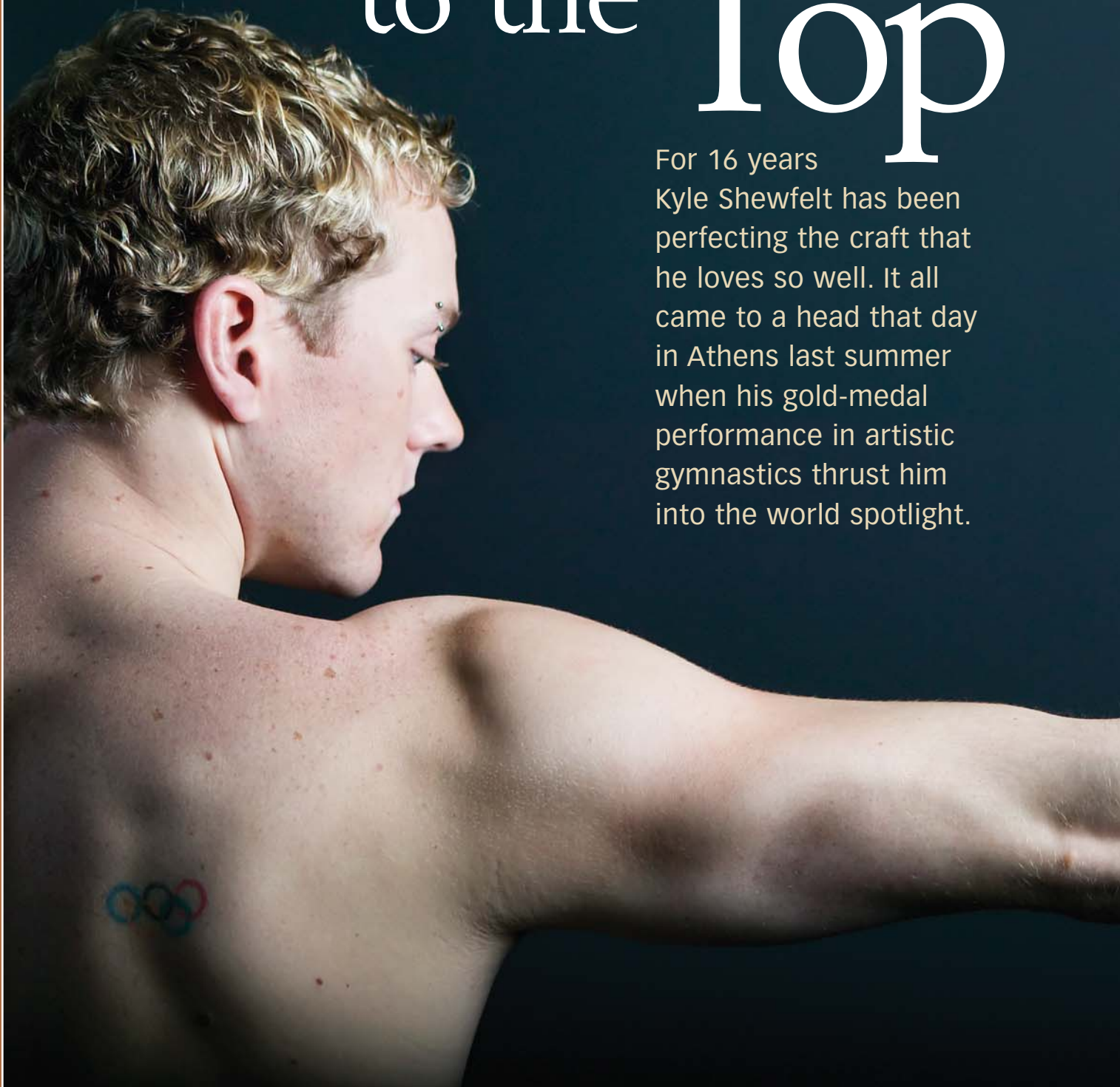


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cover

Tumbling to the Top

For 16 years
Kyle Shewfelt has been perfecting the craft that he loves so well. It all came to a head that day in Athens last summer when his gold-medal performance in artistic gymnastics thrust him into the world spotlight.



“IT STILL SEEMS LIKE A DREAM,”

Shewfelt says. But he knows that all of the hype and media attention is for real as he filters through hundreds of phone calls and e-mails daily. And it never seems to stop. He is one of the most in-demand athletes today, and he is taking it very seriously—so seriously that when he is not making public appearances or training, he is perfecting his PowerPoint presentations. “I have 16 years to map out, and in order for me to be an effective speaker, I need to take the time to make my presentations as interesting and inspiring as possible.”

This softly spoken, articulate, 22-year-old Calgarian is handling all of the acclamation like a duck to water. Some would crumble amidst all of the media hype, but Shewfelt seems to thrive on it. “I enjoy it. It has been a mad rush, but I like meeting people and talking about my experiences. It is really cool that I am an inspiration to many up-and-coming athletes.”

When International Management Group (IMG), one of the world’s largest sports marketing organizations, signed Shewfelt up after the Olympics, it was feared that western Canada had lost its famous Olympian to the east, but it hasn’t proved to be the case. Still keeping close ties to his old gym club—Altadore—and the Canadian Sport Centre Calgary, he makes a lot of charity and corporate appearances in and around Calgary. Now that he is back in training, at the University of Calgary, and a homeowner (he and his girlfriend, Melissa, recently bought a house in the city), he is consolidating his roots in his hometown.

While Shewfelt is enjoying being a celebrity athlete, he realizes that he must start focusing on 2005 and beyond. “I took two months off after the Olympics, which is the longest time I have not trained. I am pacing myself, as it isn’t a sport that you get back to quickly. But I have the time, as I won’t compete again until the summer.” He has set his sights on the World University Games in August in Turkey and then the World Championships in Australia in November. His goal is to walk away with the World Champion mantle in Melbourne, but with a field of over 200 competitors, he knows it will be challenging.

“This year is a transition year for me, as I think about and start preparing for the 2008 Olympics. I have the two competitions this

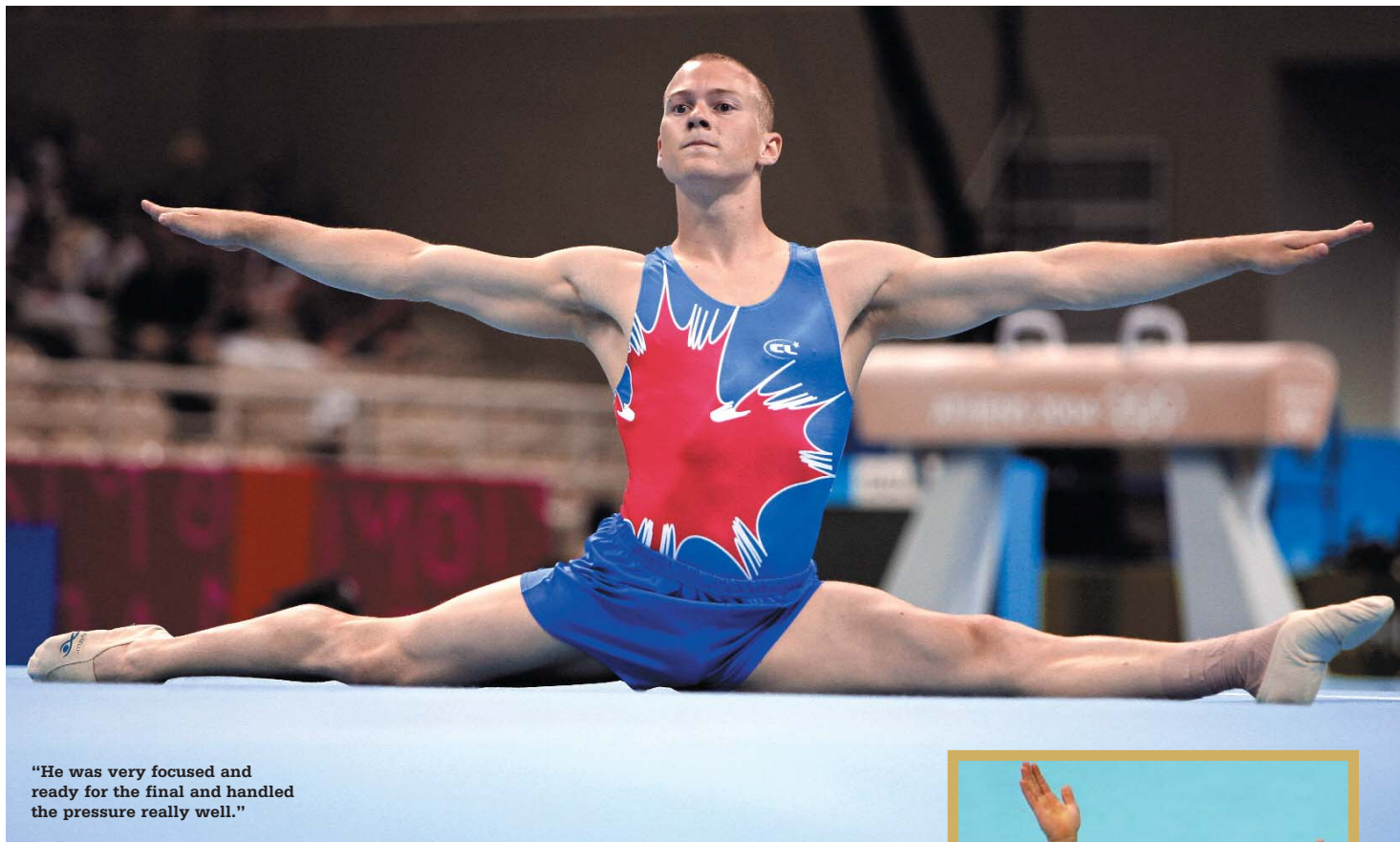


Shewfelt's sights are set on the 2005 World Championship and Beijing in 2008

year and then the Commonwealth Games in 2006 and the Worlds in 2007.” Although Shewfelt’s ultimate goal is to defend his Olympic title in Beijing, he knows the steps he has to take to get there. “I have a vision of what I want to accomplish; just as it was to medal in Athens, now it is to be World Champion.”

When asked what motivates him, it is simply his love of the sport. How he became involved in gymnastics has been well documented. “I started to do cartwheels and flips around the house. A neighbour knew a local gym club, so my mom signed me up. I had found my sport and passion.” He started training under Kelly Manjak’s wing and at eight started competing. In his two favourite events, floor and vault, he became a confident and reliable com-





"He was very focused and ready for the final and handled the pressure really well."

petitor. "Kyle had a natural ability for the sport," Manjak recalls. "He had all the qualities needed to succeed in gymnastics—strength, flexibility, quickness—and he was totally aware of his body."

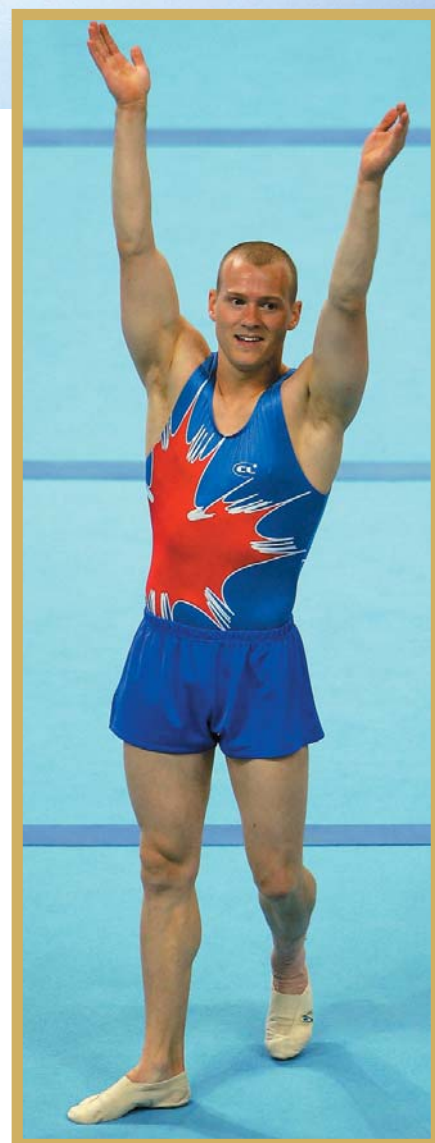
At 14 he competed internationally and started to acquire impressive results in youth events, including second in the floor event and fourth on the vault at the World Youth Games in Moscow in 1998. That year also saw him finish first in the youth Elite Canada event. From 1999, as a senior, his impressive performances on the World Cup circuit earned him enough top-ranking results to go to the Sydney Olympics in 2000, four years before he was expected to compete in the Olympic Games. Although he did not make the event finals, he showed that he was a serious prospect in international gymnastics. After Sydney he took several national awards, a gold medal in the 2002 Commonwealth Games, and a top-three placement in World Cup competition. His ticket to Athens was assured.

Canada had never won a medal in gymnastics before, and we were still waiting for that first gold when Shewfelt stepped onto the floor. The pressure on him was intense, but he kept telling himself that "people don't expect great things from those who are capable of achieving them." Physically and emotionally he knew that he was prepared. He spent the day prior to competing keeping to himself, visualizing his routine and trying to downplay the pressure and to think positive-

"People don't expect great things from those who are capable of achieving them."

ly. Sixteen years of training all came together that day and nobody could have been more proud than Manjak. The recipient of the 2004 Jack Donohue Coach of the Year Award, he knew that Shewfelt had the ability to medal. "He was very focused and ready for the final and handled the pressure really well."

With that gold-medal day behind him—and that controversial fourth placing on the vault—2004 has been all that Shewfelt could have dreamed. Approaching a new year with a new coach, Tony Smith, the Olympic team coach—Manjak left Altadore last September for a coaching position in Ontario—he looks forward to the future whether it's chasing that coveted World Champion title, competing in Beijing, or pursuing a new career path. At 22 he certainly has time to consider his options. "There are so many opportunities for me that the future is open." Speaking and motivating others is one path that he can see himself following one day: "I would like to use the knowledge and tools that I have gained to help others feel inspired and motivated." **i**



Competition photos courtesy CP PHOTO. (Previous Page) Hair and makeup by JADE CARRY, CHROME HAIR DESIGN.