms of the standards of the media and their sponsors in the corporate sector.⁵⁶ This has led to the integration of image construction, sponsor servicing, athlete media training, and the use of a sport psychologist to enhance team cohesiveness and public relations. In turn, media and public relations training has hegemonically reconciled SNC officials, coaches, and athletes to a corporate agenda. The rhetoric of team cohesiveness on site fostered a vision of unified national teamship set firmly in the goals and values of Speedo, Maritime Life, and Sears.

As swimming has grown into a marquee Olympic sport, the CBC and a number of print reporters from major Canadian dailies have begun to cultivate longer term relationships with amateur swimming athletes. Journalists regularly covering swimming include: Suzanne Blake of *CBC Radio*, Steve Buffery of the *Toronto Sun*, James Christie of the *Globe and Mail*. Randy Starkman of the *Toronto Star*, Dave Stubbs of the *Montreal Gazette*, and Wendy Long of the *Vancouver Sun*, among others. According to the media personnel who attended the 2000 Olympic Trials for the Canadian team, the reasons for fostering these relationships have included:

- (1) a genuine commitment on the part of some individual media personnel and the CBC to tell Canadian stories about amateur sport in Canadian culture;

- (2) the CBC has been mandated by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to tell a diversity of Canadian stories about amateur sport in Canadian culture;
- (3) swimming has long been a high profile and sexy' sport for attracting audiences and sponsors to media corporations;
- (4) the Canadian media predicted attention would be on swimming at the 2000 Games because Australians consider swimming to be the national sport and numerous world records were expected at the Sydney Olympics (due to the 'fast pool' and to Speedo's 'Fast Skin' suit): and,
- (5) Canada was expected to win medals in the pool, which CBC had anticipated was required to keep audiences riveted to the television to produce high ratings.

However, cultivating long-term relationships with French language media across Canada and in Quebec was a difficult task for SNC, despite having a bilingual head coach and staff. Francophone media has not, according to Penny Joyce, regularly covered swimming unless there was a significant contingent of Francophone athletes on the team. Few Francophone media members attended the swimming Trials, despite the location of the Trials in Montreal, Quebec. Although two of the thirty-six athletes eventually named to the Olympic team during the Trials were Francophone -- Karine Chevrier and Karine Legault -- the Francophone media left the swimming trials to camp outside the Maurice Richard Arena adjacent to the Olympic swimming pool. During the Olympic Trials, the legendary French-Canadian hockey player Maurice "The Rocket" Richard died and was given a state funeral in Montreal. Rather than watching swimmers, Francophone reporters were more interested in the conversion of The Rocket's statue into a shrine by mourners. Despite claiming to be "just a hockey player," Richard had signified the emergence of Quebec separatist nationalism following the 1955 hockey riot in Montreal.⁵⁷ Local CBC reporters covering the trials on 28 May 2000 used the Swim Canada Media Room to coordinate efforts to recruit a full camera crew over the phone to film children laying flowers at the feet of the statue. By lunch, a battle between mourners over which flag would drape the bronze body was settled and recorded by media: Quebec's flag was attached by duct tape and flew prominently from his shoulder, a Canadian flag was tucked into the crook of his arm, and a red home knit Montreal Canadiens scarf was draped around the statue's neck. Each hour of pilgrimage to the shrine by fans provided the former swimming media from Francophone outlets with a new layer of identity to decipher. The Anglophone reporters from Toronto remained with the swimming events. Political news journalists from their respective media organizations, not sports reporters, were assigned to The Rocket story for English-speaking audiences.

Around the pool, Swimming/Natation Canada implemented a strict media interview protocol. Head coach Dave Johnson in *A Media Guide for Coaches and their Athletes* outlined the justifications for such a protocol.⁵⁸ Johnson claimed many reporters had often been confused about who was the most appropriate person on the national team to answer various types of questions. He claimed that interviewing the wrong person had resulted in the public being misinformed, that the privacy of swimmers was violated in the locker rooms, and that some staff coaches made biased

remarks about their club athletes on the national team. To “unclutter” the process, yet to still be courteous and respectful of media work, the protocol was instituted and strictly enforced.⁵⁹

Athletes were expected to strictly adhere to the protocol, while Penny Joyce and her SNC communications assistants endeavored to respond swiftly to all media requests. Expediency of response was the major rule during the liaison’s labour process.⁶⁰ The six steps of the SNC media interview protocol were:

1. The media request is directed to the team media attache;
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; and,
6. The media attache responds to the reporter and sets up the interview.⁶¹

Many of the journalists who regularly covered swimming respected the protocol to maintain courteous relations with Swimming Canada until the Olympics. However, at the Olympic Games, some journalists planned to do whatever they needed to do to get the story, including yelling down to athletes from the stands before they were interviewed by Australian or American rights holders who were contractually in line before Canadian media,⁶² and phoning athletes directly on personal cellular phones to scoop competing media.⁶³

The power to control media interactions rested in the hands of the head coach and the communications director. Joyce could supply or deny media accreditation to SNC events. Johnson enjoyed full control over when and where athletes could speak to the media, as well as the subject matter. As well, Joyce and Johnson insulated some athletes from the media: “If an athlete asks, or if we feel an athlete is unfocused, we put them in the ‘bubble’ away from media.”⁶⁴ Basically, the protocol was a mechanism for controlling athletes, branding SNC, and limiting access to athletes by the media. The protocol limited expression rights by stipulating who could speak on various topics to the media. For example, only the head coach or the SNC chief executive officer could address controversial issues, such as drugs or the naming of an unqualified coach to Olympic coach level. Also, the team’s overall performance could be commented on by the head coach alone, not by swimmers or their staff coaches on the team.

Protocol limitations were still subverted to an athlete’s advantage if she or he did not want to speak to a member of the media because he or she was nervous, tired, or ill (as will be demonstrated in the next section), or wanted to avoid particular journalists. Athletes such as Joanne Malar, for example, have used protocol to stall the media. When Malar wanted to support a teammate still swimming at the Olympic Trials, or when she wanted to avoid emotional questions about the death of teammate

Tara Sloan in Calgary just before the start of the Spring National Championships, she was unavailable for interview and protected by the SNC communications staff.

Ultimately, the protocol served to produce and maintain a protected image that SNC branded onto the national team in a manner intended to attract and retain sponsors. Johnson claimed:

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 endeavors.⁶⁵

Public conflicts between the sponsors, agents of individual athletes, and the team sponsors have been avoided by instilling athletes with a sense that it is a “privilege” to be on a national team and to be sponsored by multi/national corporations. During the Winnipeg media training session, for example, a male swimmer asked the media trainers:

What do I do if the media asks me if the new Speedo *FastSkin* is helping my performance and I think it’s a sham? I don’t want to hurt the funding of other athletes by cutting up the sponsor, but I’m not going to risk wearing a full suit.⁶⁶

The trainer replied:

Protocol. You are only allowed to talk about individual performance, not give opinion about a new technology . . . Can’t you wait six weeks until the Games are over? See how you do in Sydney and then decide if you have something to say about your performance in the suit.⁶⁷

A few swimmers rolled their eyeballs as they glanced around the room. A veteran later confided that “if we don’t do well at the 2000 Olympics, the media will not be interested in asking questions about our suits after the event.” After the Olympics, athletes will be assumed to be responsible for their own “failure.”⁶⁸ Athletes were divided about whether the new technology would shave a few hundredths of a second off their swimming times or whether the shoulder straps and restrictive limb coverings might hamper their mobility. By the end of three days of spin-doctoring sessions, all athletes adopted the standard response to swimsuit questions that had emerged during on-air practice sessions with the media trainers in Winnipeg: “*it’s a matter of personal preference. I prefer to wear (full, tank top, jammer or /traditional) style of Speedo Fastskin because ___.*” Athletes consented to self-censorship due to the pressures from SNC officials, the media trainers, protocol rules, a fear of letting down the team, as noted above, and to the unstated fear of being cut from the team and destroying the dream of competing at the Olympics.⁶⁹

Veteran athletes with personal agents and sponsors also relinquished overall sponsorship rights to the corporate sponsors of SNC. The phenomenon of swimmers hiring agents to promote their personalities, sell their likenesses, and commodify their bodies has been recent. Penny Joyce admitted that the most frequent inquiries she

fielded from athletes, parents, and coaches concerned sponsorship issues and the question, “who owns the image of an athlete?”:

When athletes begin to think of themselves as commodities, they ask questions about sponsorship. They are uncertain about sponsorship and logos. When they compete off shore in non-Olympic international events, they are not under the jurisdiction of the COA. The rules change from sport to sport as well, and from national organisation to organisation. We don't own them unless they are on a plane for us - on a trip for Swim Canada.”

Some athletes with individual sponsorship, such as Curtis Myden who has been sponsored by General Mills in 2000 and Met Life in 1996. still attended Maritime Life receptions leading up to the 2000 Olympic Games to sign autographs. Maritime Life sponsorship of SNC and the Olympic Trials conferred a contracted team obligation.⁷¹



Informing athletes and the Canadian media on the American-based globalized corporate values of Speedo and Maritime Life (a Canadian branch of John Hancock Inc.) began long before the Trials.” Previous media training sessions for athletes, according to Jane Davies of Maritime Life,” included her “PR perspective” [public relations] to help athletes better understand the partnership between SNC and her corporation, Maritime Life. Davies claimed the sponsor-SNC partnership worked because both organizations had the same goals: name awareness, relationship building, and an image of financial success. “Believe. Achieve. Success,” the motto splashed across the Maritime Life Olympic Swim Trials posters for sale at the meet and on the programme cover, were values that referred to the financial services business she worked in and to athletes’ successes in the pool. At the Olympic Trials in May of 2000, SNC worked hard to promote swimming as a family-friendly sport to reinforce Maritime Life’s promotion of family-sound financial products, such as

insurance. In the year of the Sydney Summer Olympics, Maritime Life paid SNC \$100,000 and provided t-shirts for swim meet officials in exchange for signage around the Olympic Trials pool, television coverage, reserved seating, and athlete services. Her goal at this event was to have 80% of media coverage report the corporate name “Maritime Life” in conjunction with mention of the Olympic Trials event, to get coverage in every major Canadian daily newspaper, and to increase the total number of media ‘impressions.’⁷⁴ They achieved many broadcast mentions of the corporate name during CBC broadcasts, mainly because they were the title sponsor of the television show as well as the athletic event in Montreal. However, almost all print media refused to put a corporate title before “Olympic Swim Trials.” The company has since broken away from sponsoring SNC. Maritime Life did not achieve its goals in sponsoring swimming, but believed SNC had benefited from globalized skills of the John Hancock corporation, which addressed event planning, strategic planning, public relations, and awareness of the “importance of constantly acknowledging marketing.”⁷⁵

SNC is now attempting to create fundamental shifts in the structure of the national sport organization towards focusing more on member services, supporting athletes and coaches at the elite level, promoting a ‘performance first’ philosophy, and to attend to the needs of the national team within ‘corporate realities.’⁷⁶ The key ‘reality’ that emerged from the Sydney Olympics was that high performance sport could not cull excellence as its primary use-value to sell to corporations when few medals were won by Team Canada. The loss of Maritime Life as a title sponsor following the financial company’s shift in marketing focus away from sport promotions, and the poor showing by the Canadian Olympic team at the Olympics in terms of medal yield, have led to further ‘rebranding’ exercises by SNC to strengthen the financial support and image of the organization.⁷⁷ The continued expectations of medals and concerns for corporate needs are neither likely to shift the official corporatized identity of the national team, nor create an athlete-centered sport training system due to concerns of catering to corporate sponsors as the following section reveals.

Dying to Make the Team – Scooping the Guts and Perseverance Story

Perseverance was, and continues to be, a personality trait respected by athletes, coaches, media, and sponsors. Athletes at the Olympic Trials primarily wanted to qualify for the Sydney Olympic Team. Media members wanted to tell the stories of the process of achieving or failing this quest. To pursue the ‘Olympic Dream’ at the Trials, despite earlier failures or significant personal sacrifices was, therefore, an “important and compelling story” to the media.⁷⁸ To pursue ‘The Dream’ while suffering from life-threatening conditions became the coveted story for media during the Olympic Trials.

Owen von Richter’s pursuit of a spot on the national swim team for the Sydney Olympics was a ‘guts and perseverance’ story that exemplified how media narratives transposed identities. The media focus of the May 29th evening finals at the Olympic Trials demonstrated the naturalization of unhealthy performance expectations. revealed how nervous athletes used medical excuses and media protocol to avoid interviews, and exposed the competitive relationships between print journalists and

the CBC to get the story. Before the start of the evening finals, Byron MacDonald (an on-air analyst for CBC) predicted competition that night would be full of “good theatre -- with a very sick athlete and about five of his former girlfriends in the stands to cheer him on.”⁷⁹ A few minutes later in the Media Room, Steve Buffery of the *Toronto Sun*, was asked [by the researcher] if he knew who the sick athlete was. He shrugged his shoulders and flatly said, “in this business you learn that if an athlete says they’re not feeling well, it usually means they just aren’t swimming well.” This night, the CBC’s broadcast team stumbled on a story Buffery had been investigating. A CBC interview after the Men’s 400 Meter Individual Medley race, later broadcast by CBC on the 10th of June 2000, told the following story:

Byron MacDonald (CBC poolside commentator):

He’s just about 10 seconds away from possibly making the Olympic team that he’s waited seven years to make. The standard that he needs to make is 4:22:82 to be going to the Olympic games. He’s under it! He’ll be going to the Olympic Games. *[Close-up on von Richter with Maritime Life logo on clock above shoulder]* A long, long journey for Owen von Richter. A very popular winner in the men’s 400 metre individual medley.

Steve Armitage (CBC poolside commentator):

It was certainly one of those feel-good stories at the Olympic pool. *[CBC logo wipes screen, CBC Sports/Maritime Life Olympic Trials placement chart with race times superimposed on a high angle pool shot]*. The man who beat Myden in ‘93, but watched the Games on CBC Television in ‘96, is finally getting a free ticket to his first Olympics. Guts and perseverance paid off big time for von Richter.

Brenda Russell (CBC post race interviewer on deck):

[Deckside interview: medium close-up on upper bodies of CBC’s Russell and von Richter with a blue Maritime Life towel adorned with Olympic rings draped over his left shoulder]. Well I guess I don’t have to ask how you feel about this Olympic berth. It’s been a long tough road.

Owen von Richter (swimmer):

Ahh, it’s been tough, unreal. This morning I swam really bad. And I was pretty much planning retirement all afternoon. And actually, I was going to scratch this morning, but-ta poppa-pee-poo-see-blahhhh [stutters]. Talked to a few people and calmed down. And I knew I didn’t have my “A” swim in, so tonight I knew I had to work on my strengths. So I took it out nice and easy and it was there on the way home. Unreal! . . . I’ve just had so many problems, you know -- healthwise. Its tough for your parents to see you in the hospital, pretty much almost dying, and then to have them support you, you know, getting back in the water. It’s been tough. *[He looks up at family and friends in audience, puts his head back, thrusts his fists up and roars]* Yahhhhh!

Maritime Life Promotion:

Be Focused. Be Driven. Believe. Maritime Life, Worldwide sponsor. [Sponsor trailer at end of swimming segment leads into subsequent commercial break].

Print journalists were not on deck for the recording of the CBC interview. They eagerly waited their turn to interview von Richter in the Media Room on the 29th of May 2000. They waited for CBC television to finish interviews with the swimmer, his doping tests in the medical area, cool down in the pool, and then for Coach Johnson and medics to possibly grant permission for interviews. The journalists furiously typed their stories, checked their facts, and telephoned editors to update them on possible filing times. The race was over by 9 p.m. At 9:30 p.m., the journalists were getting dangerously close to their editors' deadlines at 10 p.m.

James Hood, a communications assistant for SNC at the Olympic Trials, was constantly badgered about when the swimmer would be available. Hood, normally the General Manager of Swim Alberta, orchestrated the movement of athletes between media on and off camera at the Olympic Trials. He worked on the pool deck during broadcast taping, urged winning athletes out of the pool, put the title sponsor's logo towel on their shoulders, delivered them to deckside interviews with CBC, and then to interviews with SNC's Chris Wilson for the audience present at the Montreal Olympic pool. Hood then led winning athletes to the scrums in the Media Room, and finally, to sponsor receptions at the end of the night. Media and sponsor obligations often prevented athletes from savouring their moments of victory and the achievement of a lifelong dream to make an Olympic team by catering to the competitive pressures between media and sponsors. Hood finally arrived in the Media Room to announce von Richter would be there soon but was "nervous and upset."

Randy Starkman (*Toronto Star*): That's because he heard Steve Buffery is here.
Steve Buffery (*Toronto Sun*): Tell Owen to get his von Butt in here.

After this humorous bantering, Starkman and Buffery continued to debate who had the real 'pipelines' in this sport and to discuss the politics of athlete media training. Buffery noted that he and the other journalists had known each other for about twelve years:

we razz each other all the time. It's kind of a weird relationship -- we're really good friends, but we drive each other nuts at events. Swimming's not too bad, but if you go to a world track and field championship you always keep one eye on the competition because you're paranoid about what they're doing and you're trying to concentrate on your own job... You're trying to find the perfect angle -- quietly. If you've got a great angle, the last thing you want to do is bring the guy in here where everyone hears your questions ... You either ask him as he's walking in, or walking out, or try to snag him to the side, or get him on the phone in his hotel in the afternoon.

James Christie of the *Globe and Mail* worked quietly with his back to the room. Buffery worked with his back to the wall in a corner to protect his angles, while Starkman

floated to different media desks throughout the evening. During the wait for the promised von Richter interview, Buffery analysed the competitive pressures between print media, at the same time his ability to complete the journalistic task at hand was being delayed by CBC interviews on the pool deck, as well as team media protocol and pressures from one of the sponsors to have athletes attend a corporate client reception.

While waiting, Buffery continued to complain about the perceived effects of formal media training of athletes:

Swimmers in particular are, I won't say 'bad' because they're really great interviews, but they're controlled. That drives us nuts. I wish they'd be themselves . . . It's hard, someone will come in here and we'll have, like, ten minutes with them. And there's four or five of us, and radio guys are trying to get sound bites. It's hard to pick up something about their career or even their personal life. It's tough. You'll see what happens -- sometimes an athlete will say something interesting about themselves -- like eight years ago Marianne Limpert told us she was born in a little Inuit village in Northern Quebec because her father was a helicopter pilot and her mother went into labour. So her father landed in this little Inuit village. And all of us zeroed in on that and of course it was in everyone's story the next day.

After this story, Buffery described how he hated clichés and technical answers from swimmers. He also revealed that the number one rule among sports journalists was not to 'piggyback' on another journalist's interview with an athlete outside of press conference and scum situations, but noted that this still occurred in competitive situations at important Olympic, World, and professional events.

Humour was employed to manage the stress of deadlines and SNC's prohibitive protocol. Coach Johnson entered and conducted a telephone interview with the media, as they grew impatient. While on the phone, Starkman chided the coach for his athlete's tardiness when the coach was not listening. Penny Joyce entered the Media Room and was tackled with questions about the athlete's whereabouts. They were told, "he's still in the building;" they were not informed that he was fulfilling a team obligation by attending a Maritime Life reception. The journalists assumed the rights holding broadcaster, CBC, was still interviewing him.

Buffery: Did he drown? Where is he? I want to ask him some questions. I'm not asking him to marry me.

Starkman: Is CBC doing a "Life and Times" piece on him? *[Laughter]*

Joyce: Buff, I want you off my back.

Despite SNC's strict protocol about who, when, and what could be communicated to the media, the hierarchy of official sources was contested terrain. The news media normally imposes its own division of labour on sources: primary sources have official status and authority, and have typically been asked to speak rationally and strategically in ways that concerned the exercise of effective authority, problem solv-

ing, or action-taking. Secondary sources for news have been often called upon to speak emotionally about their experiences. But athletes embodied both aspects of types of sources despite protocol attempting to locate political issues, technique expertise, and team performance analysis solely at the level of the head coach. Athletes were experts at a corporeal level and had the sporting experience level that media wanted to know about. Buffery was the only journalist to have finished his story. He just wanted a quote from the athlete at the centre of the story to get a combination of primary and secondary sources of insight.

To pass time, Buffery pestered Starkman. Starkman was criticized for his failure to know von Richter was a local boy: von Richter's hometown was Mississauga, a city adjacent to Toronto where both journalists worked. New to the swimming beat, Buffery has brought a guarded and punchy style of interaction into the media room from previous experiences garnered covering boxing and track and field. His colleagues called him a 'bulldog' reporter. According to Buffery, at track events, journalists "mentally and physically beat each other up" in tight holding areas reserved for media scrums. Buffery has also covered Winter Olympic sports and has developed tactics to encourage Olympic broadcasting rights holders to relinquish athletes to the print media:

Buffery:

The CBC monopolized short track speed skaters in Nagano. We had deadlines, so the journalists started shouting "we want a quote, we want a quote" to shut down their feed [by interrupting CBC]. Now I really want Owen so I can just have a beer, but I don't want to interview him in here with these guys around.

Matt Charbonneau, a Swim Canada communications assistant entered and responded to a battery of questions regarding von Richter's whereabouts.

Charbonneau: Owen's M.I.A.⁸⁰ now.

Starkman: Isn't it M.I.D.? Missing in Doping?

Charbonneau: No. I wish he was in doping 'cause then I could hunt him.

Buffery: What's that mean though? Is he sick or something?

Charbonneau: No, it means he's far too excited, he's having dinner with his parents and two girls who were crying in the stands.

James Hood finally entered with the 'flash quote' he had obtained from von Richter. He set up his tape recorder on Buffery's desk. Hood proclaimed the athlete to be "fine." "He was just a little too excited for his own good. By the time he finished cool-down, he just wanted to have dinner and maybe a hug."

Buffery: I'll give him a hug if it means getting an interview.

Hood: He almost died with a heart problem at altitude.

Buffery: Don't tell everybody that [Buffery quietly pleaded to Hood, who did not hear due to the cross talk with other reporters].

As journalists gathered around Buffery's desk to listen to the audio clip of the athlete who was avoiding them, Starkman teased Hood. "We're trying to do our job and you didn't do your job," he said. Hood repeated the near death story and elaborated as Buffery looked angry and then defeated. The flash quote dealt with von Richter's poor swim in the morning heats when he was "unshaved and unrested." The athlete said nothing about his health in the flash quote in the recording. The full quote was replayed a few times. Starkman was more interested in gathering further details about the near death experience from Hood, than he was in listening to the tape about race strategies again. No one asked if von Richter was in any danger swimming at the Trials. The perseverance story detailing von Richter's seven-year wait to make the Olympic 'cut' suddenly became a sacrificial story of putting one's heart literally on the line to compete for Canada. 'Guts' was more poetic than technique when telling stories about graduation from a local Toronto club scene to the national Olympic team.

Buffery quietly fumed. The other journalists had scooped the story he had been working on for weeks about von Richter's "near death" story. Unfortunately for Buffery, Hood had overheard the earlier taping of the CBC pool deck interview. CBC would not be broadcasting the story for two weeks. Most of the journalists were pleased to scoop CBC due to timing. Buffery, on the other hand, had been the sole journalist who had uncovered and researched the sacrifice and danger angle before the race. He felt he owned the story. Buffery pointed to his laptop screen, as the other journalists rushed back to their desks to rewrite their articles:

There's my story as it was written, I'm so pissed. Oh well. You do what you gotta do. You win some, you lose some. It's not Hood's fault – with von Richter M.I.A. he had to give us some crumbs.⁸¹

In the end, the relations that athletes were expected to build with print journalists and broadcast media before the Olympics were traded off in favour of corporate public relations. In this case, an athlete was able to use interview protocol to his advantage to avoid media interviews due to nervousness and exhaustion from the competition; yet he was not able to avoid all team obligations and chose to attend the corporate reception rather than be surrounded in a scrum of reporters in the Media Room. Protocol did, indeed, serve as a gate-keeping device for access to athletes and particular storylines at the Trials. Competing for Canada was a dream, a goal, and a sacrifice for which at least one athlete was willing to put his life on the line. Traditionally, the discourse of sacrifice has referred to the long hours of training and narrowed life-choices that delay schooling, work, and relationships for national team athletes. In other words, the sacrifice narrative in media coverage once referred primarily to dedication within sport. However, for athletes like swimmer von Richter, the willingness to die for one's country in an attempt to win a berth on the national team took the risk to a

new level.

Corporate nationalist discourse and nationalist corporate discourse are *particular systems of representations* that are historically constructed and struggled over. Discourse was introduced earlier in terms of *meaning making*, following the notion of O'Sullivan et al.,⁸² but discourse is also about *claims making*. That is, the politicization of discourse is built into the way it functions as a strategic resource in social interaction as an ongoing struggle over interests, benefits, and successes. Everyone in the chain of relations at the Olympic Trials, national championships, and training had strategic interests at stake, and part of the claims-making process was about taking and being given credit for success. The field of corporatized nationalism discourse has become another second-order competition over the distribution of responsibility. Sacrifice as a storyline, the media claimed, has been able to create lines of instant identification with audiences. Nationalism was a narrative that was taken for granted as something that would sell by SNC and the CBC. However, at the same time, the use of nationalism in this context not only reproduced a general sense of nationalism that reminded readers and viewers who they were and how they possibly should have felt about it. It also articulated nationalism to specific practices (such as overcoming barriers and hardships, or facing one's fears).

Thus, following Andrew Wernick's notion of promotionalism,⁸³ the celebration of an official team nationalism as the team was chosen at the Trials promoted another cluster of corporate values -- "*be focused, be driven, believe*" inferring that audiences/consumers need financial products to protect the financial well-being of the family. Corporations, in turn, promoted nationalism backing the notion of: "believe" in the Olympic dream of success and "be driven" to achieve it for the nation. The lack of medals won by the swim team at the 2000 Olympics (except one bronze medal by Curtis Myden), and the Canadian media coverage of the 2000 Olympic Games as the "disappointment games,"⁸⁴ resulted in public calls for greater government funding.⁸⁵ This provided SNC with a renewed impetus for a commitment to winning medals to celebrate excellence in high performance sport and to attract corporate funding. The CEO, Harold Cliff, was fired after the Sydney Olympics, and the Board of Directors negotiated a four-year plan based on a philosophy of "performance first" intent on positioning "our athletes on the podium."⁸⁶ Hall has argued, "history does not 'make' discourses, discourses make history."⁸⁷ Corporatized discourse did indeed make history as it was the dominant discourse that mediated the events and relationships of the Olympic Trials and media training of the national swim team headed to Sydney.

Concluding Comments

This ethnography has examined the politics of corporatized identity that mediated relationships between national team athletes, media, sponsors, media attaches, and other sporting officials. The images of the national team and corporate visions of the nation(s) of Canada were abstract in meaning but experienced in concrete forms such as in the media productions of sport and related promotions for the 2000 Olympics. The examination of contested imagined visions of nationalism during preparations of the National Swim Team for the 2000 Olympics Games revealed multiple layers of 'team cohesion' discourses which were employed by the head coach, media trainers, SNC officials, and sponsors during swim and media training to position the

official identity. This narrative of daily team interaction mediated public and private team interactions but served, ultimately, to prioritize a corporatized mission for SNC. The formal national team identity of 'clean' athletes committed to high performance goals has tended to marginalize the values and identities of athletes during public appearances. Communications about SNC programs, athletes, and their accomplishments in the pool were carefully crafted, branded, and circulated back to the media and Canadian public with values preferred by sponsors.

Moreover, the investigation of the pre-Olympic media training uncovered the lack of athlete-centredness and abuse of basic human rights. Training that reinforced SNC interview protocol denied athletes the constitutional right to freedom of expression when athletes were told not to speak negatively about sponsors' products, told not to discuss team performances, and warned not to discuss political issues affecting SNC and the team, such as the hiring of an under-qualified female coach. Only the head coach and SNC executives were permitted to comment on such matters to the media. With such a small 'window' of peak athletic performance and four years between each set of Summer Olympic Games, athletes were not willing to break protocol for fear of being dropped from the team. Moreover, the hierarchy of official sources created by SNC protocol functioned as filtration devices when problematic events or actions arose. With respect to controversial issues, the institutionalization of the protocol acted as a gate-keeping system to control media access to athletes and to allow SNC to reduce symbolic and financial damage.

Finally, the corporatization of high performance sport through exclusivity agreements for team sponsorship and title sponsorship of events, created tensions between (i) the media and SNC over access to athletes compared to sponsors for their receptions and public relations events; (ii) between exclusive media and non-rights holding media created by interview protocol and exclusivity rights; and (iii) between media over the issue of CBC's conflict of interest in the network's direct involvement in media skills training because Olympic coverage by the network spanned both entertainment and news formats that meant current and retired CBC announcers were informing the very sporting and political news they were reporting on at the Olympic Trials and Games.

Thus, it is clear that corporatized identity discourses were both descriptive and productive of the social reality of relationships and images forged between sponsors, Swimming/Natation Canada, athletes, media, and media skills trainers. We argue that media skills and public relations training needs to be resituated first and foremost within a human rights perspective to achieve an athlete-centered approach to high performance sport and to democratize the relationships between athletes, national sporting organizations, media, and sponsors that are currently imbalanced in the exclusive rights setting.

Endnotes

1. A preliminary version of this article was presented at the *Fifth International Symposium for Olympic Research, Bridging Three Centuries: Intellectual Crossroads and the Modern Olympic Movement* (Sydney, Australia, September 2000) and is published in the proceedings edited by Kevin B. Wamsley et al. (London,

ON: University of Western Ontario/International Centre for Olympic Studies, 2000), pp. 17-28. The authors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for funding this research, and all the athletes, media, and sporting officials who allowed us to enter their training and work spaces to observe the culture of high performance sport.

2. David Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), p. 23.
3. See, for example, Canadian political-economic studies such as: John Barnes, *Sports and the Law in Canada*, 3rd edition (Toronto: Butterworths, 1996); Rob Beamish, "Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of the National Executives of Selected Amateur Sports in Canada", *Working Papers in the Sociology in the Sociological Study of Sports and Leisure 1* (Kingston: Queen's University, 1978); Eric Broom and Richard Baka, *Canadian Governments and Sport* (Ottawa: CAHPER Sociology of Sport Monograph Series, 1978); Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Hart Cantelon, *Leisure, Sport, and Working Class Cultures* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988); Hart Cantelon and Richard Gruneau, *Sport, Culture and the Modern State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982); Peter Donnelly and Jean Harvey, "Class and Gender: Intersections in Sport and Physical Activity", eds., Philip White and Kevin Young, *Sport and Gender in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 40-64; Richard Gruneau, "Commercialism and the Modern Olympic Games," eds., Alan Tomlinson and Garry Whannel, *Five Ring Circus: Money, Power, and Politics at the Olympic Games*, (London: Pluto Press, 1984), pp. 1-15; Richard Gruneau, *Class, Sports, and Social Development* (Champaign: Human Kinetics Press, 1999); Jean Harvey and Roger Proulx. "Sport and the State in Canada," eds., Jean Harvey and Hart Cantelon, *Not Just a Game: Essays in Canadian Sport Sociology* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press), pp. 93-119; Bruce Kidd, *The Political Economy of Sport* (Calgary: Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, 1979); Bruce Kidd with Mary Eberts. *Athletes Rights in Canada* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, 1982); Bruce Kidd and John MacFarlane, *The Death of Hockey* (Toronto: New Press, 1972); Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Donald Macintosh, with Tom Bedeck and C.E.S. Franks, *Sports and Politics in Canada: Federal Government Involvement since 1961* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987); Donald Macintosh and Michael Hawes, *Sport and Canadian Diplomacy* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Donald Macintosh and Dave Whitson, *The Game Planners: Transforming Canada's Sport System*, (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).
4. Recent developments in research examining commodified images and issues of identity have emerged primarily in postmodern studies of sport. See, for example, David Andrews, "Michael Jordan: A Commodity-Sign of [post] Reaganite

- Times”, in *Working Papers in Popular Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1, (1984) pp. 1-50. Cheryl Cole and Amy Hribar, “Celebrity Feminism: Nike Style Post Fordism, Transcendence, and Consumer Power, *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12, no.4, 347-369. Melisse Lafrance, “Colonizing the Feminine: Nike’s Intersections of Post-feminism and Hyperconsumption,” in ed., Genevieve Rail, *Sport and Postmodern Times* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), pp. 117-139.
5. Ethnographic research about the production of commodified sporting images include Richard Gruneau’s research about World Cup Skiing, Margaret MacNeill’s study about Olympic ice hockey, and Michael Silk’s study of the Commonwealth Games: Richard Gruneau, “Making Spectacle: A Case Study in Televised Sport Production”, ed., Lawrence Wenner, *Media, Sports and Society* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989). pp. 134-154; Margaret MacNeill, “Networks: Producing Olympic Ice Hockey for a National Television Audience,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 13, pp. 103-24; Michael Silk, “Together We’re One? The ‘Place’ of the Nation in Media Representations of the 1998 Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 18, pp. 277-301.
 6. Andrew Wernick. *Promotional Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1991).
 7. Maritime Life Website, “Sponsorship: Teamwork, Performance, Achievement,” *Maritime Life* (<Maritimelife.ca/mainWWW/MLAC...entLookup/SiteMainContent-SponsorMain?Op>, November 2001).
 8. Commodification, to adapt the work of Bero Rigauer, is the process and product of producing someone [e.g., an athlete] or some thing [e.g., gold medal Olympic performances and world records] “not to satisfy the producer’s needs but to be exchanged in the marketplace for other values” such as money. See Bero Rigauer, *Sport and Work*, trans.. Allen Guttmann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969/1981), p. 67.
 9. The new Speedo suits were banned at the Olympic Trials because the company could not produce enough for all competitors. The CBC coverage of the Olympic Trials still contained a segment in Part I of the broadcast (10 June 2000), in which commentator Byron MacDonald modeled a suit and explained the new technology of the fabric. Part II, broadcast on June 17, 2000 included the Vice-President of Speedo explaining how the protests against the suits were being leveled by athletes or nations who were sponsored by Speedo’s competitors. Penny Joyce, the Director of Corporate Communications and Media Officer, noted that the French non-sport media were very intrigued by the technological angle on the suit story (interview by Margaret MacNeill, tape recording, Montreal, 27 May 2000).
 10. After the 2000 Olympics, *Swimming World* has become a promotional vehicle to immortalize the “technological advancement” of the new swimsuit. Inside covers of this leading periodical -- subscribed to by athletes, coaches and media -- contained full-page advertizements with an image of American Swimmer Jenny Thompson. The ads announced the number of world records, Olympic records,

and medals garnered by athletes wearing the *Fastskin* suit. After the Sydney Olympics, Speedo's American-owned parent company, Warnico, filed for bankruptcy. Speedo is one of the few profitable arms of Warnico, which has avoided bankruptcy after acquiring loans according to Byron MacDonald, a CBC swimming commentator (interview by Margaret MacNeill, telephone, 4 October 2001). Speedo continues to support SNC and has reassured this sports organization that it continues to be financially secure (Interview with Penny Joyce by Margaret MacNeill, telephone, 5 October 2001).

11. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991 revised edition/1983). p. 4.
12. *Ibid*, p. 6.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Margaret MacNeill, "Canadian Culture and the Politics of Identity," in *iichiko intercultural*, no. 69, p. 119.
15. CBC negotiated a partnership with The Sports Network, a 24-hour a day Canadian sports channel, to cover certain team sports (such as basketball) in their entirety. CBC was still contractually considered the "host" broadcaster for the nation and TSN crews were under the executive producership of CBC's Joel Darling.
16. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms in Cultural Studies," in Tony Bennett, ed. *Culture, Ideology and Social Processes* (London: Bratsford Press, 1989), pp. 19-39.
17. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge. 1994).
18. CBC executives, such as Nancy Lee (Head of CBC Sports) and Joel Darling (Executive Producer of CBC's 2000 Olympic Summer Games) assumed that "all" Canadians would watch the Games for at least 15 minutes each based on accumulative audience ratings from the 1996 Atlanta Games. When asked if they would be cultivating particular segments of the audience, they answered "no" because they simply assumed that CBC's Canadian "stories" from the Sydney Games would speak to all citizens (interview by Margaret MacNeill and Peter Donnelly, tape recording, Toronto, 19 July 2000). Maritime Life marketing spokesperson, Jane Davies, imagined the nation to be families (interview by Margaret MacNeill, tape recording, Montreal, 27 May 2000).
19. Catherine Palmer, "Outside the Imagined Community: Basque Terrorism, Political Activism, and the Tour de France," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 18, pp. 143-161.
20. *Ibid*, p. 159.
21. P. Hall, *The social construction of nationalism* (Lund, Sweden: Lund University

- Press, 1998), p. 253.
22. Tim O'Sullivan, et al., *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 236.
 23. Macintosh and Whitson, pp. 67-68.
 24. Today, Sport Canada is a branch of the federal Department of Canadian Heritage within the Canadian Identity Sector (until the mid 1990s Sport Canada was a junior ministry of the former Ministry of Health and Welfare).
 25. Macintosh and Whitson, p. 68.
 26. Sport Canada, "Sport Canada Funding Programs", Sport Canada (<www.pch.gc.ca/SportcanaddSc_eEscC.html>, 5 October 2001), pp. 1-2.
 27. At present, SNC governs 350 clubs, 50,000 competitive swimmers, and 75,000 other people in programs such as the "Sears, I Can Swim" program.
 28. Swimming Canada, "Association Profile" (<www.swimming.ca/profile.html>, 3 October 2001).
 29. Joyce, interview, 27 May 2000.
 30. Victor Head, *Sponsorship: The Newest Marketing Skill* (Cambridge: Woodhead-Faulkner, 1982).
 31. Chris Gratton and Peter Taylor, *Economics of Sport and Recreation* (London: E & FP Spon), pp. 175-6.
 32. See Laurel Richardson, "Writing a Method of Inquiry", in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994) pp. 516-529.
 33. Ibid.
 34. Tom Mayenknecht, media training presentation, video-taped, Winnipeg, 7 August 2000.
 35. Maritime Life Website, "Financial Strength", *Maritime Life* <[Maritimelife.ca/mainWWW/MLAC...entLookup/SiteMainContent-strength?Op](http://Maritimelife.ca/mainWWW/MLAC...entLookup/SiteMainContent-strength?Op>)>, November 2001).
 36. Steve Arnotage, CBC swim commentator, interview by Margaret MacNeill, tape recording, Montreal, 29 May 2000.
 37. Tom Mayenknecht and Fred Walker, *Media Training Workshop Notes* (Winnipeg: The Media Institute, 7 August 2000), p. 1.
 38. Moreover, the involvement of the CBC sports personnel in media skills training

for the SNC was seen to be a conflict of interest by some print and broadcast news journalists covering the Olympics, such as Randy Starkman of the *Toronto Star* (interview by Margaret MacNeill, in transit to Sydney, 5 September 2000) and Robin Brown of *CBC Radio* (interview by Margaret MacNeill, taping recording, Toronto, 31 August 2000).

39. Dave Stubbs, "Buying into the System," *The Montreal Gazette* (<www.montreal-gazette.com/sports/pages/00602/4206585.htm>, June 2, 2000).
40. James Christie, "Abstinence again Golden Rule for Canadian Swimmers," *Globe and Mail* (June, 5, 2000), p. A5.
41. Swimming/Natation Canada, *1999 Annual Report* (Ottawa: <www.swimming.ca>, 1999), p. 7.
42. During the Olympic Trials, Swimming Canada distributed a press release that announced Joanne Malar (whom earlier rejected a citizenship offer from Australia to swim for their national team) and 1996 Olympic silver medallist Marianne Limpert were no longer bitter enemies. The team psychologist had intervened. Although they competed in the same event, the 200 metre individual medley, the media transposed the reconciliation as a joining of forces for Canada to take on the world at the Olympics.
43. Dave Johnson (head coach), interview by Margaret MacNeill, tape recording, Montreal, 27 May 2000.
44. Dave Johnson, Pre-Olympic Trials press conference, video recording, Montreal, 25 May 2000.
45. Johnson, interview.
46. Davies, interview.
47. Female national team member, interview by Margaret MacNeill, video recording, Montreal, 29 May 2000.
48. Armitage, interview.
49. Davies, interview.
50. Johnson, interview.
51. Brown, interview.
52. Joyce, interview, 27 May 2000.
53. Head coach Johnson claimed that no Canadian on the national team has ever had a positive drug test, although at least one Canadian competing for an American University has tested positive (interview).

54. SNC, pp. 22-24; Joyce, interview, 27 May 2000.
55. Starkman, interview.
56. Joyce interview, 17 May 2000; Johnson interview.
57. See Jean R. Dupereault, "L'Affaire Richard: A Situational Analysis of the Montreal Hockey Riot of 1955." *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, May 1981, Vol. XII, No. 1. pp. 66-83.
58. Dave Johnson and Sheila Robertson, "Why a Media Interview Request Protocol: Swimming Head Coach Dave Johnson Explains." in Sheila Robertson, ed., *A Media Guide For Athletes and Their Coaches* (Ottawa: Canadian Association for the Advanced of Women In Sport and Canadian Coaching Association), pp. 71-72.
59. Ibid.
60. She was hired by the COA to serve as the media liaison for the swimming and beach volleyball events at the Sydney Olympic Games.
61. Dave Johnson and Sheila Robertson, pp. 71-72. The strict media protocol demonstrated that athlete-centredness was not being realized as a primary philosophy mediating the rules, practices, and relationships. The formal strategic priorities of Swim/Natation Canada between 1999 and 2004 included: pursue world championship, Olympic, and Paralympic medals; provide an holistic training environment for athletes and coaches through the network of national swimming centres; develop events and properties to increase exposure and sponsorship; capitalize on technological advantages to effectively communicate to SNC members; and revise and implement the swimming development model (SNC, p. 7).
62. Armitage, interview.
63. Steve Buffery, *Toronto Sun* Reporter, tape recording, interview by Margaret MacNeill, Montreal, 29 May 2000.
64. Joyce, interview, 28 May 2000.
65. Johnson and Robertson, p. 72.
66. Male national team swimmer, media skills workshop, video recording, Winnipeg, 7 August 2000.
67. Tom Mayenknecht, media skills workshop facilitation, video recording, 7 August 2000.
68. Male national team swimmer, interview by Margaret MacNeill, tape recording, 7 August 2000.

69. Ann Peel, former chair of Athletes' Can, telephone communication with Margaret MacNeill, 15 October 1999. This observation by Ann Peel was made after almost a decade of interaction with national team members of Athlete's Can.
70. Penny Joyce, interview by Margaret MacNeill, telephone, 9 May 2000.
71. Davies, interview.
72. Maritime Life was the title sponsor for both the Trials in Montreal and CBC's national television coverage of the event. It is the Canadian subsidiary of the American-based John Hancock company (a TOP sponsor of the Olympics).
73. Jane Davies, the public relations specialist from title sponsor Maritime Life, had two official roles at the Olympic Trials: (1) to support Penny Joyce and the Swim Canada communications and media relations staff to pull together the six months of planning regarding signage for the title sponsor and relations with CBC to "maximize the name awareness component of Maritime Life," and (2) to manage her company's hospitality program. The Olympic Trials was her last 'gig' with sports marketing. She was to be moved to a new portfolio in promoting financial services after the Trials. Maritime Life was not present at the Olympics because its parent company, John Hancock, was the exclusive TOP partner (Davis, interview). After the 2000 Games, Maritime Life did not renew its sponsorship of Swim Canada. Penny Joyce, the corporate communications director for SNC, claimed the parting was amicable and that Maritime Life had moved out of sports sponsorship completely (Joyce, interview, 5 October 2001). This decision may be a response to John Hancock's temporary break from the IOC in 1999 in the wake of the bribery scandal regarding the 2002 Salt Lake City Games and the low number of medals earned by swimmers at the 2000 Olympic Games.
74. Athletes earned \$150 for each broadcast clip that framed them wearing the blue Maritime Life towel on their shoulder during media interviews according to Davies (interview).
75. Maritime Life personnel and signage were not at the 2000 Summer Olympic Games because, as mentioned earlier, John Hancock Insurance, its parent company, focused on its global name in Sydney. At the Montreal Olympic Swimming trials, title sponsorship reigned supreme leading the liaison to proclaim, "This is my Olympics" (Davies, interview).
76. Ken Radford. "Notes from the Acting Executive Director, *Swimming/Natation Canada E-News* (<www.swimming.ca>, July 2001), p. 2.
77. Joyce. interview, 5 October 2001.
78. Armitage, interview.
79. MacDonald, interview, 29 May 2001.
80. M.I.A. is a military acronym for "missing in action."

81. Buffery, interview.
82. Tim O'Sullivan et al, 1994.
83. Andrew Wernick, *Promotional Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1991).
84. Graham Knight, "The Disappointment Games," forthcoming.
85. Graham Knight, panel presentation on "Nationalism and Olympic Sport," *Annual Conference for the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport* (Colorado Springs, 6 November 2000).
86. Rob Colburn (Acting President of Swimming/Natation Canada), "Notes from the Acting President", *Swimming/Natation Canada E-News 1* (<www.swimming.ca>. July 2001), p. 1.
87. Hall, *The social construction of nationalism*, p. 6.