

## SOCIAL MEDIA FOR THE ELITE ATHLETE

### THE DOs, THE DON'Ts, AND THE OMGs

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Social media has exploded over the past several years and has since introduced new opportunities as well as challenges with respect to how we communicate. The implications, both positive and negative, are amplified when it comes to individuals who are exposed to more publicity. As an elite or up-and-coming athlete, social media is a great way to connect with your fans and share both professional and personal experiences.

The most important thing to remember is you're creating a personal brand that defines you. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow you to communicate your message and personal brand in creative / interactive ways, so don't be afraid to optimize these tools! Get your feet off the ground with social media by considering the following DOs, DON'Ts, and strategies.

#### DOs

##### ***Be honest and speak with an authentic voice***

People like to know who you are outside of your sport, especially younger athletes who are aspiring to one day be like you. The most well known athletes are not only loved for what they do on the field, but also for what they do off the field. Use proper grammar, be honest, share your emotions but have a filter and keep politically incorrect things to yourself. The 'Grandma' rule is an easy way to censor yourself – only post something you would be comfortable with your Grandma seeing!



##### ***Keep potential sponsors and scholarship opportunities in mind***

It is unlikely, but in the event you violate rules, laws, or decide to make a less than appropriate decision, don't share it with the world on Twitter or Facebook. What you post and who you follow is a direct reflection of yourself and sponsors will not only judge you based on what you say, but also on your interactions. There are far too many stories about careers ruined and scholarships lost over stupidity on social media platforms.

##### ***Provide compelling, meaningful content***

1. Use images! People love photos and videos, so there is no better way to showcase what you do in a day than to post pictures. Capturing moments during competition is key, but your audience also loves to see what it's like behind the scenes at practice, mealtime, or when you are hanging out with your team. To increase publicity, share your Vines, Instagram photos, and YouTube videos on Twitter and Facebook.
2. Allow your profiles to be a source of information for people. Get into the habit of posting and tweeting shortly after something happens, such as competition results, new training techniques, or a gear upgrade.
3. Post or tweet about things that interest you such as current sports science, nutrition, or even things unrelated to your sport like music, politics, etc. Your passion will shine through and engage your audience.



##### **Did you know?**

Vine is a mobile service that lets you capture and share short looping videos of 6 seconds or less in creative, hilarious ways.  
<https://vine.co/>



Team Canada doing their own rendition of 'Call Me Maybe' during the London 2012 Olympic Games.  
© Canadian Olympic Committee

4. Show appreciation and gratitude.
5. Spread some love! Check out this video that Team Canada released during the London 2012 Olympic Games. Don't forget to have fun and inspire people through sport!

## DON'Ts

The #1 rule for social media is to always think before you post. You are not only a reflection of yourself, but you're a reflection of your team, your trainers, your coaches, your support team, and your family.

### ***Avoid the obvious: offensive images and inappropriate language***

There are too many stories of athletes who have gotten themselves in a lot of trouble because of preventable, tasteless social media decisions. Before the London 2012 Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee released guidelines for athlete social media usage. The document states: "postings, blogs and tweets should at all times conform to the Olympic spirit and fundamental principles as contained in the Olympic Charter, be dignified and in good taste, and not contain vulgar or obscene words or images."

### ***Don't tweet what's on your mind after a tough loss***

You work day in and day out training hard to become a champion so when you lose a game or a race, it can be emotionally draining and set you off. Put your phone away and avoid tweeting when you're upset. Sleep on it - your followers and likes will still be there in the morning.

### ***Respect your team***

Don't post anything your coaches or teammates say in confidence or in private. What happens in the locker room stays in the locker room.

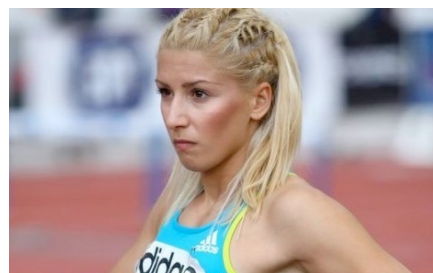
### ***Avoid following vulgar usernames***

Pay attention to Twitter handles and Facebook / Instagram usernames, avoid retweeting or replying to people with vulgar names. Do you really want to be associated with @PhatBooty18?

## OMGs

The power of 140 characters is evident in these examples of poor social media choices. Remember to proofread your post; don't end up in the news for a controversial, career-threatening mistake!

- Voula Papachristou was all set for the Olympic Games but tweeted a racial comment that ruined her chance at competing at London 2012.  
<http://ow.ly/nhQ7i>





- While they were at a training camp in the U.S., Olympic Australian swimmers Nick D'Arcy and Kenrick Monk posted foolish and clearly inappropriate photos of themselves with guns on their Twitter accounts. The Australian Olympic Committee forced them to remove and delete the photo, and then banned their use of social media during the London Games.  
<http://ow.ly/nhQO4>



- Remember when Rashard Mendenhall of the Pittsburgh Steelers voiced his aggressive opinion of 9/11 conspiracies? Bad choice. <http://ow.ly/nhPtQ>



- Marlon Williams of Texas Tech bashed his head coach on Twitter when he showed up late to a team meeting. This is a perfect example of disclosing locker room matters that should stay private.



- Olympic track athlete Lolo Jones drew more negative attention to her Twitter when she made a comment comparing star-witness Rachel Jeantel to Tyler Perry's character Madea.

Social media is a fantastic tool, have fun with it while respecting that you are accountable for your actions. Know that you are a leader in sport, you have the ability to use your voice and have a positive, inspiring impact on people and define your personal brand in a way that reflects your best self.

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