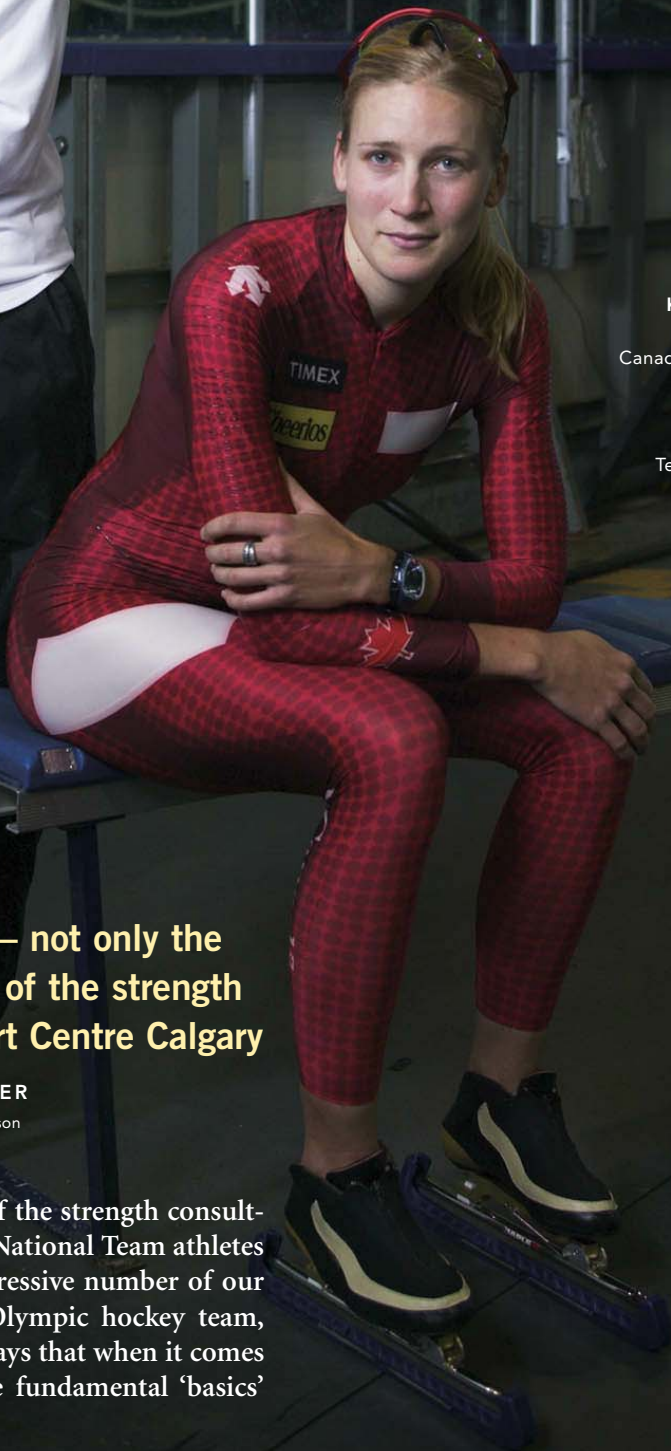


In The **WEIGHT ROOM** with Canada's Olympians



KRISTINA GROVES
2002 Olympian
Canadian speed skating team

KELLY BECHARD
2002 Olympian
Team Canada Hockey

Swifter, Higher, Stronger — not only the Olympic motto but the goal of the strength trainers at the Canadian Sport Centre Calgary

BY REGAN LAUSCHER

Photography by Ewan Nicholson

Jason Poole and Matt Jordan are two of the strength consultants who work with many of Canada's National Team athletes and coaches. Poole, who trains an impressive number of our top athletes, including the women's Olympic hockey team, luge, men's water polo, and wrestling, says that when it comes to developing world-class athletes, the fundamental 'basics' become increasingly important.

MAYFAIR

full

The basics are the priority in almost every athlete. We want to make sure that they become more athletic ... a more well-rounded athlete." Poole explains, "The more athletic they are, the easier it becomes for them to adapt and excel during competition regardless of unexpected stimuli such as changes in weather, routine, or equipment."

Jordan, who trains speed skaters, agrees that when push comes to shove, the only thing that matters in the end is whether or not the athlete performs better in their sport. "Your body adapts to a certain stimulus, and just because you get strong in one specific movement does not necessarily mean you will be better in your specific sport or event. I've seen athletes who can stand on a Swiss ball and do a hundred squats, but that doesn't necessarily mean that when they get on the ice, they have the core strength to stabilize their body when they explode off the starting line," he explains.

Kristina Groves, one of Canada's best distance skaters is benefiting from the training. "Matt really tries to incorporate speed skating into the design of our weight-training programs. We do so many different exercises that complement our sport such as jumps, single leg squats, core exercises, even upper body, all with different tempos to mimic skating."

Realizing that on top of fine-tuning the body's motor movements and the need to make athletes stronger and faster, Poole and Jordan pour their energy into the careful construction of training programs that target an athlete's peak performance for a major event such as the World Championships or the Olympics. The program incorporates all aspects of strength training, including flexibility, core, explosive power, and hand-eye coordination.

"When planning for an upcoming year, I'm looking at where they need to be their best and then work backwards on developing the qualities they need to get there," explains Jordan. "What do I need to manipulate so that they are going to be more effective on the ice on that specific day of competition?"

Earlier in the program cycle, athletes work a lot more on developing all perspectives of strength training, and then as they get closer to the Olympic games, they become more specific with strength-training components that they need in their sport.

With the off-season in most winter sports being longer than the competition season, and the span between each Olympic games stretching four years, it becomes a challenge

for the trainers to break up the monotony of long hours spent in the weight room during hot summer months. "During our summer training, when we were working on our aerobic capacity, Jason decided that during activities such as warm-up and circuit training we would use 'heavy sticks' (sticks with hockey pucks taped on the blade), which allows us to continuously work on our wrist strength, which will translate into a stronger shot," explains Kelly Bechard of Canada's

CSCC strength coaches Jason Poole (left) and Matt Jordan at Mount Royal College's new fitness centre.



"Your body adapts to a certain stimulus, and just because you get strong in one specific movement does not necessarily mean you will be better in your specific sport or event."

gold-medal-winning women's hockey team.

Creativity in keeping the mind focused and motivated becomes a priority on top of making muscles big and bodies fast. Adding another sport element also sharpens balance and coordination skills. Luge athletes do gymnastics on a regular basis, as well as swimming exercises that mimic specific movements in the sport. Athletes enjoy this variety. "It's surprising how your body reacts to different types of activities," says Eric Pothier of Canada's luge team. "I didn't expect to be sore after Tae Box or swimming. Not only is it a change of scenery but it is extremely effective training."

Cross-training, whether it's Tae-Box, yoga, rollerblading, hiking, golf, or even paintball,


not only enhances and develops all aspects of the body but also stimulates the mind and maintains interest. Realizing, of course, that different athletes respond differently to training, Jordan and Poole make it their first priority to understand and accommodate each athlete's needs. "When you get to the highest level, you may have people who are extremely good in their sport, but when it comes to the weight room, not everybody is a) going to have the same interest in it, b) be able to do the same work load and, c) respond the same way," says Jordan. "That's where the real art of strength coaching comes

in—being able to adjust and adapt your program to suit an individual's needs."

Designing a training program for a world-class athlete involves an entire team of sport experts who together consider the needs of the athlete in terms of performance, injury, and long-term development and growth. Input from the athlete, primary coach, strength coach, physiotherapist, and sport scientist is vital in ensuring improvement and increased performance on a long-term basis.

"What's important is that everyone works in concert. So I'm not doing something that's going to mess up what the coach wants to do or what the sport scientist told the coach to do," says Jordan.

Cooperation, dedication, and trust are the principles on which success is found. "They [the athletes] put a lot of faith in us and, to be honest, we put a lot of faith in ourselves in the sense that, in the end, we hope that what we do works."

So many people involved. One goal. No guarantees. 

For more information about the CSCC visit www.canadiansportcentre.com