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"Adaptive framework for Olympic storytelling in a shifting sport media environment"

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ABSTRACT

The power of sport and the value of the Olympic Movement is undeniable. But what connects the power of sport and the Olympic Movement to billions of people worldwide are the stories. Stories of determination, triumph, tragedy, inspiration and overcoming incredible challenges to represent one's country on the world's biggest stage, have the power to unite populations and become intrinsic to national identity. Such stories have been shared for over 100 years through the media, predominantly through broadcast (radio, followed by television) and print. However, the past decade has seen a massive shift in the ways in which populations consume media, causing a significant evolution in the media landscape, undoubtedly impacting sport media and Olympic storytelling. As such, the power of sport and the Olympic Movement cannot continue to grow and impact the general public and next generation if its stories are not reaching them.

It is essential that communications professionals working in Olympic sport evolve alongside the evolving sport media landscape, to ensure Olympic storytelling continues. The aim of this research was to learn best practices and innovations from communications staff within the Olympic Movement and to understand what the current sport media needs from National Olympic Committee (NOC) communications staff at the time of this research paper. In this study, semi-structured interviews with Olympic communications staff and members of the media (broadcast, print and new digital media), as well as a survey to capture the athlete perspective, were conducted and analyzed using a relational content analysis and thematic analysis. The objective was to create a framework for NOC communications staff to optimize Olympic storytelling in the current unstable and shifting sport media landscape. However, as the findings were analyzed, it became apparent that creating multiple frameworks for differing levels of institutional resources, capacity and regional/cultural realities was necessary.

Key findings include the impact of lost institutional knowledge among current sport media, the need to balance servicing external media with the growing appetite for in-house content creation, and the need to prioritize media relations by investing in intentional in-person media interactions. Another growing area of concern is the concept of athlete support in helping them navigate the distraction that media can bring while also helping them understand how leverage the media to share their story. This project aims to contribute actionable insights for National Olympic Committees and National Sport Federations to adapt and optimize their day-to-day

communications operations to ensure Olympic storytelling continues in the shifting sport media environment.

RÉSUMÉ

La puissance du sport et la valeur du Mouvement olympique sont indéniables. Cependant, ce qui transmet la puissance du sport et du Mouvement olympique à des milliards de personnes à travers le monde sont les histoires. Des histoires de détermination, de triomphe, de tragédie, d'inspiration et des récits de défis incroyables surmontés pour représenter son pays sur la plus grande scène mondiale, et qui ont le pouvoir de rassembler des populations et de s'inscrire au cœur même de l'identité nationale. De telles histoires ont été partagées depuis plus de 100 ans, surtout par les médias électroniques (la radio d'abord, puis la télévision) et dans la presse écrite. La dernière décennie toutefois a été marquée par d'importants changements dans la façon dont les gens consomment le contenu des médias, causant une transformation significative du paysage médiatique, ce qui a certainement touché à la fois les médias sportifs et les récits olympiques. Ainsi donc, la puissance du sport et le Mouvement olympique ne peuvent pas continuer à croître et à toucher le grand public ni la prochaine génération si les histoires et les récits ne les atteignent pas.

Il est essentiel que les professionnels de la communication qui travaillent dans le sport olympique continuent d'évoluer avec le paysage médiatique sportif qui est aussi en transformation, afin de garantir que les histoires olympiques continuent d'être racontées. L'objectif de cette recherche était d'apprendre les pratiques exemplaires et les innovations du personnel des communications au sein du Mouvement olympique et de comprendre les besoins actuels des médias sportifs auprès des équipes de communications des Comités nationaux olympiques (CNO) au moment de ce travail de recherche. Dans cette étude, les entrevues semi-structurées avec les membres des équipes de communications olympiques et les représentants des médias (presse électronique, presse écrite et nouveaux médias numériques), ainsi qu'un sondage pour saisir le point de vue des athlètes, ont été menés, puis mesurés par une analyse de contenu relationnel et une analyse thématique. L'intention était donc de créer un cadre pour que l'équipe des communications du CNO puisse optimiser les récits olympiques dans un contexte médiatique sportif actuellement instable et engagé dans une transition. Cependant, avec l'analyse des

conclusions, il est devenu clair que la création de multiples cadres pour différents niveaux de ressources institutionnelles, de capacité et de réalités régionales/culturelles était nécessaire.

Les principales conclusions comprennent les répercussions de la perte de connaissance institutionnelle au sein des médias sportifs actuels, le besoin d'équilibrer les services aux médias extérieurs avec l'appétit croissant pour de la création de contenu à l'interne, et le besoin de prioriser les relations de presse en investissant dans des interactions intentionnelles en personne avec les médias. Un autre secteur de préoccupation croissante est le concept de soutien des athlètes en les aidant à naviguer à travers les distractions que la presse peut créer, tout en contribuant aussi à leur compréhension des façons d'utiliser les médias pour partager leur récit. Ce projet a pour but d'offrir des perspectives applicables pour les Comités nationaux olympiques et les organismes nationaux de sport, afin qu'ils adaptent et optimisent leurs activités de communication au quotidien, afin de garantir que les histoires olympiques continuent d'être racontées dans le contexte de médias sportifs en pleine évolution.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Current Context

Sport media in Canada has shifted significantly over the past 10 years and continues to shift throughout each Olympic quadrennial. Traditional, or legacy, sport media (print and broadcast) in Canada is declining. Over the past few years, traditional media outlets in Canada have experienced massive and unprecedented layoffs which have impacted hundreds of sports journalists, as well as significant budget cuts due to the rapidly changing way that the current generation consumes media. The advent of digital and social media has also caused massive shifts in the media landscape, while exploding in popularity and consumption among younger populations. Therefore, what worked in terms of communications operations and media servicing 10 - 20 years ago does not necessarily work now and will not necessarily continue to work in the future.

Media and its storytelling are critical to the Olympic Movement. Olympic storytelling, through a variety of different mediums, introduces athletes and their journeys to the general public, helping to inspire the next generation and create value for marketing partners and athletes in terms of sponsorship. Additionally, the Canadian sport system is in dire need of increased funding. However, the general population cannot relate to this if the current Olympic athletes' stories are not reaching them. It is crucial that Olympic athletes of today's generation continue to be household names and have their stories widely shared, in order to sustain the Canadian sport system and the Olympic Movement in Canada, and to continue to inspire the next generation of Olympic fans and future athletes. The Canadian sport system needs the media to survive, but the media itself is trying to survive and evolve through instability and a digital transformation.

National Olympic Committees' (NOC) communications departments will need to approach their operations differently in order to continue to enable Olympic storytelling outside of the intensive Games period, and to promote athletes, Olympic values and Olympism in the media in between Games, to continue to build the Olympic Movement with the general population.

1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose of this project was to discover best practices and innovations in order to create a

framework to optimize Olympic storytelling in the current unstable and shifting sport media landscape. As work on the project developed, it became apparent that there can be multiple recommendations depending on the level of communications capacity and resources within the organization, as well as the regional culture of the organization. It is understood that the size and capacity of a communications team can drastically vary depending on the organization, so it would be beneficial to develop baseline recommendations for a sport organization without a full-time communications staff, in addition to recommendations for organizations that have a small communications team with limited resources, as well as communications team with significant resources and capacity, such as the Canadian Olympic Committee. As such, three distinct frameworks developed from this research.

1.3 Research Questions

To address this research purpose, the following primary research questions were addressed:

- 1) How can NOC communications departments optimize how they work to better service the media in sharing Olympic stories and to support in-house content creation?
- 2) What are best practices from the IOC, other NOCs and professional sports to ensure their stories are being told?
- 3) What do Canadian media outlets need from the COC to help them more efficiently and effectively do their job while navigating the current sport media environment?

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Before understanding how NOC Communications teams can evolve to better ensure that Olympic storytelling continues in the shifting sport media landscape, an important first step was gaining a strong foundation of how the sport media landscape has changed, what new forms of media and reporting are developing, and the current media relations challenges and opportunities for NOCs.

2.1 Sport/Media Complex

The concept of the sport/media complex, originally discussed by Jhally (1984), was referenced in a great deal of literature. The sport/media complex explores the interconnectedness of sports and the media, and discusses how both industries intricately rely on each other for commercial

benefits. Put simply, *"news media and sports rely heavily on each other for financial survival... to produce audiences to sell to advertisers,"* (Robertson 2024). Nölleke & Perreault (2024) described the interconnectedness as *"mutual dependence, since each had something to contribute that the other desperately needed: Sports relied on media coverage to gain visibility and thus attract sponsors. Journalists, in turn, benefited from access to athletes, teams, and events, which allowed them to provide valuable content that reinforced their strong position as an economic muscle in newsrooms."*

Jhally argues that sports events can also be characterized as media spectacles, and that the media's extensive coverage of sport enables it to grow its cultural significance. This is especially evident in media coverage of Olympic sport. Kidd (2013) acknowledges that *"the Olympic Movement has gained significantly from its long association with the mass media. The media's endless fascination with Olympic events and athletes has enormously aided Coubertin's successors and followers in recruiting more and more people, social strata and communities to their activities. It has ensured 'the widest possible audience' – one goal of the Olympic Charter – for the Games."* Historically, Olympic media coverage was most prominent in print and broadcast (radio and television) media, but with the advent of the digital age, it has been expanding to include many additional forms of digital media.

Tryantafyllou & Antonopoulou (2022) describes the relationship that "Mega Events" (such as the Olympic Games) have with broadcast and how the commercialization of sport benefits broadcast media, in that *"television plays sports as a spectacle for consumption and evaluates it in terms of commercialism, and on the other hand sport claims to become more commercial to attract the interest of the media."* An obvious example of this is the relationship that the Rights-Holding Broadcast network for the United States, NBC, has with the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Triantafyllou & Antonopoulou (2022) describe that *"NBC has paid to the International Olympic Committee for the television rights of the Olympic Games from 1998 to 2032, 12 billion dollars. The main revenue for the host cities of the Olympic Games comes from the television rights, no longer done only in the traditional way, but also online, through web and social streaming."*

Within the sport/media complex, it has been well established throughout the literature that *"sports journalism is 'the toy department of the news media' – that is, in a place dedicated to fun and frivolity, rather than to serious functions"* (Rowe 2007). Weedon, G., Wilson, B., Yoon, L., & Lawson,

S. (2018) build on this, and discuss *"the inherent ethical contradictions that sports journalists are known to face as they attempt to, on one hand, 'objectively' and 'impartially' report sport-related news, and on the other hand, offer an important promotional service for the sports leagues and events that they cover."* This concept is important to understand in relation to this research project, as it has implications on the nuanced circumstances that sport journalists have within the greater media industry.

2.2 Sport Media Landscape Transformation

The quantity, type of content and means of consumption of sport media is vastly different in 2024 than it was in 2014 or 2004, and it will continue to drastically evolve over the upcoming quadrennials. Historically, sport media was restricted to professional journalists and distributed through regulated newspapers and network radio and television. Triantafyllou & Antonopoulou (2022) confirm that now, *"citizens watch less and less TV in the traditional way or watch less and less traditional TV. This happens in almost all age groups, but especially in younger ages."* It is also evident that the general public receives their news much less frequently from subscriptions to daily newspapers.

This is notably evident in Canada, where an enormous amount of print and broadcast media outlets have shut down or made significant budget cuts resulting in substantial job loss for journalists, including hundreds of sports journalists. In December 2023, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Canada's public broadcaster and the Rights-Holding Broadcaster for the Olympic Games in Canada, *"announced it was cutting 600 jobs due to a \$125 million budget shortfall. About 200 vacant positions will be scrapped and programming will be reduced."* (Egwu, 2024). In addition to the significant cuts from CBC, earlier in 2023, Metroland Media Group, one of Canada's largest publishers for local newspapers, filed for bankruptcy protection and executed 650 layoffs. Canadian government data claims that more than 450 news outlets in Canada have shut down since 2008, and more than a third of Canadian journalism jobs have disappeared during that period. (Egwu, 2024). Evidently, a significant amount of experienced Canadian sport journalists are no longer sharing Olympic stories, and those that are, have much less resources and avenues to have it widely distributed.

However, although traditional media in Canada is declining, the advent of digital media has

created many new avenues for Olympic storytelling. Triantafyllou & Antonopoulou (2022), confirm that *"the Internet with its new channels, platforms and tools has created a new and rapidly changing media environment. Those changes have contributed to an ever-increasing pace of innovation."* According to Nölleke & Perreault (2024), *"shifts in audience consumption of sports news and damage from the coronavirus pandemic would seem to have caused environmental damage to which the sports ecosystem is attempting to adapt. What reporting on sports will be cannot be what it was prior to the changes in the environment."* Innovations in digital media in the forms of social media, podcasts, newsletters, athlete-centered publications such as the Players' Tribune, and team-owned media channels have flooded the sports media landscape in the past decade. Such innovations offer creativity and additional voices, although it has disturbed the symbiosis between professional journalists and the sport industry. Due to the nature of digital content creators not being required to follow journalistic standards, as well as the accelerating need for online 'clicks' and commercialization, the accuracy, depth and quality of content can be jeopardized.

Boyle (2017) explained that *"the digital turn of the 1990s has also dramatically reshaped the journalistic landscape, with sports journalism often being at the leading edge of this transition as journalism moved online and many new (often fan-based) sources of information become available around sports culture."* Nölleke & Perreault (2024) also make note that *"sports organizations (as well as individual athletes) are increasingly using their own digital channels which allow them to bypass traditional sports journalism and communicate directly with their fans,"* further disrupting the conventional relationship between the media and sport. This, according to the literature, can undermine the *"historical role of sports journalism since sports organizations can now provide content that resembles journalism and allows them to restrict journalists' access to events"* Nölleke & Perreault (2024).

The advent of social media has certainly impacted how the public consumes news. Having constant access to the latest breaking news instantaneously on one's smartphone lessens the need to subscribe to newspapers, while also accelerating the rate of distribution. For journalists, *"social media has shortened the timescale in which a 'scoop' can retain its exclusive value,"* Boyle & Haynes (2014). This has caused media organizations to struggle *"to find viable business models to sustain their work, in an era in which news content appears ubiquitous and often free at the point of consumption"* (Boyle & Haynes, 2014).

2.3 New Media

Within the literature, there are various examples of new forms of media and new technology that have significant impacts on the changing sport media landscape and how Olympic storytelling occurs. These innovations will continue to develop over the next several years.

Certainly, the largest shift has been with the influx of social media. Athletes and sport organizations are given a freedom of expression to share their narrative through their own voice, when and how they want to (Boyle & Haynes, 2014). For example, Olympian Michel Phelps announced his retirement during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games on Facebook Live prior to it appearing in traditional media. Phelps' video received nearly 4 million views, and later, resulted in a \$200,000 contract with Facebook (Triantafyllou, 2016). Sports journalists will often follow athletes they cover on social media and use the social networks as news feeds to help them gain insight for stories (Boyle & Haynes, 2014). In addition to social media, over the past decade, athletes can also leverage athlete-centered publications such as the Player's Tribune to share their stories outside of traditional media, enabling them control over their narrative, giving them a space to 'self-brand' without external voices that may distort the image that they are seeking to create (Schwartz and Vogan, 2017).

Additionally, sport organizations (including the International Olympic Committee, International Federations, National Olympic Committees and National Sport Organizations) use their own social media channels, as well as other owned channels such as their websites, podcasts and newsletters to share Olympic stories, often disguised as journalism. For the sake of this paper, this will be referred to as in-house media. Schwartz and Vogan (2017) explain the impact, however, is that such in-house media *"unsurprisingly downplay, and sometimes altogether avoid, topics that might negatively represent their parent organizations. Moreover, they typically situate their highly selective content as official."* This shift to in-house media can also pressure athletes to maintain an online social media presence to *"cultivate a marketable identity"* (Schwartz and Vogan, 2017). The concept of in-house media has significant benefits such as allowing organizations to control the narrative, create content that share their messages and to have greater representation of athletes and sports in their storytelling. However, the content is predominantly consumed by those who are already fans of the organization and who already actively follow their channels, as

compared to the wide reach of traditional print and broadcast media, which introduces Olympic storytelling to the general public who may not follow specific athletes or teams.

Technology has also produced new ways of reporting on sport that are continuing to change the sport media landscape. Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming increasingly used in journalism. Triantafyllou and Antonopoulou (2022) describe an early use case of algorithms by the Washington Post during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Their specific algorithm created results and graphic outputs using data (results, times, medals, etc.) from the International Olympic Committee's website, and within less than one minute, the algorithm had created and uploaded its outputs to the Washington Post's website and social channels. This allowed the journalists more time and capacity to focus on research, interviews and overall, more in-depth coverage, which resulted in higher quality content. After the success of the algorithm at Rio 2016, the Washington Post continued to use it at PyeongChang 2018 and Tokyo 2020 (Triantafyllou and Antonopoulou, 2022).

The Washington Post piloted another reporting technology using augmented reality during Tokyo 2020. It created an experimental video series on three sports that made their Olympic debuts in Tokyo (skateboarding, surfing and sport climbing) (Triantafyllou and Antonopoulou, 2022), allowing innovative storytelling opportunities and an entry-point to bring new fans in and become consumers of Olympic content.

Data journalism is also becoming more widespread. At Sochi 2014, the New York Times *"used graphics created with real athlete simulations and created a mosaic of interactive corridors, embedded videos, 3D graphics, interviews and explanatory captions"* (Triantafyllou and Antonopoulou, 2022).

Mobile apps are offering a new avenue for sport media distribution. Triantafyllou and Antonopoulou (2022) explain how apps are *"rapidly becoming fans' go-to method of accessing their favorite sports teams and live fixtures. In addition to the lucrative linear TV deals that have changed the face of sport over the past few decades, forward-thinking sports brands are now equally focused on going direct-to-consumer with their own products – be it the NBA's League Pass, the NFL's Game Pass or Formula 1's F1TV."* The International Olympic Committee has an app where it shares regular content and allows personalization to specify the user's preferred sports and nations,

feeding them personalized content. The Canadian Olympic Committee also has its own app which offers regular results-based and in-depth articles, athlete biographies, historical pages, as well as gaming.

It is evident that a multitude of new opportunities for Olympic storytelling have recently emerged in the shifting sport media landscape. However, *"the introduction of new digital platforms has meant that sports organizations now have multiple ways to communicate, including through channels that they can now control. This has potentially impacted on sports media relations practice, and in turn caused conflict in the symbiotic sport and media relationship"* Sherwood, Nicholson & Marjoribanks (2017).

2.4 Media Relations

With the shifts in sport media and the developing new forms of media technology, the practice of sports media relations is shifting. Nölleke, D., & Perreault, G. (2024) explain that communication should occur in an environment that is codependent on journalism, public relations, advocacy organizations, businesses, government entities, and audiences, which is the basis for the theoretical framework of communications ecology. However, *"in digital media environments and accelerated by the pandemic, power structures have shifted significantly. We are witnessing a sudden imbalance characterized by sports journalists gaining increasingly poor access to sports protagonists and events. Instead, sports organizations circumvent journalism through owned media and thus hold control over what is being reported. This ultimately calls into question the legitimacy and authority of traditional sports journalism thereby disrupting the established sports communication ecology"* (Nölleke & Perreault, 2024).

Nölleke & Perreault (2024) note that sports' media departments have shifted with the changing landscape, and as more content is created by in-house media, communications staff have *"transformed from facilitators to obstructors: Rather than providing access to athletes, coaches and events, [they] increasingly prevent access for sports journalists"*. Sherwood, Nicholson, & Marjoribanks (2017) have indicated through their research that *"sports journalists' reliance on sports public relations practitioners as sources has increased. Interactions between sports journalists and athletes and coaches are restricted to highly managed and controlled group settings, such as media conferences, rather than informal, personal encounters."* Thus, with the changing

landscape and the advent of numerous new avenues to distribute sports stories, journalists increasingly rely on communications staff, yet journalists' access is increasingly being cut, so that *"conflict between media and sports organizations is developing rather than receding,"* Sherwood, Nicholson, & Marjoribanks (2017).

It is important to also note that due to significant budget cuts and lack of resources within sport journalism, journalists are also becoming more reliant on sport organizations' media materials. *"Sports journalism is less and less likely to take the initiative itself, instead increasingly taking topic ideas, sound bites, or even entire stories from team media"* (Nölleke & Perreault, 2024). This highlights the importance of communications staff creating accurate, high-quality resources that journalists can utilize, especially when access to athletes is limited.

2.5 Summary

To summarize the existing literature in the context of the shifting sport media landscape, although the interconnectedness of the media and sport continues to exist, the symbiosis of the past between traditional sport journalism and sport organizations has shifted significantly with the advent of digital media. New forms of media and new ways of reporting have altered how communications professionals do media relations, increasingly restricting access to journalists and favoring in-house media where organizations can more easily shape narratives. This is creating tensions between sport journalists and sport organizations, as journalism continues to struggle financially and for legitimacy.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

As the existing literature related to Olympic storytelling in a shifting sport media landscape does not focus on the current and specifically Canadian context, I chose to administer exploratory research. Due to the nature of the research questions, the intention was to explore three main areas of focus:

1. What are the best practices among other world class sport organizations;
2. What do media need or want and what do they not need or want from NOC communications teams;

3. What is the perspective of Canadian athletes in terms of how NOC communications teams can support them in facilitating sharing their stories to media and through their own channels.

I took a qualitative approach to the research, conducting semi-structured interviews and a survey. This approach ensured that the data collected would be applicable and up-to-date in the current sport media context, in relation to my research purpose.

I have divided the stakeholders into three groups:

1. Communications professionals (including the IOC, NOCs and professional sports)
2. Media (including the Olympic Channel, Canada's Rights-Holding Broadcaster (RHB), as well as national print and digital media)
3. Athletes (both actively competing and retired Olympians).

The best practices and perspectives learned from these stakeholders ensured the data that was collected was current, relevant and applicable to formulating a framework and recommendations.

3.2 Data Collection

- Semi-structured interviews: Individual interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams in a semi-structured format with stakeholders from two distinct groups: communications professionals and media. There were specific themes that were discussed across all interviews to ensure that ideas and recommendations could be compared and validated among both groups, while there were also specific themes that were only relevant to one of the groups, or a specific interviewee. Thus, the interview guides were tailored specifically to the stakeholder group and further personalized to the interviewee based on their organization.
- Survey: It was important to consider the athlete perspective. As such, I administered an athlete survey built on SurveyMonkey, to ensure their perspective was considered.

3.3 Choice of Stakeholders

3.3.1 Communications Professionals

In order to gain an understanding of communications operations and best practices at other

world-class National Olympic Committees with similar cultural contexts to that of the Canadian Olympic Committee, I chose to connect with the communications leads at both the NOC United States of America (USOPC) and NOC Great Britain (Team GB). It is understood that the USOPC typically accredits the largest media contingent for Olympic Games and Olympic Winter Games. British media is also a significant player in international sport media. Additionally, both NOCs have longstanding high-functioning communications teams and day-to-day Olympic storytelling within their countries is part of the mainstream media.

Understanding the importance of learning best practices from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), I chose to speak with the IOC's Director of Media Operations, to learn strategies that they find work well in servicing media, their perspective on the evolving new media and its growing influence on Olympic coverage, and the opportunities they see for National Olympic Committees.

Gaining an understanding of what works best for sports storytelling outside of the Olympic context is an area I felt was valuable and applicable to my research, so I chose to interview the Manager of Media Relations at the Toronto Raptors NBA basketball team, as they, like the COC, have national reach and relevance (being the only NBA team in Canada). The Toronto Raptors' Manager of Media Relations is a former COC's communications team colleague, so his familiarity with the COC's business offered a relevant perspective on the differences between a professional sport organization's media and communications strategy in comparison to that of a National Olympic Committee.

3.3.2 Media

The second distinct group that I conducted semi-structured interviews with was members of the media. Certainly, it is of utmost importance to understand the perspective of Canada's Olympic Rights-Holding Broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). I interviewed a CBC broadcast reporter who is a retired Canadian Olympian, in addition to a CBC journalist who has covered three Olympic and Paralympic Games and will be an on-site journalist and broadcast host at the upcoming Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games. Additionally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a national sports reporter from Canada's leading news agency, Canadian Press, a sports reporter from a syndicated major newspaper, the Hamilton Spectator and who has recently transitioned to new media, and a francophone journalist from a Quebec-

based sports news agency, Sportcom, all who have covered multiple Games and who consistently report on Canadian Olympic athletes in between Games.

It was crucial to my research to also understand the perspective of media members involved in new media. I interviewed a USA-based contributor to Olympics.com and the Olympic Channel podcast to understand an international 'Olympic beat' journalist's unique perspective, as well as a content contributor with "The Gist", a Canadian-founded international sports media outlet that provides equal coverage to women's and men's sports, which produces a newsletter, podcast, social channels and a website. The Gist would be considered new media.

3.3.3 Athletes

Lastly, to ensure the athlete perspective was taken into consideration in my research, I administered a survey with mainly qualitative questions to the COC's Athletes' Commission and NSO athlete representatives. This group ensured a diverse representation of winter and summer sport athletes as well as actively competing and recently retired.

3.4 Data Analysis

I conducted a relational content analysis and a thematic analysis to interpret and analyze the data collected through the semi-structured interviews and the athlete survey.

- Through the relational content analysis, I identified the meanings of links and commonalities between concepts, such as which tools and processes benefit the media in enabling Olympic storytelling and benefit athletes in feeling supported and prepared to share their stories.
- By undertaking a thematic analysis, I analyzed the patterns and themes that continually were discussed throughout the interviews and survey responses. By reviewing the data sets in a thematically structured spreadsheet, I was able to review each question and theme, compare responses across the different stakeholders, and understand the themes and recommendations from a broad perspective.

I continually reviewed the responses and themes by cross-referencing them against the original transcripts to validate the information that was then built out into the frameworks and recommendations that will be discussed throughout the paper.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Effects of the shifting sport media landscape

It is clear that the shifting sport media landscape has significantly impacted many facets of Olympic storytelling. The loss of numerous legacy media outlets has resulted in a loss of coverage opportunities, but above all, a loss of institutional knowledge of the specificities of Olympic sport and its athletes.

The loss of coverage opportunities in legacy media is evident in Canada, but also, according to USOPC Executive, evident in the U.S, and is most noticeable in that regional and local newspapers no longer have journalists committed to Olympic coverage. *"To see those kinds of outlets drop their coverage is hard for us because in some ways it was the best coverage because it was very specific. And it was storytelling that was very connected to the community. We love broad national coverage, it raises everybody's profile, but you might not read a story about this great up-and-coming athlete and have his or her parents quoted and the insight into their pathway to how they got to where they are, which then inspires other athletes,"* noted USOPC Executive.

However, it is clear that the advent of new media has created different storytelling opportunities. Steve Milton, a legacy sport journalist who recently transitioned to new media shared that, *"of how the media world has changed -- there are actually more people doing it than ever before, but they have smaller, fragmented audiences. There's way more people doing it than before."*

Although the absolute numbers of people endeavoring to share sport stories may have increased, the specificity of Olympic stories and the lack of institutional knowledge in such media outlets is a challenge that communications professionals working in Olympic sport need to address, especially in the day-to-day between Games. Team GB Executive highlighted this point in sharing that the significant fall-off in legacy media numbers has caused Team GB communications staff to begin targeting new forms of media, and trying to find the right balance between significantly investing in legacy media with little fruition, versus investing similar resources into creating owned content that the athlete trusts and can go direct to audience. *"We are having to forage and find different routes to market because we're finding the traditional legacy sports media is being squeezed by budgets, numbers of journalists are being squeezed, the ways in which people can obtain and digest media has changed so dramatically that we are seeing a significant falloff in*

numbers," said Team GB Executive. *"The changing face of traditional legacy media has really led us to focus differently on how we deliver those messages to our audiences and for us, a lot is focused on delivery through our own channels, growing our own channels and growing engagement on those channels,"* he added.

However, the need to balance in-house content creation with prioritizing the media is a significant issue for the International Olympic Committee that NOCs should be sensitive to. The perspective of the IOC Media Operations Director is that NOCs should not become a press agency, as it ultimately will provide only one side of a story, which will be biased. *"A biased story doesn't make good communication, because what you want is the multi-phased story and also the critical stories, because they actually help in very many cases, they help the sports progress as well,"* added IOC Executive. It is important, in the view of the IOC, that NOCs balance prioritizing in-house content creation and prioritizing media, understanding that if the pendulum swings too far towards in-house content creation, that media may no longer see a need to attend events to create their own coverage. The importance remains in providing information to the content creators without substituting them entirely.

4.2 Perspective on new media

It is evident that the impact new media is having on Olympic storytelling is significant, and organizations are actively working to embrace it. USOPC can see that the current American athletes seem very receptive to new media – which could be a generational phenomenon. USOPC is focusing on being intentional around which athletes to make available to which new media in the most opportune moments. Team GB Executive shared that its communications team actively targets new media in its communications strategies and that there is an expectation to set objectives around new media. Team GB acknowledges that there is a place for all types of media. *"We've got to follow the audiences and so therefore a lot of our objectives are set around how we can penetrate the new media with our stories and the personalities, the characters, the athletes and the sports,"* added Team GB Executive.

USOPC Executive acknowledged the need to continually work with the IOC to accommodate new media. *"The reality is that it's on all of us to make it work and bring them into the fold, because I think the storytelling is really positive,"* (USOPC Executive). The IOC does understand the

importance of new media and its preference to more video-based content, and although challenging, is trying to adapt to find spaces where new media can exist and share stories. (IOC Executive).

The IOC also understands the importance of engaging with the youth of new media and its fresh approach to storytelling and athlete relations. Through the Young Reporters Program at Youth Olympic Games (YOG), the IOC is able to generate unique, compelling and fresh content through new media, in a context that many legacy media are not as interested in covering. IOC Executive shared that the athletes who engaged with the Young Reporters at YOG were able to provide very interesting insights and stories, likely because they were connecting with media who were more similar to their peers than senior reporters. In fact, *"some of the stories that the Young Reporters produced were possible only because of the young athletes and the Young Reporters. And it's something that worked well. The more relaxed approach that the Young Reporters have and speaking the same language, and being interested in asking questions that are relevant for that generation, and from that comes a really interesting story."* (IOC Executive).

As such, the prioritization of a diversity of media opportunities (both in legacy media and in new media) should be a focus for NOC communications operations. Team GB Executive added that, *"in areas of lifestyle and consumer media that perhaps traditionally we didn't focus on, which today I think is as relevant as anything, and athletes are so much more multifaceted than just running fast, jumping high, or being the strongest – they have all these interests themselves – like anyone does – so for some of our athletes, it's where they want to play. They want to play in lifestyle media, fashion media, they want to be in that entertainment sector as much as they want to be known for their sporting achievements."* Therefore, it is clear that although the sport media landscape has experienced a massive shift, there is enormous opportunity in diverse forms of new media that NOC communications professionals need to seize. New media will not have the deep institutional knowledge that a legacy sports journalist had 10 to 20 years ago, so the onus is on communications staff to evolve the way they work to ensure Olympic storytelling continues in this shifting sport media environment.

4.3 Media Resources

With the significant lost institutional knowledge among today's media, it is imperative that sport communications professionals work to fill that gap. Perhaps more than ever, a greater focus should be placed on creating and maintaining detailed, accurate and polished media resources, ensuring they are easily accessible and that media know they exist. The recommendation is to have an open (not a password protected) media hub available digitally (NOC website, mobile app, etc.). As Steve Milton shared, *"journalists are so busy, make their job easier!"*, which was reiterated by Olympics.com contributor, that *"it's difficult to find comprehensive, easy-to-digest resources which could become more and more important with less traditional media and beat reporters who know these sports and the athletes' lifetime results."*

4.3.1 Athlete Biographies

Throughout all the interviews, the importance of athlete biographies could not be understated. Among all Canadian media interviewed for this study, each of them confirmed the necessity for up-to-date and accurate athlete biographies. The inclusion of hometowns, Games competed at, notable results, linked social media profiles, athlete backgrounds and human-interest non-sport related facts are crucial. CBC Broadcast Host shared that having the search function by location is helpful, and multiple Canadian media shared that having the athlete biographies on the NOC's webpage as a source of truth is far more trustworthy than information extracted from Wikipedia. Donna Spencer of Canadian Press shared that the inclusion of name pronunciation would be beneficial, and Steve Milton suggested including not only hometowns, but everywhere the athlete has lived, since localization is important to media.

The CBC's Devin Heroux, however, highlighted the need to keep athlete bios updated in between Olympic Games to ensure reliability. *"The problem I have with it, candidly, is I don't trust that the COC bios are up to date in real time. So I am always questioning if that performance two months ago is reflected in the allocation of the package,"* Heroux explained. Among the athletes surveyed for this study, 80% shared that the COC could improve day-to-day athlete storytelling by creating more in-depth athlete bios, so journalists do not have to constantly ask the same basic questions in interviews. USOPC Executive and Team GB Executive shared how significant athlete biographies are to their operations, and that *"athlete bios seem to be the most popular and biggest traffic drivers to the website"* (USOPC Executive). Athlete bios on the Canadian Olympic

Committee's websites Olympic.ca and Olympique.ca are also the biggest traffic drivers, by far.

4.3.2 Press Releases

Press releases remain crucial to media, and communications teams should not overlook them within the shifting sport media landscape. Press releases continue to build and maintain the media's institutional knowledge, no matter the subject, as well as create a historical reference and public record that media can refer to in future storytelling. Donna Spencer shared that even if she does not immediately cover news within a release, she still wants and reads all of them, from competition results to corporate announcements to government budget requests to Olympic Team Announcements and everything in between. CBC Broadcast Host emphasized that *"as much as it may seem like a quick or meaningless press release, I find them super beneficial."* It is, however, key to maintain and consistently update the media distribution list, in order for the press releases to have an impact. As outlets close, journalists change organizations, and new media evolves and gains interest in covering Olympic sport, the media distribution list should constantly be updated and maintained in order to ensure press releases are reaching the right media.

4.3.3 Source of Truth

In order for media to share Olympic stories, they need an accessible source of truth that they can refer to in their coverage. It is important to *"keep encouraging those written pieces of documentation which allow us to have an actual fact to live off of, to then make it into a story or to then pitch elsewhere to local news,"* (CBC Broadcast Host). Thus, resources such as historical statistics & fact pages, an NSO media contact list, a sport event calendar, sport information pages, a qualification tracker as well as event previews and result recaps are examples of media resources that are important for communications staff to prioritize creating and maintaining.

Luc Turgeon of Sportcom, a Quebec-based sport media outlet, shared that the COC's sport pages are crucial for his understanding of each sport's specific rules and nuances, and supports him with event coverage. For Turgeon, *"the most important resource is the Olympic qualification tracker – it's really hard to know so many sports' qualification criteria and this resource provides significant support."* Steve Milton shared that the NSO Media & Communications Contact List that the Canadian Olympic Committee has published on its Press Resources page is invaluable and he encouraged to share it widely with media.

The concept of ensuring detailed, accurate sources of truth for media relates to the IOC's concept of the Olympic Information Service (OIS) during the Olympic Games. IOC Media Operations Executive shared that the objective of OIS is *"to provide factual information on every sport so that if you are the only reporter from your country at the Games and you have athletes competing in multiple sports, you can go on the info portal and find information on athletes and are able to cover the Games because you're supported by the content."* As OIS has evolved into the essential media resource it currently is, it can be used as an example of a best practice in media resources and ensuring a source of truth.

4.3.4 Image Sharing

Particularly with new media, having access to rights-free athlete imagery as a media resource came up multiple times throughout the data collection process. Although not a widespread resource among those interviewed, (USOPC, IOC and Toronto Raptors do not have a rights-free image sharing platform and instead encourage media to utilize subscription services such as Getty Images), media who were interviewed did share that having access to select images outside of a Games environment would be beneficial to their storytelling endeavors. Team GB and the Canadian Olympic Committee do have image-sharing platforms and distribute images to athletes, marketing partners and external media, providing they abide by specific terms of use. The media interviewed expressed the benefits of having access to non-Games imagery (Team Announcements, athletes at speaking engagements, etc.) for editorial use to enhance their content and storytelling endeavors.

4.3.5 Active Distribution

With the loss of the media's institutional knowledge, having a comprehensive suite of detailed, accurate, up-to-date and polished media resources will not have the desired impact if the media does not know they exist. It is important that media resources are easily accessible on a media hub on the sport organization's digital channels, but it is also important that there is active distribution to the media's inboxes. With the decline of Olympic 'beat' reporters, the likelihood that media will discover the resources that passively live on NOC channels is much less than if the NOC periodically pushed out such resources to their distribution list. Luc Turgeon reiterated that the event preview articles on Olympic.ca are excellent preparation resources for covering events,

but he encourages the COC to consider distributing them to media's inboxes because they are easily missed if not actively searched for. Donna Spencer echoed that sentiment, explaining that National Sport Organizations (NSOs) not feeding press releases directly to media's inboxes makes her work more challenging. In the current media landscape with extremely limited budgets and capacity, having media resources, including results-based releases, live passively on websites or relying on social media for distribution is insufficient. NOCs should be actively distributing to media inboxes via their consistently updated and maintained media distribution list.

In Canada, sport organizations have the opportunity to submit press releases to the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC), which creates a daily newsletter that includes all relevant Canadian sport press releases – similar to a wire service. SIRC gathers and distributes these releases free-of-charge for Canadian sport organizations, and this resource should be utilized for organizations with sophisticated media operations as well as organizations without the capacity to maintain a media distribution list. Such services should be utilized in other countries by other NOCs, where available.

4.4 Media Summit

Across all stakeholders, the concept of a Media Summit was essential to both media and sport organizations. The Canadian Olympic Committee, USOPC and Team GB, in addition to many professional sports teams such as the Toronto Raptors, all host their own version of a Media Summit. In the case of NOCs, the Media Summit is an opportunity to bring together top Olympic hopefuls and multiple media outlets (national, local, broadcast, print, legacy, new media and in-house content teams), where outlets can interview, photograph and capture video content ahead of the upcoming Olympic Games for editorial purposes. Although the number of athletes and media outlets can vary based on the NOC's resources, the impact that the Media Summit has on Olympic storytelling is unmatched, in terms of content banking, relationship building, storyline mining and increasing the media's institutional knowledge. Josh Su, Media Relations Manager for the Toronto Raptors, explained that the best practices for the Raptors' (and professional sports') Media Summit is to hold it shortly before training camp at the start of each season, and to include the Rights Holding Broadcasters, non-Rights Holders, print and internal content capture. Print and non-Rights Holders generally do not get their own 1:1 interviews, and instead attend a press

conference with the top players – a concept that could be implemented in NOC Media Summits when time and space are limited.

Another important benefit of the Media Summit is how it protects and supports athlete performance. By bundling many media interviews and content capture sessions in one event, the Media Summit reduces the demands and requests on athletes throughout the busy training and competition season, especially during Olympic seasons. All the Canadian media interviewed for this study had attended past COC Media Summits, in addition to multiple Media Summits (or Media Days) for various Canadian National Sport Organizations.

Another benefit of having multiple athletes physically together for a Media Summit, is the opportunity for the NOC to provide media guidance and education to support and better prepare the athletes. The Canadian Olympic Committee creates a written resource provided to the athletes prior to Media Summit to support them in finding their story and determining how they want to approach sensitive questions. The COC also leads a media preparation session prior to Media Summit to provide the athletes with further guidance and coaching on how to think about their story and how best to share it with media. Team GB prioritizes athlete support prior to their Media Summit. Team GB Executive explains that *"they'll get a full day's worth of exposure to media, and within that we'll do media training, brand building work, content work so they can optimize their channels and know how to best present themselves."*

4.5 Media Relations

Although the sport media landscape looks much different in 2025 than it did in 2015, what has remained constant is the fact that relationships remain essential. Intentional media relationship building should be prioritized amongst communications staff, both with legacy media who have covered Olympic sport for decades, as well as new media who show a growing interest in covering the sector. It was unanimous among the interviewees, both media and communications leads, that although the COVID-19 pandemic made video-conference calls more widespread, the preference for in-person interviews and media availabilities remains over virtual interviews. The consensus is that media would prefer travelling and having face-to-face conversations than joining a virtual availability, where possible. Donna Spencer reiterated that, *"It makes a huge difference when the athlete has seen your face before. It's amazing. It's about trust, right? I would*

always prefer in person."

4.5.1 Relationship-building

The concept of intentional relationship-building between communications staff and media, communications staff and athletes, and athletes and media, is crucial. CBC Broadcast Host explained that, *"Sport is like a little circle or ecosystem – the athletes, the NSOs, the COC, the partners, their agents and then the media – and everyone has to be on the same team, although we all have different needs,"* which demonstrates the importance of a high sense of trust and a deep understanding of the stakeholders' needs and the stories themselves. Relationship-building with media can look different in different contexts and cultures, but building a rapport, establishing consistent and timely communication, and ensuring consideration for media's specific needs when planning press conferences, releases and availabilities, has an impact. Steve Milton emphasized that communications staff should balance media's and athletes' needs on timing, date and location for press events and releases, instead of fully catering to the athletes' needs.

4.5.2 Embargoes, Exclusives and Urgency

The media interviewed for this study confirmed how beneficial embargoes and exclusives are, and how appreciative they are when communications staff offer them. With the lack of capacity and resources in legacy media, and the constant deadlines and demand for content in new media, the ability to immediately react and cover a story without forewarning can be limited. By sharing news under embargo or offering exclusives ahead of time, media can better prepare and plan their coverage while working with limited resources. Steve Milton reiterated that it is important for communications staff to *"know who your key players and influencers are and to trust them, and understand what off-the-record could do for you."*

Additionally, an understanding from communications professionals on the realities of a newsroom and the intense time constraints on both legacy media and new media is essential. Timely responses and working quickly to provide media with what they need in order to share a story, is crucial. As Devin Heroux explained, *"I will continually advocate for COC comms, IOC comms, NSO comms to understand the pace of a newsroom and know that it's always going to be more urgent than what they think it is."* With strong media relations built and maintained intentionally over time, embargoes, exclusives and trust around off-the-record sharing can

positively impact storytelling opportunities.

4.5.3 Active Pitching

Throughout the interviews with members of the media, there was a distinct request for more active pitching, while ensuring clear coordination with the NSOs and athletes. CBC Broadcast Host shared that the outlet can be strategic around where stories live, and that there have not been many pitches from the COC that they have not been able to find a window for. *"The more support I'm given in terms of accessible information to advocate for it internally, the better. There's a time and platform for everyone."* (CBC Broadcast Host). Josh Su of the Toronto Raptors reiterated the importance of pitching strategically. *"You have to be strategic in terms of timing and what the story is. It's always going to be tough, for example, to pitch an outlet on a swimming story or athletics story in the middle of a Toronto Maple Leafs' [NHL Ice Hockey] playoff run, for example."* That said, the importance of strong collaboration and coordination between the NOC, NSO and athletes is paramount when pitching. The NOC and NSO must be able to ensure athlete availability if the media want to move forward on a story pitch.

4.5.4 Localization

Community storytelling remains significant in all forms of media. Thus, it is essential for communications staff to strategize around stories that are important to different communities and localities. In the Canadian context, Quebec sport media intensely supports Quebec athletes, and within the province, Quebec athletes with fewer top results and weaker performances will continue to receive far more media attention than more accomplished athletes from elsewhere in Canada. Communications staff must be mindful of similar contexts in their region, and be strategic with which athletes they make available, which stories they pitch, and which quotes they choose to include in materials.

USOPC recognizes the importance of localization and community storytelling, and built a program around intentional media relations within communities. USOPC Executive explained that each time an athlete was named to Team USA for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, a communications intern was tasked on researching and directly reaching out to each outlet from the community the athlete was born in, went to school in and currently lives in, including school newspapers, community radio stations, local television networks and other community-based

outlets. The intern shared how the outlets could follow their community's athlete's journey to the Games via the USOPC and NSO's channels, and who to get in contact with for athlete interviews. USOPC Executive shared that this concept, although time consuming, could easily be completed by a junior-level staff, and had significant return-on-investment in terms of athlete storytelling and building new media relationships.

4.5.5 Stories media want to share

Throughout each interview for this project, it was clear that the stories that media are most interested in telling are human-interest stories. Results-based stories are imperative, but stories that media want to tell are what lays behind the results – stories of struggle, feel-good stories, challenges, quirky stories, as well as stories that relate to the current 'news' climate – financial situations, doping, geopolitics, etc. Devin Heroux expanded on this, sharing, *"I want the stories that reflect Canada. I want the stories of resilience. I want the stories of comeback. I want the stories of adversity and challenge. I want stories that are relatable to everyday people. We're never going to know what it's like to swim like Summer or run like Andre, but we all know victory and triumph in our own lives, and what are the threads that tie us together with our Olympians?"*

With new media, preference is given to top names and athletes with strong social media presence, as these athletes increase engagement and page views. Team GB Executive explained that *"if you win the 100m in the fastest time, then you're the fastest person on Earth, and there isn't much you need to add to that to get your column inches in the media. But if you're not the fastest person in the world but you still have a really compelling story and personality and something to say, then I think it's incumbent on us to get that story out there as much as it is to celebrate the fastest person in the world."* Communications staff should focus on understanding what the athlete storylines are, above and beyond results, and pitching strategically around the human-interest stories.

4.6 Content Creation

As in-house content creation (or team media) grows in prevalence and importance, NOCs need to leverage their unique ability to authentically promote the Olympic Movement with storytelling on owned channels. NOCs, with their national reach and relevance, can amplify stories originally shared through external media or through athletes' own platforms, as well as share unique and

untapped stories and content on owned channels, assuming strong relations and collaboration with the athletes and NSOs.

It is paramount that NOC communications and content creation staff, if under different reporting structures, have strong collaboration and coordination. Although there is a variety of departmental structures throughout the organizations interviewed for this study, including some whose content teams report to the communications lead and others whose content teams report to separate marketing leads, the consistent theme of the need for communications leads to have oversight and approval on content to ensure consistent messaging and overall strategic alignment was clear.

A key consideration for communications staff, however, is ensuring a balance between prioritizing in-house content creation with external media. As discussed by Nölleke & Perreault (2024), the shifting sport media landscape, with in-house content creators becoming more widespread and prominent in sport organizations' marketing operations, is changing how communications professionals collaborate with media. Preserving athlete access and storylines to prioritize in-house content creation can have a negative impact on media relations, and communications staff should be cognizant of creating the best balance that works for their NOC. Devin Heroux of the CBC highlighted this as a growing point of contention with the Canadian Olympic Committee. *"I think that's a space where the COC has to decide what it wants to be. Does it want to be its own content creator or does it want buy-in from other media? And I think you've seen a massive decline of mainstream media engaging in Olympic stories because they feel that the COC has become and wants to be its own content creator"*. IOC Media Operations Director highlighted the importance of finding the right balance between privileged access for content creation teams and the media, and that NOCs should continue servicing media to ensure they continue covering Olympic sport.

4.6.1 Mediums

The opportunities for in-house content creation and storytelling continue to grow as digital and new media continues to evolve. Best practices from the IOC, USOPC, Team GB, the COC and professional sports include a comprehensive suite of unique content through multiple mediums, customized to align with specific content strategies and audience segmentation. The type of

content that a story produces should be optimized for written articles, video content, social media, podcasts and mobile apps. On social media, the recommendation is that NOCs build customized content strategies for each platform, as audience preferences shift from Instagram to Facebook to LinkedIn to TikTok and beyond.

4.6.2 Athletes as content creators

The shifting sport media landscape has ushered in the opportunity for athletes to be able to share their own story how they want to, using their own channels. NOCs should encourage this, as it is another avenue to promote the Olympic Movement and share Olympic stories to the widest audience. More recently, organizations are collaborating with athletes and leveraging them as content creators. The COC periodically publishes athlete-written content on Olympic.ca, providing athletes a significant platform to share their story while providing Team Canada fans a unique piece of content from an athlete perspective. The COC, USOPC and Team GB also periodically let athletes 'take over' the NOC Instagram account for a day, providing authentic behind-the-scenes storytelling opportunities. *"Our brand is built off our athletes, so we need to let people know who they are and what they're about, because I think that's a big point of difference for us as Olympic sports,"* cited Team GB Executive.

In the case of the Toronto Raptors and the COC, an image sharing app (Greenfly) allows the organizations to share field of play imagery directly with athletes to use for editorial purposes on their own channels, which supports their own content creation. Josh Su of the Toronto Raptors explained that *"allowing the players access to our assets, and they themselves are content creators, so they share certain things on social media during the game day or game week, and it just becomes part of the news cycle,"* demonstrates how easy and efficient it is to give athletes another opportunity to share their story and create their own content.

4.7 Athlete Support

As the sport media landscape shifts and athletes share their stories their way on their channels, NOC communications staff should evolve how they support athletes. At the COC, it is understood that athletes are at the heart of what we do, therefore, amplifying the athlete voice is critical. However, it also supports additional unique storytelling opportunities that did not necessarily exist prior to the shifts in sport media. The ways in which NOC communications staff supported

athletes when the sole means of storytelling was through legacy media need to evolve with the shifting landscape. Supporting athletes though navigating online threats of misrepresentation, fake news and social media bullying are paramount, and NOCs should place more focus on this. Team GB Executive explained that for their communications team, *"athlete protection is a focus - the hate that exists particularly in the digital landscape, it's not pleasant and we have to maintain a protection for the athletes."*

With the growing prominence of social media, supporting athletes in navigating the distraction and sharing tools on how to manage it while prioritizing performance is another important aspect that NOC communications teams need to consider.

4.7.1 Media guidance

In terms of preparing athletes for media, a common theme among NOC Communications leads was focusing more on media guidance, support with finding the athletes' story, and brand-building, instead of more formal media training with specific key messaging. NOCs should focus on ensuring athletes understand the power of their story and learn how to harness 'speaking from the heart', as that is what leads to the human-interest stories that media are interested in telling. This can be done through in-person or virtual sessions, or through creating resources with prompting questions and examples to help athletes reflect on what they want to share. It is important that NOCs prioritize media guidance, as only 25% of athletes surveyed for this study shared that the COC and/or their NSO's communications staff has supported them by learning about their story and helping craft a narrative to share with media, and only 12% have been supported through media training.

4.7.2 Image sharing

Sharing access to imagery with athletes can significantly support them in their storytelling endeavors. Platforms like the Greenfly app, used by the Toronto Raptors and the COC, can efficiently share imagery with stakeholders. The more athletes can share on their own channels, the more storytelling opportunities exist, but quality imagery is essential. Of the athletes surveyed for this study, 100% confirmed that they would make use of more access to imagery to support storytelling endeavors. One athlete shared that more access to imagery would *"improve the quality of the content, the diversity, the reach, and it would help build a stronger fan base with more*

views and interest."

4.8 New Opportunities for NOCs

Depending on the level of resources within the NOC's communications department, there is an abundance of new opportunities to leverage that were discussed throughout the interviews for this study, that fall outside of the recommendations discussed above.

Knowledge-sharing and upskilling communications staff at National Sport Organizations through mentorship programs, resource sharing and seconding NOC communications staff to NSO sport events to support media operations can significantly improve storytelling opportunities overall and can support the more under-resourced sport organizations. USOPC Executive described a communications support program that the NOC established which offers annual grants of up to \$11,000 USD to support a basic media operations program at NSOs without the financial resources for communications staff. Although the grant is insufficient to fund a full-time communications staff member, it helps significantly with media operations, press releases, and contacts with athletes, which ultimately raises awareness for the sports and athletes that historically do not receive as much attention. The grant includes a budget for occasional travel to attend and support media operations at important competitions, and USOPC Executive shared that a suitable next step could be a shared-service model between NSOs.

Team GB Executive shared that an emerging opportunity for NOCs is educating the next generation on legacy media, explaining that *"we've got a generation of athletes now who have genuinely not grown up around the media that we still have sat at the heart of our operations at the Olympic Games."* Team GB Executive expressed that some younger athletes are not accustomed to press conferences or mixed zone scrums and do not consume legacy media, so the opportunity to educate them on how to approach such situations can ultimately be a benefit.

Likewise, building a strategy around leveraging influencers is a developing opportunity for NOC communications staff. USOPC Executive shared that the influencers that they collaborated with NBC on for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games had incredible success, and examples such as having Snoop Dog at Paris 2024 to share experiential stories will likely continue to evolve, especially on the road to LA2028. Moreover, leveraging retired legacy journalists – a different type of influencer

– to create content for NOC websites or to pitch to high-reach outlets, is a strategy that both USOPC and the COC have taken that has produced quality content while balancing limited resources.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Recommendations

As the sport media landscape continues to shift, it is clear that NOC communications staff need to evolve how they work in order to ensure Olympic storytelling continues. The lost institutional knowledge among legacy media and its nonexistence among new media necessitates that communications staff prioritize maintaining and actively distributing more high-quality media resources than ever before. Although the COVID-19 pandemic introduced video-conference calls to the media relations field, the data confirms that NOC communications staff should continue prioritizing in-person media interactions and continue investing in intentional media relations. As in-house content continues to evolve, the importance of maintaining a balance between prioritizing in-house content creation and external media has grown, and the concept of athlete support in helping them navigate the distraction that comes with sharing their story on their channels, and with how to approach media in this shifting environment, should become a more crucial aspect of NOC communications teams' work.

The recommendations, however, are not necessarily realistic and actionable to all NOCs, as there are vastly different levels of communications resources, capacity and regional cultures among the 206 National Olympic Committees. Creating one framework to optimize Olympic storytelling in the shifting sport media environment would be insufficient to globally support the objective, thus, three frameworks have emerged to account for differing levels of resources, capacity and scalability.

Framework 1: High-Capacity Organizations

This framework presents recommendations for National Olympic Committees and National Sport Organizations with significant capacity and resources amongst their communications team, reflecting current trends in sport media and digital storytelling strategies as of 2025.

| Priority | Recommendation | Actions | Lead | Resources | Critical success factors |
|----------|--|--|-----------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Build and maintain a comprehensive suite of Media Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a digital media hub, including updated athlete bios, press releases, stats & historical facts, media contacts, sport event calendar, real-time qualification and results tracker, and event previews & results - Multilingual (as applicable to the NOC) and accessible functionality - Image sharing with media and athletes - Automated media distribution | NOC Communications staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5+ full time staff including a digital archivist - Continually updated media contact list - Digital media resources hub - CRM / E-mail marketing platform - Photo-sharing platform - Contracted photographers and NOC-owned images | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detailed, accurate and polished media materials, demonstrating the NOC as the source of truth - Easy access and discoverability - Regular updates and proactive outreach - Constantly filling gaps and re-building media's institutional knowledge - Create accessible records of athletes' achievements that media can refer to |
| 2 | Prioritize hybrid Media Relations with a human-first approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain key legacy media relationships while building new / digital media relations - Prioritize embargos and exclusives to reward and support loyal media - Host hybrid press events while prioritizing in-person availabilities over virtual - Continuous personalized active pitching on both human-interest stories and results - Focus on unique local angles important to the cultural context of the NOC, leveraging athlete hometown stories and diaspora connections | NOC Media Relations Manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dedicated media relations staff member - Media monitoring & intelligence tools (Meltwater, Cision, etc.) - Subscriptions to media outlets with strategic importance - AI pitch assistant | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intentionally fostered relationships with strong trust with members of the media - Deep understanding of athlete stories - Cultural fluency and local relevance - Deep understanding of media outlets' strategies and journalist preferences / areas of focus - Timely, personalized |

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|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure consideration for media's needs in scheduling press conferences, releases and availabilities - Actively seek out local / community media when athletes are named to teams | | | outreach |
| 3 | Establish a culture and high standard of athlete support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritize media guidance, brand-building support and storytelling coaching over traditional media training - Educate and enable athletes to share their story and speak from the heart - Offer digital literacy and brand-building workshops - Ensure distraction management throughout the season - Make images available to athletes - Offer mental health support for media exposure | NOC Communications Director, supported by communications staff and athlete support staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Athlete media coach with necessary skills and experience to deliver media support sessions - Collaborations with athlete support staff - Athlete content toolkit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Athlete trust and by-in - High competency and high trust in communications personnel - Strong collaboration and integration with high performance planning - Safe space for athlete voice |
| 4 | Ensure a healthy balance between in-house content creation and media servicing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest in diverse in-house content creators and influencers for written articles, video production, social media strategy and community management - Build a clear strategy on when to prioritize media vs in-house teams - Develop a content strategy aligned with Olympic values and athlete journeys - Collaborate with athlete creators and influencers | NOC Content Marketing director | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full content team (writers, videographers, social media) who are intimately knowledgeable on athlete population - Quality photo/video equipment - Content tools (Canva, etc.) - Athlete collaboration agreements - Analytics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong collaboration and coordination between media relations and content creation teams - Innovation and creativity are encouraged |

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|---|--|--|--------------------------|--|---|
| | | | | dashboard | |
| 5 | Host a Media Summit before each Olympic Games | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make significant portion of Olympic hopefuls available for broadcast, print and digital media content capture for one event lasting 1-2 days - Invite broadcast, print and digital media members from across the country (legacy and new/digital media) - Support athlete preparation with brand-building and media training sessions and documents - Include virtual access for global reach | NOC Communications staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Event space rental (hotel or conference space) - Accommodation & travel budget for all invited athletes and staff - Communications staff to support athletes through interviews - Audio/Visual equipment set-up / rentals for content capture - Athlete prep materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce and build relationships between athletes and media - Build confidence in athletes to share their story with media - Strong athlete-media rapport - Opportunity for media to bank content - Intentional scheduling to allow athletes to focus on training and performance later in the season, while being cognizant of media's scheduling needs |

Framework 2: Organizations with limited communications resources

Framework 2 presents recommendations for National Olympic Committees and National Sport Organizations with small communications teams with more limited resources, focusing on scalable, cost-effective strategies that leverage partnerships, free tools and athlete-driven content.

| Priority | Recommendation | Actions | Lead | Resources | Critical success factors |
|----------|--|--|--------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | Build and maintain a selection of the most crucial Media Resources , accessible via a digital media toolkit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a simple, mobile-friendly microsite or landing page - Include athlete bios, press releases, schedules and results, historical facts and downloadable media assets - Use free Content Management System platforms - Ensure multilingual (as | NOC Communications staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1-2 full time staff - Continually updated national media contact list - Free CMS and cloud storage (Google Drive, etc.) - Templates for bios and press releases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detailed, accurate and polished media materials, demonstrating the NOC or NSO as the source of truth - Easy access for media - Filling gaps and re-building media's |

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|---|--|---|--|--|---|
| | | applicable to the NOC) and accessible functionality | | | <p>institutional knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create accessible records of athletes' achievements that media can refer to |
| 2 | Prioritize relationship maintenance in Media Relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain 5-10 key legacy media relationships and build new / digital media relations - Facilitate athlete and spokesperson availabilities (in-person or virtual) - Pitch to media on both human-interest and results, including periodic embargoes and exclusives where possible - Focus on unique local angles important to the cultural context of the NOC | NOC Communications lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subscriptions to outlets with strategic importance - Google alerts to stay up-to-date on storytelling in the region - Dedicated time each day to actively seek out and consume sport media (legacy & new) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intentionally fostered relationships with members of the media - Deep understanding of athlete stories - Knowledge of media outlets' strategies and journalist preferences / areas of focus - Timely communication |
| 3 | Ensure athlete support around media is included in Games preparation and high performance plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide materials and/or sessions to athletes on media training, brand building and social media - Educate and enable athletes to share their story and speak from the heart - Offer a shared folder with quality imagery to athletes | NOC Communications lead, supported by communications and athlete support staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff / contractor with necessary skills and experience to deliver media support sessions - Athlete media guide - Shared content folder - Opportunity to leverage staff from more highly-resourced NOCs or NSOs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High competency and high trust in communications personnel - Strong collaboration between athlete technical support staff and communications staff |
| 4 | Consistently share creative in-house content to build fanbase | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build a strategic content creation strategy for all owned platforms - Share athlete-created content and leverage collaborations on social media | NOC Communications lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 full-time social media staff, contractor or intern tasked to create content for all owned platforms and share athlete | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality content at low cost - Clear content guidelines - Strong collaboration and |

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|---|---|---|--------------------------|---|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborate with volunteers / interns for content creation - Use free editing tools (Canva, etc.) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> content - Quality photo/video equipment - Free creative tools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> coordination with media relations staff member and high performance staff / coaches / athletes |
| 5 | Coordinate a Media Day before each Olympic Games - in-person or virtual, depending on resources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinate availabilities for top Olympic hopefuls for broadcast, print and digital media content capture on one day - Support athlete preparation with brand-building and media training sessions and documents | NOC Communications staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Event space rental (NOC office, hotel or conference space) - Accommodation & travel budget for all invited athletes and staff - Communications staff to support athletes through interviews - With limited resources, virtual media availabilities are an option | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce and build relationships between athletes and media - Build confidence in athletes to share their story with media - Opportunity for media to bank content - Intentional scheduling to allow athletes to focus on training and performance when necessary |

Framework 3: Organizations without Communications staff

Framework 3 is designed for National Olympic Committees and National Sport Organizations that currently operate without dedicated communications staff. This framework provides a foundational approach to create baseline operations for storytelling using scalable, low-cost and community-driven strategies.

| Priority | Recommendation | Actions | Lead | Resources | Critical success factors |
|----------|--|--|---|---|--|
| 1 | Maintain essential Media Resources , accessible on organization's webpage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create and maintain a simple landing page for media resources, including athlete bios, media contacts, press releases, sport event calendar and results - Use free platforms - Link to social media accounts | Marketing staff, Secretary General or Volunteer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intern or contractor to build and maintain page - Access to central press release hub or updated national media contact list | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Up-to-date and accurate content - Easy navigation - Ensure media is aware of the resources |
| 2 | Nominate a media relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internally confirm which staff (CEO, High | Secretary General | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Additional tasks on one staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintained relationships |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|-----------------------|--|--|
| | contact to ensure media knows who to contact for storytelling endeavors | Performance Director, Head Coach, etc.) will act as the facilitator for any media inquiries - Maintain regular contact and enhance relations by sharing human interest and results storylines to main media contacts | | member's job description to include baseline media relations - Capacity to connect with media throughout the season and immediately after competitions | with members of the media, prioritizing media who continue to cover the sport / organization - Understanding of athlete stories |
| 3 | Ensure athlete support around media is included in Games preparation and high performance plans | - Provide materials and/or sessions to athletes on media training and brand building - Educate and enable athletes to share their story and speak from the heart | Athlete support staff | - Contractor with necessary skills and experience to deliver media support sessions - Opportunity to leverage staff from more highly-resourced NOCs or NSOs | - Quality resources and competent contractors |
| 4 | Create a foundation for content creation while leveraging community media | - Share athlete-created content and leverage collaborations on social media - Share results-based and human-interest content on owned channels, focusing on platforms with the highest reach - Tag athletes and encourage post collaborations - Identify local student journalists and influencers, encouraging community storytelling and coverage | Marketing staff | - Intern or contractor - Media contact list | - Consistent content sharing to grow fanbase and media's institutional knowledge - Recognition of contributors |

**All three frameworks have been refined using AI by inputting an original version and adjusting based on Copilot recommendations*

5.2 Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that although the sport media landscape has drastically shifted over the past few quadrennials with the erosion of legacy media and explosion of new digital media, there are a multitude of strategies that communications professionals working in Olympic sport can adopt, in order to evolve alongside the shifts in media.

Throughout this study, the key challenges of the loss of media's institutional knowledge of Olympic sport, the instability in media relations and increasing restrictions journalists' access to athletes by communications staff, the growing challenge of balancing in-house content creation with continuing to prioritize external media, and the increasing importance of supporting, educating and collaborating with athletes to share their stories through different channels, including their own, are apparent.

These such challenges are significant, in that they demonstrate how essential it is to examine how communications teams operate and to consider the areas of opportunity to improve, in order to ensure Olympic storytelling continues. The recommendations presented through three scalable frameworks provide roadmaps for National Olympic Committees to upgrade and evolve their communications operations. The findings within the discussion throughout this paper demonstrate best practices from the IOC, NOCs with sophisticated communications operations and professional sports to facilitate storytelling, explain what media outlets need from NOCs to help them more efficiently do their job with decreasing capacity and resources, and ultimately how NOC communications departments can optimize how they work to better help the media share Olympic stories while supporting in-house content creation.

It is important to note, however, that the recommendations were developed based on interviews from a select group of stakeholders, leading to limitations of this study. The recommendations may require adaptation based on differing regional, cultural or political contexts, as well as ongoing reflection and evaluation as technology continues to advance and impact the media landscape.

Further research could explore differing budgetary considerations for the three frameworks of recommendations and how to maximize decreasing levels of financial resources to optimize communications operations, as well as the growing impact of AI on sport media and Olympic storytelling.

Ultimately, however, at the heart of sport media, and what makes the Olympic Games so compelling on a global stage decade after decade, is storytelling. Steve Milton echoed this point, sharing, *"What do people like? It's storytelling. Beginning. Middle. End. And that's why, whether*

people know it or not, it's one of the main reasons people become sports fans. Besides the distraction, besides the fact that they played it themselves, besides the fact that it's a cultural phenomenon. It's actually more. The storytelling is part of it and it's why they love sport." By intentionally investing in the recommendations outlined in this research, NOC communications teams can continue to evolve the way they work, and can do their part in ensuring Olympic storytelling continues and evolves. The investments made now can have a positive impact on Olympic storytelling around LA2028 and beyond, inspiring the next generation of aspiring athletes and Olympic fans, and ensuring that the Olympic Movement continues to grow throughout the world, bringing people together for quadrennials to come.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide – Media

INTRODUCTION

- Greeting & Introduction
- Thank interviewee for their time
- Introduce myself and explain the project

- How many major Games have you covered as accredited on-site media? At home?

MEDIA RELATIONS

- What does the COC currently do that makes your work easier?
 - Is there anything the COC used to do that made your work easier, that the COC does not do anymore, that you wish we would bring back?
- What does the COC currently do that makes your work harder?
 - Is there anything the COC used to do that made your work harder, that the COC does not do anymore?
- How often do you interact with the COC compared to other sport organizations?
 - Do you want more/less interaction with the COC or are you currently satisfied?
- How easy/challenging is it to work with the COC to schedule interviews and with access to athletes/spokespeople (not in a Games environment)?
- How easy/challenging is it to work with Canadian NSOs to schedule interviews and with access to athletes/spokespeople (not in a Games environment)?
 - How much easier/more challenging is it if the NSO has a communications staff vs if they do not?

MEDIA RESOURCES

- Are you aware of the COC's athlete biographies, [historical statistics pages](#) and [press resources](#) on Olympic.ca?
 - Do you / how often do you use them?
 - Are there any additional resources that would be helpful?
- Do you use either COC press releases or content articles from Olympic.ca to help with story ideas?
- How helpful do you find COC press releases in relation to helping you share Olympic stories?

- Team Announcements
- Chef de Mission Announcements
- Corporate Announcements
- How helpful is the Team Canada Media Day to your work?
 - Are there any changes you'd encourage the COC to consider?
 - Do you attend Media Days for any NSOs? If so, do they do anything that the COC does not do, that you would find helpful?
- Are there media resources that other sport organizations produce, that the COC does not, that would be beneficial if the COC produced?

PHOTOGRAPHY

- How would greater access to COC imagery (non-Olympic Games) help in your storytelling endeavours? (Example: Team Announcements, Chef de Mission, training camps, events such as Olympian speaking engagements)
- Are you aware of the COC's image platform, images.olympic.ca? Have you ever used it or requested images from it?
- Do you wish the COC would do anything differently in terms of our photography program?

GENERAL

- How can the COC (and NSOs) help you to continue sharing stories of Team Canada athletes in between Olympic Games?
 - More active pitching?
 - More results-based resources?
 - Easier access to athlete interviews?
- What stories are media most interested in telling? What elements should be in those stories to reach the widest possible audience?
- Do you prefer in-person or virtual media availabilities, if in your city?
- Is your organization / you investing in any new forms of media (newsletter, podcast, social) that the COC and/or NSOs could support you better in?
- What challenges do you face in your day-to-day work, endeavouring to share Olympic stories?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about optimizing media relations / media resources / content creation in terms of Olympic storytelling?

Appendix B: Interview Transcript with Luc Turgeon of Sportcom

Tara MacBournie

Great. Well, thanks so much. So I guess the first question here, so what does the COC Comms team currently do that makes SportCom's work easier?

Luc Turgeon

And I was thinking about it. It's hard to tell because we do not interact a lot with COC outside of the Games environment. So during the Games, it's always really good and easy to communicate with you and to interact. For me, in Santiago, you really, really helped me to stay in touch with athletes, coaches and interviews. It was the same in Paris, so that's good. But outside of the Games, we don't interact a lot, so it's hard to tell.

Tara MacBournie

Do you use the press resources at all or different press releases? Does that help you and Sportcom in what stories that Sportcom wants to tell?

Luc Turgeon

Yeah, we do. And some features and that you write too. I think there's something I can use from an interview with Laurie Blouin a few days ago. So that's really helpful for us too. We learn many things in those content. And I liked your winter recap.

Tara MacBournie

OK. Perfect.

Luc Turgeon

And also the releases, like for team announcements, flag Bearers. We have some good contacts with many federations, many NSOs. So we are in touch with them, but for the Games you're like another resource.

Tara MacBournie

Is there anything that we do that makes your work harder, day-to-day or even leading up into the games? That we could improve on.

Luc Turgeon

I don't know if I would say harder because as I said for example, for the Games, you are one more intermediary that we don't have normally, so. It's maybe harder because OK, there's another step to take, but we understand that there's a protocol and the games are bigger than other events, so. It's not really harder, just the way we have to work, so it's OK. So, harder, I don't think so. You are not blocking our path or I don't know, it's OK.

Tara MacBournie

OK, great. Well, that's good to know. Would you say it's easier or more challenging to work with Nsos? To perhaps schedule interviews with athletes when nsos have a strong communication staff versus maybe a sport who doesn't really have a communications Staff at all. Do you notice a significant difference between nsos like that? And can you speak it a little bit about that?

Luc Turgeon

Yes, yeah. And maybe there's another path with that it's easier for us for communication, when there's someone from Quebec or who is bilingual.

Tara MacBournie

Yeah.

Luc Turgeon

If the person is bilingual, we have better contact with them.

Tara MacBournie

OK.

Luc Turgeon

And on the other side, sometimes some NSOs have a good communications team, but they are bigger in terms of, I don't know popularity or membership. So, like Hockey and Soccer Canada?

Tara MacBournie

Yeah.

Luc Turgeon

Yes, they have communication staff, but it's always more difficult to get some interviews or a good follow up because maybe they have more requests too so it just normal. But yeah, it can be harder. And on the other side, as you said. We have a follow up. I will get some answers but it can take more times so.

Tara MacBournie

OK.

Luc Turgeon

That could be a great way to help us from COC, maybe.

Tara MacBournie

For sure. Yeah, good to know that you do notice a difference between working with like Skate Canada versus, Fencing Canada, for example who does not have communications staff. Awesome. OK. That's helpful. Thank you. OK. Moving to different media resources. I'm sure you're aware of the COC's athlete bios that we create for every team member going to Pan Am's or Olympics? We have a new page, well group of pages. Actually I've linked it in the comments. It's called historical statistics pages. And then as well as we have the press resources page on Olympic.ca. Do you use those? How often? And are there any additional media resources that you think would be helpful for us to produce?

Luc Turgeon

I didn't know about the historical fact this page.

Tara MacBournie

It's brand new in the past month, so.

Luc Turgeon

It's very nice. I like it. I knew about the Athlete Bios and it's always really good to check if I need any informations. And not always on the result, because it's not always.

Tara MacBournie

Updated.

Luc Turgeon

Updated. Exactly, but for the bios for information on the Athlete's path is cool and it can help me for my interviews.

Tara MacBournie

Perfect.

Luc Turgeon

I also really like and use often the sports pages. Sometimes there's a few rules that we we're not sure and the pages explain everything. And they can help me for event coverage too. And also I think the most important resource is the Olympic qualification tracker – it's really hard to know so many sports' qualification criteria.

Tara MacBournie

Nice. OK.

Luc Turgeon

Yes, that's really, really helpful. Because for us it can be really hard to know with many, many organizations like athletics or gymnastics. Gymnastics where we have many, many events with one federation. And in Quebec, because Sportcom is the only reference with Olympics or Paralympic sports, we need to understand these sports and qualification info. So yeah, those pages are really, really helpful for us.

Tara MacBournie

Great. Is there anything you can think of that would be helpful for us to produce that we don't yet produce?

Luc Turgeon

I don't think so. I really like this page. That's a good idea with historical facts. I don't know, maybe some more Results or records? It could help to prepare for a specific event, maybe before World Championships, if we have a page where we can see what are they looking for in this event particularly? Or what is special this year? For example, World Championships in figure skating. So, Max & Deanna. OK, that was a good example. It's too, too large, but, specifics and information that could help to prepare and to follow the event. But you have it sometimes. You wrote some preview for events.

Tara MacBournie

We do.

Luc Turgeon

You did some for world championships. I think those are key.

Tara MacBournie

Yes, we do write preview articles, but we don't push them out to media via our distribution list. It's more just

on social media and they appear on Olympic.ca, but you have to go and find it versus pushing it out to media's inboxes. It's something we don't do yet, but could be something to consider in the future.

Luc Turgeon

Yeah, I think so, that would help a lot. And same thing for if you want to help with interviews for like some NSOs who don't have good communication or they just don't have the staff for it. If we had got it by mail, you know, if we don't have to go looking for it.

Tara MacBournie

Right. OK, thank you. I guess to layer onto that. Safe to say that the COC press releases that are pushed out to media's inboxes, like team announcement, Chef de Mission, even corporate announcements are still very helpful for sportcom's work, or less so?

Luc Turgeon

Yeah. As I said, we need those announcements. Maybe more corporate announcements, those are good to know, but we will not use it really for articles. But yeah, it's important to stay in touch and to get info like that.

Tara MacBournie

OK, switching a bit to Team Canada Media Day. I guess how helpful does Sportcom find it to your ongoing work. And do you attend any media days for NSOs?

Luc Turgeon

Yeah, I'll start with your Media Day. It's really, really helpful. It's a must for us. And I asked Matthieu if he would like to get some changes, and he said it's just perfect. We can meet the athletes. We have enough time, like before the games. It's really, really nice. And for NSOs, we went for short track team last year, and that's really cool too. To me, media day, it's a good way to ask our questions and to be one-on-one too. Sometimes it's just the media calls and every medias are there so you don't want to ask your questions. You want to keep your idea for you. So when we have those moments where we can meet athletes or coaches in person, it's really helpful. So if we have more announcements like it or more moments with athletes it could be great.

Tara MacBournie

Awesome. So in general, then you guys prefer in person media availabilities when it's in Quebec versus a virtual media availability.

Luc Turgeon

We always prefer in person. I think virtual is better than nothing, but always in person is really great. And also for media. In Canada, we are small enough to not be blocked on Instagram or Facebook, so we continue many videos and that's a good occasion to use some stuff, and it's much better than a zoom call.

Tara MacBournie

Right. Thanks.

Luc Turgeon

So yeah, personally happy for in person.

Tara MacBournie

Great. OK. Next, so in terms of photography. Would greater access to COC imagery help support sportcom in your storytelling endeavors? So not so much games images like Olympic field of play, but more so if Sportcom had access to images from in person team announcements, for the Chef de Mission, maybe even training camps or events where maybe an Olympian is going to speak at a school in Montreal. Would do you think Sportcom would make use of more imagery or it doesn't really impact you?

Luc Turgeon

Training camps could be a great idea for some action, because Sportcom doesn't have membership for like, CP or Getty so it can be challenging to get some photos. For any events, so we have more photos, it would be really, really helpful for us. If it's during the games, it's easy for us to get your photos to illustrate our stories. And for some I'm just thinking about the other activities like as you said in schools or I don't know, it can help.

Tara MacBournie

OK, cool. And then I guess because you use it during games, you're aware of the COC's image platform images.olympic.ca?

Luc Turgeon

I was aware, but only for a Games. I think I don't have the reflex or something to go there for other events.

Tara MacBournie

If you wanted an image for something, yeah, you can still request it.

Luc Turgeon

Yeah.

Tara MacBournie

Like now in 2025.

Luc Turgeon

OK, nice. I will do it because, yeah. Sometimes we don't need a photo from exactly the same event already. We don't need something to show who he is. So yeah, like my colleague just wrote something about Sophiane Methot. She just won a bronze medal. Like gymnastics and I'll follow today, but sometimes we have nothing, no images. So, OK, what do we do now? We can't use the same image for five or six articles.

Tara MacBournie

All right, a little bit more general now. What challenges do you and your colleagues face in your day-to-day work trying to share Olympic stories? Not in a games environment, but like for example now in 2025.

Luc Turgeon

I think photos is a great example for us to have to get access to it. Also, sometimes to just watch the competitions, not always easy to see. Since maybe since COVID it's easier now. Like the FIS would put many events on YouTube sometimes. Sometimes it's blocked on in Canada, but CBC can have it too. So it's

easier than before, but sometimes we have to write about some athletes and we can't see anything. So yeah, that's my first sentence in interviews, OK. I didn't see your performance, so help me out a little bit. It's challenging to sometimes just to speak with some athletes. As we said before, some nsos cannot or will not help us so, yeah, that can be challenging too. But in Quebec we have some good contacts. Our athletes, we can reach them directly so that's OK. But for some events it's hard.

Tara MacBournie

How can the COC and NSOs help you alleviate some of those challenges? So would it be helpful to have more active pitching if we knew about a really cool story about a Quebec athlete? Or perhaps more results based resources. So say I don't know, Fares Arfa, fencing at a World Cup really far away, and there's no way to watch it in Canada. Having a quick blurb of what happened, like literally sent to your inbox. Easier access to athletes to interview them. Anything else? What do you think about those?

Luc Turgeon

Yeah, yeah, that would be great. Or like access to the athlete. Sometimes it's just, if you have videos also from training or other contents, we can use it. Active pitching is a good idea too. I like it a lot. For team sports too, like many, many Team sports will spotlight some athletes, but they are not from Quebec so it can be hard to get some interviews with some athletes that they think no one would like to talk with them.

Tara MacBournie

Maybe the soccer team. There's definitely some Quebec athletes, but they weren't always necessarily the top stars.

Luc Turgeon

Yes. Yeah, exactly. Maybe that's a reason why we don't cover women's soccer anymore because it was hard to speak with them.

Tara MacBournie

OK.

Luc Turgeon

Sportcom will always work for Quebec, so, when we don't have this Quebec angle, OK, Sportcom is not useful for that.

Tara MacBournie

I see.

Luc Turgeon

We will cover fencing and water polo. Figure skating or? Like some sports, I will know before the event OK, I'm the only one who works on it. And this article will be on four or five different websites because Sportcom will be only for that. So it's always, it's always, it's always to get the Quebec angle. We're different, so.

Tara MacBournie

Cool, very cool. What stories is Sportcom most interested in in telling? Of course athletes with the Quebec angle. But what elements should we keep in mind when we're trying to pitch to Sportcom?

Luc Turgeon

And it's funny because it's not always the results about the events, it's stories about, I don't know, some challenges before the event, like injuries or stories about the travelling or relations in team with coaches. There's always this like, human angle people really like and I think it's the case. It's more the case with Olympics or Paralympics sports. Like people will not look for it with professional sports in North America. But it's always the best for sports. So I'm I'm thinking about some examples. Let me see. Just last week, we spoke with Laurence St. Germain. And we wrote about her results all winter long and it was not really interesting -- I don't know if she finished the 22 or 23, but for this recap where she, it's cliché, but she spoke with her heart. We can feel it when we read the article so. That's always the best for us.

Tara MacBournie

That's awesome. Human interest stories, then sometimes trump results.

Luc Turgeon

Also, it's for those sports where not us, because Sportcom is different, but for many media they just will cover those sports only for the Games, so they have no idea who are those athletes. They don't know what happened for qualifications, for training. And so we have people who like us because they learn something new and we have this information. And I think it's easier for those athletes to get those stories. Like for example, from Montreal Canadiens, we will never know stories from their lives. But it's nice if, like, an Olympic athlete, she will say, I doubted myself all season long and I was crying sometimes and, like there's a process behind every result, so it's nice to share it.

Tara MacBournie

Thanks. That's awesome. Do you find the athletes are more willing to share more human interest stories like that with you guys because there's a trust built up. Like there's more of a relationship there than, an outlet that doesn't cover them all the time?

Luc Turgeon

Yeah, I think so. And they know we are not there to be bad for them. Like if there's a bad news, we will not put it first, we will not lead with it. Like, yeah, that was really a bad result. And you failed. And no, that's not, that's not our job at all. The young athletes, they will read our articles and they know when it's a good time or bad times and how it can be challenging for an athlete and they know that is a part of our job too. So they're willing to share it. It's not the case for professional sports. And it's the same for us. Some athletes who are more professional, or big big stars. It will be harder to get those infos and to be in touch. But also, like Kingsbury is the greatest in his sport, but he's still really good in interviews and he wants to speak with media. We will never see that for NHL players or NFL players.

Tara MacBournie

Right, that makes sense. So, thank you, I think this is everything that I wanted to discuss. I guess last thing,

I'll just open up the floor. Is there anything else that you would like to share about optimizing media relations, resources, working closely with Sportcom?

Luc Turgeon

No, I think we covered everything. Just a call like this one to follow up or to know what is best. I think it will be helpful for us and for you. Like an active pitching. Helping for interviews or for photos. Like you, you are so great for us during the Games. If you can be the same before and after -- Let's go.

Tara MacBournie

Right. OK, awesome. Well, thank you so much Luc for your time. I really, really appreciate it. This has been some really great learnings and I'm happy to share my final project with you if you'd like to see it at all and hoping that we can really integrate some of these learnings into how we work. Since we're all really trying to do the same thing at the end of the day and support the athletes and let Canada know about all these amazing stories. So yeah, I appreciate your time. I hope our paths cross again soon. So yeah, thanks again Luc, and enjoy the rest of your afternoon.

Luc Turgeon

Yeah. Perfect. Thank you. Same for you.

Appendix C: Athlete Survey Questions

Purpose of the Study:

This study aims to understand how National Olympic Committees' and National Sport Organizations' communications teams can improve the way they work, both in servicing the media and enabling in-house content creation, to ensure day-to-day Olympic storytelling continues in between Olympic Games, taking into consideration the changing sport media landscape.

Please note that this survey is completely anonymous.

QUESTIONS:

- Does your National Sport Organization have a dedicated communications staff?
 - If yes, How many communications staff are there, to your recollection?
 - If yes: How have they provided media support for you?
 - Media Training
 - Learning about my story and helping craft messaging / a narrative to share with media
 - Support in lining up interviews before or after competitions
 - Support in the mixed zones at competitions
 - Working with me to create content around my story for my NSO's website or social media
 - Connecting with me journalists
 - Crisis communication
 - Other (please specify)
 - No
- Do you want to have your story shared more widely, either in the media, on your NSO or the COC's channels?
 - Yes. Please expand. (Which outlets would you want to see your story on more widely, which mediums (written articles, video content, podcast, etc., why is this important to you?)
 - No. Please expand
- What media issue(s) do you feel are the biggest challenge for Olympic athletes today? (Choose all that apply)
 - Competition for coverage with pro sports in the sport media landscape
 - Finding the right media who want to help me share my story
 - Media are not often at my competitions
 - I am uncomfortable speaking with media and want more media training
 - I am uncomfortable sharing my story and want more media support resources / workshops / guidance

- Understanding how to approach rumors and/or false information?
 - How to correct incomplete or erroneous information, or information taken up by AI
 - Other (Please specify)
 - Please expand - add any details / context you feel is important to share
- What improvements do you wish the Canadian Olympic Committee and/or your National Sport Organization could make, in order to improve day-to-day athlete storytelling? (Choose all that apply)
 - More athlete-centered written content on the COC's and/or my NSO's website
 - More results-based written content on the COC's and/or my NSO's website
 - More athlete-centered video content on the COC's and/or my NSO's social media
 - More personalized media training throughout the year
 - Connecting me with journalists so I can share my story to them
 - Social media training / support / management
 - Stronger support in media crisis situations or threats (rumors, false information, etc)
 - In-depth athlete biographies so journalists don't always ask me the same basic questions
 - Tagging me directly on social media when there are posts about me so I can re-share them with my followers
 - Support for media clipping, media monitoring, etc.
 - Other (Please specify)
 - Please expand - add any details / context you feel is important to share
 - No huge improvements needed - I am satisfied with the level of day-to-day athlete storytelling that the COC and/or my NSO create and share.
- Have you seen any media/content that your competitors or athletes from other sports are featured in, that you wish you could be featured in?
 - Yes (Please specify)
 - No
- Do you want the opportunity to work with a journalist or communications staff to help you write your own articles about yourself when you have a story to tell?
 - Yes
 - If yes: would you want such self-written articles to:
 - Recap your season?
 - Start off season?
 - Overall articles to help with sponsorship pitching?
 - How would you share this content?
 - No

- Can you share a bit about your experience working with the COC's communications and/or digital staff to help share your story?
 - What did they support you with?
 - What do you wish they could have done differently?
 - I rarely have/had any contact with COC's communications and/or digital staff
- Can you share a bit about your experience working with your NSO's communications and/or digital staff to help share your story?
 - What did they support you with?
 - What do you wish they could have done differently?
 - I rarely have/had any contact with my NSO's communications and/or digital staff
 - My NSO doesn't have a communications and/or digital staff
- Would you make use of the following:
 - More access to imagery of myself
 - More access to video content of myself
 - More access to communications staff for support
 - More access to the media
 - How would more access to these resources better support you in helping share your story?
- What is your perspective on COC / NSO Media Day?
 - Do you consider this a distraction/disruption or do you consider this worthwhile?
 - Would you want an additional COC Media Day each quad? (The main one 6-8 months out from Games, and an additional mid-quad?)
 - Do you want more resources or support from the COC to help you prepare for Media Day?
 - If yes, can you share what types of resources / support would be helpful?
- Do you see any opportunities on how NOC and NSOs can optimize how they work to ensure Olympic storytelling continues?
- Is there anything else you would like to share on this topic?

Thank you very much for submitting the survey. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please don't hesitate to reach out to Tara - tmacbournie@olympic.ca