



Ombudsperson for Team Canada at the 2010 Winter Paralympic Games

by Jeff Palamar

February 2010



I am excited once again to have the opportunity to be part of Team Canada. My experience in Beijing in 2008 helped define for me what the Ombudsperson really does.

I help solve problems.

These can be classification appeals or challenges, field of play disputes or protests, harassment allegations, interaction conflicts, doping issues, or anywhere things are not running as they should.

I am here to help in anyway I reasonably can, to make the Games better for individual members of Team Canada, and Team Canada as a whole. Some examples of my work in Beijing may help explain:

- I acted as a sounding board in some cases of conflict where people were not getting along, and needed a safe way of dealing with frustrations, to allow a return to a focus on achieving the best possible performance;
- I was the strategic advisor and advocate in some field of play protests launched by other countries against us, to ensure our athletes' interests were protected;
- I dealt with a frustrated athlete who had perceived a violation of the rules by a competing athlete, but after consulting with his coach had decided not to pursue any formal protest. The athlete later had second thoughts, and we had to solve the problem not just by pursuing the protest, but also by resolving the damage to the relationship with the coach;
- I served as the calming influence and advocate for an athlete who "failed" a classification test (his vision was too good on that particular day) and so in the days before the Games were to start, found himself potentially outside looking in and not able to compete;
- I had trouble shooting sessions with the head of one of the sports, who had concerns about changing policy by the Organizing Committee, which led to further discussion about internal politics and different philosophies of the various coaches in the sport;
- I helped calm a troubled athlete who was worried about some potential conflict with a roommate, and unsure how to address these worries without embarrassing anyone or causing a scene;
- I worked with the Friends and Family Program to help supporters of Team Canada, who had traveled so very far, find their way to accommodation, food, competition, special events and tours; and
- I helped move equipment, track down missing luggage, and fulfilled whatever "other duties as assigned" came up.

Interestingly, the one comment I heard repeatedly throughout the Games from athletes, other team members and family alike, was that everyone was really happy I was there, as they felt assured that if something happened, I could offer the necessary help. This assurance and confidence gave those participating the opportunity to focus on their jobs, and not worry, and so



perform at a higher level than otherwise likely would have been the case. Athletes and team members could work on performance. Family and other supporters could enjoy the experience. Everyone had the comfort of knowing that whatever happened, their interests and needs would be taken care of by me and Team Canada.

I am approaching the Vancouver/Whistler Games in a similar way. I am there to make things better. I am there to do whatever I can to allow others to succeed and have the best possible experience, whatever that means to them. This particularly will be important in the pressure of the "Home Games". IF a drug test went awry, IF an athlete was being overly stressed by having 50 family and friends right there and watching, IF a coach/athlete situation were boiling over because of a conflict over training time vs. "experiencing the Games" time, etc., I'll be there to help.

In part it's about comfort, in part it's about ensuring that people know their rights and are reassured that their interests and rights will be protected as need be. Overall, it's about working as part of Team Canada and providing the necessary support and help wherever and whenever it is needed.

It's a 24-7 job, that means I will be available and accessible all the time. I'll be dividing my time between Whistler and Vancouver, in the Villages and at the competition sites and wherever else I am needed. I'm also available before the Games and would be delighted to talk to anyone who needs some help, has some questions, or simply wants to shoot the breeze.

I am very proud to be back, and part of the amazing group of Canadians who make up Team Canada. You really are the best of the best, and I'll do whatever I can to help you achieve your best in Vancouver and Whistler. ■