

On Your Marks...

WHEN CANADIAN OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC ATHLETES MARCH PROUDLY INTO THE STADIUM IN BEIJING THIS SUMMER, SOME WILL BE THERE AS A RESULT OF THE DEDICATED WORK OF TWO WESTERN LAW STUDENTS.

BY SUSANNA EAYRS

DAVID REYNOLDS AND STEVEN TEAL MANAGE SPORT SOLUTION, A PROGRAM OF ATHLETESCAN, RUN OUT OF WESTERN LAW. THEY PROVIDE MUCH NEEDED ASSISTANCE TO CANADIAN AMATEUR ATHLETES IN RESOLVING SPORTS-RELATED LEGAL ISSUES.

"We help them negotiate their way through the often complex world of amateur sport," says Teal. "There's more to being an athlete than just training. They have to also understand contracts, funding, discipline issues, doping rules and the appeals process."

Teal says while they can't offer legal advice, they can lay out a course of action to help amateur athletes understand all the resources and avenues available to them.

"We offer support throughout the dispute resolution process and give guidance on how to avoid conflict and understand the fair administration of sport."

Sport Solution was founded in 1996 when the Faculty of Law at Western joined forces with AthletesCAN, the Sports Law

Centre, and the Dispute Resolution Centre to create a not-for-profit program to help high performance Canadian amateur athletes resolve legal conflicts.

It is the only program of its kind in North America and Sport Solution offers its services free of charge to Canadian amateur athletes who are members of a national team.

"Often amateur athletes don't have the financial means to hire a lawyer. Sometimes our guidance is the only advice they receive, so it's really important for us to clearly explain the issues and help them understand their rights," says Reynolds.

In more serious cases, athletes are strongly encouraged to retain legal counsel and are referred to the list of legal representatives that have made themselves available on the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada website.

But the goal of Sport Solution is for issues to be resolved before that point.

"It's important for athletes to maintain positive relationships with their team and sports organization, and mediation is a great route," explains Reynolds. "Where an athlete's dispute is resolved via mediation as opposed to arbitration, the all-

important trust relationship between the athlete and their organization is maintained."

Sport Solution recently helped a national team athlete after their government-assisted funding was revoked when the athlete did not properly report their injury.

"We explained the appeal process, helped them file the appropriate forms and made sure the athlete was ready for battle. The process resulted in the athlete and organization coming to a mutually agreed upon middle ground in front of a mediator." This outcome provided the athlete with the financial means to continue to pursue their ultimate dream of the Olympics.

Calls to Sport Solution have increased leading up to the Games in Beijing. Athletes have been inquiring about various issues, ranging from funding to team selection.

Team selection issues are a common theme building up to events such as the Olympics. "Athletes want to know why they didn't make a team; it's a huge issue," says Teal. "We help them understand the selection criteria. If the athlete feels there was bias or the criteria was not accurately applied and wants to appeal, we help the athlete formulate their arguments, file the appeal and ensure all timelines are met."

Working at Sport Solution gives students an opportunity to apply practically what they've learned in the classroom. But the experience goes beyond that. "It's very gratifying to help amateur athletes. They really appreciate the work we've done for them. In our own small way we are helping them with their Olympic dream," he says with a grin. "And that's very exciting." **WL**



WESTERN LAW STUDENTS DAVID REYNOLDS (LEFT) AND STEVEN TEAL OF SPORT SOLUTION