

PERFORMANCE POINT

MEDIA TRAINING: PUTTING YOUR BEST SELF FORWARD

BY MARINA HAWKESWOOD, CSC PACIFIC COMMUNICATIONS

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDIA

Not many people love to give interviews. But any person in the spotlight knows the media acts as a powerful vehicle to spread your message. Whether you are a political figure, celebrity, coach or athlete, your relationship with the media is crucial to the growth of your career.

As a high performance athlete, having the support of your community is extremely important as you compete for the podium. Sponsorships and funding can only happen when you get the word out about your dreams, so you must be well prepared when a reporter comes knocking.



CTV's Perry Solkowski interviews swimmer Brent Hayden right after he won his Olympic bronze medal at the London 2012 Games.

BEHIND THE MIC

Regardless of where you are on the performance pathway, you may have never been interviewed by the media before. Or if you have, perhaps you feel the interview experience could have been better. In order to prepare, you can set some guidelines by asking a reporter ahead of time what kind of questions will be asked. If there is a topic you would rather not discuss, the reporter would appreciate knowing in advance. Here are some general tips for dealing with the media:

- Look at the reporter when answering questions; do not look at the camera.
- Take a breath and always talk a bit slower than you think you need to – many people speed up if they feel nervous.
- It's OK to ask the media to repeat or clarify a question.
- Stay away from one-word answers.
- Reiterating the question during your answer gives the reporter strong sound bites to use.
- Teach your audience about you and your sport while avoiding clichés. Nobody wants to hear 'it is what it is', or 'I gave 100%! Use your time with media to help weave in details (where appropriate) about how and why you did something.
- Try to be yourself. Do not put a wall up if you want to garner public interest.
- In the right circumstances, try to share 'human interest' tidbits you are comfortable with the public knowing - i.e., what your pre-game meal is, what sport posters you had on your bedroom wall growing up, etc. This can endear you to your audience.
- Do your best to respect the media and they will respect you in return.



KEY MESSAGES

Before you go into any interview, you should have an idea of what you'd like to say and how you would like to be perceived. One way to ensure the interview turns out the way you are hoping is to develop key messages. Key messages vary with circumstance, but many athletes will have one or two points they stick with throughout their careers. You will hear a lot of pro athletes come back to the fact that they just love playing the game, which is a really safe key message.

When looking to develop your key messages, stick to three points with the following in mind:

- Tell your story
- Educate the audience about your sport
- Keep the tone of the interview positive



It may sound silly, but it helps to practice your key messages out loud. Have a friend sit with you and do a mock interview or talk to the mirror in your bathroom! As an athlete, you know practice makes perfect.

BEING THROWN INTO THE FIRE

Controversy is part of sport. At some point, you may find yourself in the middle of some kind of issue or conflict, whether it's between you and another athlete, a coach or even with a governing body. A doping allegation is one of the more serious issues you could encounter in sport, and as a professional, you should be prepared to answer questions on the topic. Here are a few examples of tough questions:

- There have been reports that a Canadian athlete recently tested positive for a banned substance. How does this reflect on Canadian athletes?
- You tend to crack under pressure, how will you approach this competition?
- We need more hospitals, plus money for education and health care. Why should we support funding for athletes?
- There has been speculation that a terrorist attack is imminent during the Games here in [insert city name]. Are you afraid?

When you find yourself in one of these difficult situations, using a transitional phrase to re-route the conversation to one of your key messages is really helpful. Here are some examples¹:

- That is not accurate. it is my belief that...
- That's not the real issue. The real issue is...
- An equally important concern is...
- There's another issue to consider...



KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Depending on the news outlet, your audience will vary greatly – especially if you end up competing all over the world. But no matter where you are, your most important audiences are children and their families as well as potential sponsors. As a result, you should always be aware of who you are speaking to and choose your words carefully. More often than not, kids are going to look up to you as a role model. This is why it is helpful to focus one of your key messages on inspiring another generation of athletes. As a child you were most likely motivated to participate in sport because you watched one of your heroes achieve something great. Be sure you do the same for those who come after you by encouraging them to be active.

Sponsors could be your audience at almost any time, as you never know who will take interest in you and want to help out. So be sure to showcase what makes you unique – your personality, special talents or interests. Anything that makes you marketable is worth highlighting during an interview, but be sure to do so with good taste.



2012 Paralympic Gold Medallist Bo Hedges signing autographs for kids at the PacificSport Northern BC campus.

FURTHER PREPARATION

Media Training with Canadian Olympian Crispin Duenas

VIDEO: <http://youtu.be/9JzwVj0OM6o>

CSC Pacific's Media Training booklet 'Unforgettable Athletes'

Available by request through your Athlete Services Coordinator.

REFERENCES

¹ Clark Le Poole, Karen. Canadian Sport Centres' Unforgettable Athletes: A Media Training Workshop. 2003