



## Athletes Advocate at the 2006 Commonwealth Games

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The Athletes Advocate role has been assumed by many lawyers in the past and for each Games, we take on new challenges while gaining valuable experience. It is the accumulation of these valuable lessons that has made Canada effective in support of its athletes and Mission Staff. I have had the wonderful opportunity of fulfilling the Athlete Advocate role at Major Games and the following approach is something new that was used at the 2006 Commonwealth Games, and an approach I anticipate using in future Games.

By way of background I should note that prior to each Major Games, an orientation session is held for team managers and members of the Mission Staff team. These meetings are normally held at a conference centre and it provides an opportunity for Team Canada to meet and greet each other. During these sessions, the Athlete Advocate is given an opportunity to present to the group about his/her role. We normally get about 20 minutes to present at these meetings.

Although these meetings provide an opportunity to meet with the team managers, a challenge that we face relates to the lack of time to explain the role in full detail. The other issue that we have to face is the situation where the person who assumes the team manager role at the Games is not the one who attends at the orientation. So although we make some good friends, the information that was presented usually ends up getting lost in the mix.

To rectify this situation, I took a different approach for the 2006 Commonwealth Games, after I arrived in Melbourne. When each team arrived, I met with the athletes to explain my role. This is normally what is done at the Games. I then asked each team manager and coach to attend at a private individual meeting with me so we could explore areas of concerns, determine protocol for dealing with issues as they arise and more importantly, ensure that they all had their rule books for their particular sport. It was also vital for me to make sure that the coaches and team managers were aware of the steps they would have to take in the event that there was a problem off and on the competition field.

Each session lasted 20-30 minutes and the coaches and team managers were asked to bring the rule books for their sport with them. This was also an opportunity for me to identify what problems the coaches and team managers may have had with an athlete or athletes leading up to the Games, as well as areas of concern during the Games.

This approach had not been taken before at the Games, but was extremely well received by the coaches and team managers. They felt confident and prepared to deal with issues as they arose and I felt confident that the team's interests were being looked after. This approach was of great benefit to the overall team and I anticipate using it again at future Games.

**Lesson learned:** make sure that each coach and team manager has a copy of the rule book with them as they leave for competition, but more importantly, make sure that they know what is in it. Although a lot of time may be spent for the initial on-the-ground sessions, it will help reduce the amount of time that the Athlete Advocate will spend trying to understand the rules of a particular sport if and when things go wrong.