

Cashing in on Olympimania to Promote your Club

By Sue Ellis

Olympimania strikes every four years and our obscure sport gets a few minutes of lime light via the heroes, trials, and tribulations of the best athletes in the world. In 2002 thousands donned soul patches to cheer Apolo Ohno, in 2006 little girls across Canada want to be just like Clara Hughes, and the success of Quebec's short track skaters over many Olympics has meant the sport has approached mainstream in that province. It is probably our single best advertising tool and we have to make the most of it. I often hear, "Just wait till the Olympics. That'll bring them out." Sure it may bring out a few more, but are we really set to tap the full potential the Olympics can bring, especially in this economy. Maybe some have come in the past but today's economy presents new challenges where less disposable income forces folks to make hard choices. So when little Johnny and Sarah see Apolo Ohno and Clara Hughes flying around the ice winning medals and getting famous, and they announce to mom and dad that they want to try that too, your club needs to have a structure in place to:

- 1) Let them know there is indeed a club in their area
- 2) Let them know how to contact you
- 3) Have a structured program in place for them to learn the sport
- 4) Skates for people to try out
- 5) A follow up process that hooks them for good and is affordable

And, your club shouldn't wait until after the Olympics to set the wheels in motion. Now is the time to start planning. The more your community hears about speed skating in advance of the Games, the more likely they are to tune in to it.

So, how do you get the word out and start the buzz in advance, and then follow up after the Games. Your club can take on anything from mega publicity public events to small scale flyers in schools, rec centers, arenas, public areas in town. National governing bodies often make some resources available to help promote, such as Speed skate Canada's Festivals on Ice. You might also want to check out other community resources and /or consider partnering with other sports in your area to put on multi sport events (mini Olympics), or partner with community centers that runs kids programs to share in funding an event and make the kids part of the event.

One of the biggest resources we have is the young skaters themselves but we often overlook them when it comes to involving them in promotions and fundraising, thinking that's adult work. Along with the adult volunteers putting together some promo events, why not have the kids organize their own promo event. Bet they'll do a great job!

Here is a list of things your club can consider doing to ensure you get the most out of the Games hype and fill the rink with speed skaters:

- Skate-a-thon to raise funds for a local charity
 - Either choose one charity or have the kids choose which charity they want their donations to go to.
 - Contact the charity to have them endorse and help promote it
 - Invite people from the local charity chapter to the Skate-a-thon and have them actively participate by leading first lap, firing the starting gun, counting laps

- President (or representative) of local charity challenges mayor (or other city official) to a race
 - Get local news coverage, or at least take photos to send to paper
 - Invite local top hockey team to participate in the skate-a-thon
- Community Mini Olympics
 - Can include speed skating as well as cross country skiing, mini downhill race for kids, hockey shoot and score, toboggan races, figure skating demo
 - Community Marathon
 - Have individual challenges, team challenges, family challenges, different distances
 - Skating Under the lights/Stars
 - Contact city officials to flood an outdoor or clear a lake or pond
 - Offer music and hot chocolate
 - Have draws for prizes
 - Make it a costume event ('Skating in the 1800's', 50's hippies, etc)
 - Organize a community winter festival or make sure your club has a presence in an existing festival where you can run a booth or event of your choice.
 - Organize an Olympic snow or ice sculpture day or get it included in your community winter festival
 - Inter or Intra School Skills Challenges and Projects you can ask the school to get involved in:
 - Have schools or classes within a school keep track of number of laps skated during a phys-ed class
 - Set up a city school skating competition
 - Have classes or schools 'adopt' an athlete to follow through the Games
 - Write an Olympic athlete a good luck message
 - Do a mural depicting Olympic sports and favourite athletes or have kids draw sports in class to decorate the classroom for the Games.
 - Make model athletes out of paper mache or cardboard
 - Have someone go in to the schools to make a presentation on speed skating, complete with flyers, equipment, video, giving each student a 'Try for Free' ticket.
 - Design some Olympic based word games (crosswords, unscramble letters) and give them to schools to use as learning tools. (*see below)
 - Community Challenges
 - Can be done during any one of the events listed above or during the town's popular hockey team games in between periods
 - Who is the fastest 100m skater in town?
 - Celebrity / Corporate pursuits
 - Skate to Vancouver
 - Have your club keep track of the mileage skated per training session and track it on a big map in the rink
 - Challenge schools to skate to Vancouver and keep track on a big map in school
 - Set up slide board in malls or public events and have you skaters take turns (determine a number of slides to equal one kilometer)

Whatever event your club chooses to get the public excited about speed skating, you will need to be prepared to follow up.

Give out flyers at every event with a short blurb that makes speed skating sounds appealing and exciting (don't go in to a long detailed account of history, rules, equipment, etc) and who to contact, when, and where. Make sure there is someone designated and clearly visible to answer questions and give out info flyers. Make skates available if possible for people to try out at events or on their first visit to your club. Offer a 'Try Speed Skating' session at each event and set aside a 'Try Speed Skating' day at your club.

Invite past Olympians and sports celebrities (whether speed skaters or not) to be part of your events. If you have an Olympian in town who has won a medal, ask them to do a 'Meet a Medallist and See an Olympic Medal' promo.

Feed the local media lots of info, and do it often. Give them outlines of material for use in articles or write them out completely and give them to them. Ask them to write or give them pre-written features to run on local aspiring skaters.

Feel free to add your ideas to the message board topic at: <http://ellisedge.yuku.com/forums/13>

Olympic scramble:

Unscramble the letters to find words associated with the Olympic Games

segdkatnipse
uroecnvua
elmad
lbodsbe
dipomu
nohbtial
swilterh
psrmsnhsptioa
gule
ieogpnn eeoynmcr
malfe
oyhekc