

# STRAPPED for Cash

BY KAREN CLARK

Photography by Ewan Nicholson

ALANNA KRAUS

Olympic Bronze Medallist  
Short Track Speed Skating

The story of Canada's financially challenged amateur athletes is not a new one. We have world champions, Olympic medallists, and tomorrow's heroes all struggling to make ends meet. Corporations need to understand that even small contributions can make a huge impact.

The 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens are only five months away. And with just a small percentage separating the Olympic champion from the lonely soul in fourth, what will be the impact of athletes without sponsors?

Calgary's Kyle Shewfelt is Canada's most successful gymnast ever at the world level. He's won nine world cup medals, three world cup titles, two world championship bronze medals, and he has no sponsors. "In order to have a personal best at the Olympics I need to focus 100 per cent on training," says Shewfelt. "I don't need to worry about financial issues."



**THE OLYMPIC MEDAL FAVOURITE** is currently trying to raise money to buy the same brand of vault and floor that will be used in Athens—\$30,000 for the floor and \$5,000 for the vault. “Each country has a different brand of equipment. It takes days to get used to it and sometimes you just don’t get used to it at all. If I train on the right vault and floor before the Olympics, I think it will give me an advantage over the other competitors.”

With six world wrestling titles and 10 national crowns under her belt, Christine Nordhagen-Vierling has just landed her first sponsorship—10 years after her first world title—with CCS Income Trust. “It’s going to be a great partnership,” says Nordhagen-Vierling. “I am going to make them part of my Olympic journey by e-mailing them when I’m on the road, wearing their logo on my jacket, and thanking them in interviews.”

Up until January of this year, the 72-kilogram wrestler had to balance the rigours of training with teaching part-time at Ernest Manning High School. “I felt like I was running non-stop all the time, and I had no energy. Now I have time to recover, stretch,

went through tough times in her early days—working as a vacuum salesman and a waitress to make ends meet. When a \$5,000 MetLife sponsorship came her way in 1995, Le May Doan decided to give up waiting tables and focus on her athletic career. One year later she won her first world title. However, it wasn’t until a year after winning Olympic gold and bronze in Nagano that the financial burden was lifted. “People think that an Olympic medal comes with a price tag and that’s just not the case,” says the 13-time world champion. “We have this misconception that Canadian athletes with Olympic medals get sponsors. It wasn’t until 1999 that I could spend 100 per cent of my time concentrating on training.”

Sponsorship is not just about handing over a cheque to an athlete. “It’s about working out a partnership that works for both the athlete and the company,” she explains.

## An Amateur Athlete’s Basic Expenses

Housing/Utilities/etc.	\$12,000/yr
Food	\$ 4,800/yr
Transportation	\$ 3,000/yr
Clothing	\$ 2,000/yr
Sport Equipment	\$ 5,000 – \$20,000/yr
International Travel/ National Team Fees	\$0 – \$15,000/yr
<b>BASIC COSTS TOTAL</b>	<b>\$26,800 – \$61,800</b>


all too hard to manage, athletes often retire early.”

Encana has been sponsoring the CSCC’s YES program for nine years. The program—Youth Education through Sport—sends athletes to schools around Alberta to give motivational presentations. “We support YES because it’s a win-win situation all the way around,” says Mary Ann Steen, manager of community investments for Encana. “Athletes receive funding and develop skills that will serve them well throughout their career; students get the opportunity to be up close and personal with Olympic athletes; and it’s a good way for us to support the communities where our operations are based.”

According to Young, there are valuable rewards to sponsoring an athlete: “If done properly, athlete sponsorships can enhance existing marketing programs and events, and inspire employees to achieve excellence. The emotional feeling a corporation or individual will get through supporting an athlete that is competing for Canada is quite powerful.”

RBC Financial Group has been sponsoring the Olympic movement for more than 50 years. The current RBC Olympians program hires Olympic and Paralympic athletes to work for the organization in a flexible, career-oriented work experience that accommodates their training and competition schedule. “Part of the athletes’ role is to work as spokespeople and share their stories to help motivate our employees and clients,” says Scott Hartley, manager of sponsorship, marketing, and advertising for RBC Financial Group. “We also gain very committed, driven, and motivated employees in our elite athletes, and these are things we look for in all the employees we hire.”

And if athletes like Shewfelt can achieve the ultimate in Athens, being part of the journey will be motivating for everyone involved. “When I close my eyes and picture the Olympics, I picture coming home with a gold medal, and I see a lot of smiles—it’s a happy day.”

If you would like to help Canada’s athletes, contact Colin Young at 403-210-5403 or [youngc@ucalgary.ca](mailto:youngc@ucalgary.ca) or visit [www.canadiansportscentre.com](http://www.canadiansportscentre.com). 



**Kraus, a 2002 Olympic medalist, has yet to land a personal sponsor**

go for massage, do more workouts, and watch videos of my opponents—this sponsorship will make a difference in my training.”

In a well-funded winter sport like short-track speed skating, Olympic bronze medalist Alanna Kraus gets most of what she needs to train and compete at the highest level, but the gravy train ends there. Kraus has no sponsors and longs to have such luxuries as a car to get back and forth to workouts and to upgrade her skates once in a while. “It’s hard to jog everywhere,” says the skater who was ranked top-three in the world in three events last season. “It’s not far to the (Olympic Oval), but it adds up twice a day and I’m always getting sick in the winter from breathing in the cold.”

Canada’s Olympic champion, long-track speed skater Catriona Le May Doan, also

“Whether it’s \$1,000 or \$5,000, it gives athletes a boost to have somebody say, ‘we believe in you.’”

While the average amateur athlete’s basic living, training, and competition costs vary tremendously from sport to sport, according to the Canadian Sport Centre Calgary (CSCC), most athletes have costs over \$26,800 per year (see sidebar).

Athletes who earn a top international ranking standard (determined by their national federation) receive funding of \$13,200 per year. That means even our best athletes start the season a minimum of \$13,600 short. “Athletes have a couple of options,” says Colin Young, vice president of marketing and sponsorship for the CSCC. “The bank of mom and dad, or fundraising—anything from working bingos, to planning their own fundraising events. If it is