

March 23, 2020

To all Canoe-kayak athletes training for Tokyo 2020.

I'm writing these words with a heavy heart. Having grown up with a father that was nominated for the 1980 Moscow Olympics and then boycotted a few months before, also having trained and qualified for two different Olympic games which one of them was the result of an unfair doping scandal, I can only imagine and feel the nightmare you are facing right now.

As a few of you know, I am fortunate to be a member of the Canadian Olympic committee Athletes' commission for the past year. Our role is: to represent the voice of Canadian Olympic athletes to the Canadian Olympic Committee Board of Directors, to Sport Canada, to the International Olympic Committee, international sport federations and all other domestic sport organizations. It is instrumental in presenting Canadian athletes' perspectives in areas ranging from athlete rights, safe sport policies, marketing & COC partnership agreements, Olympic team selection policies and much more.

In the past few days, I have been on many calls concerning COVID-19 and the future of the Olympic being held on July 24th in Tokyo. Days before leading to yesterday's decision, the COC was following the lead of the IOC while asking many questions and putting pressure on them to send back some fact-based answers. I was on a call yesterday around 1pm, with our commission members, Tricia Smith (COC president and IOC member), David Shoemaker (CEO), Éric Myles (Chief of sport COC), Dr. Willkinson (Chief medical officer COC) and Marnie Mcbean (Chef the mission Tokyo 2020) to discuss the outcome and the public health measurement that athletes around Canada now face. During this call, Tricia

Smith received the press release of Thomas Bach, the IOC president. In this letter M. Bach said that the decision on postponing the Olympics would be held in four weeks from now. The athletes on the call were disappointed with the timeline and delays implied in the letter. While we appreciated that Thomas Bach's letter leaves open the opportunity for postponement, it also left the option to carry forward with the July 24th date which does not alleviate any of the pressure or stress on athletes globally, nor the organizing committee or stakeholders to carry on. This puts them, their families, and communities at risk. Given the recommendation to not train currently, and for the foreseeable future, and the time period it would take for athletes to retrain, it is not reasonable, ethical, or safe, to expect athletes to be ready for a July 24th start date. Additionally, evidence provided by our Chief Medical Officer, the trajectory of the virus within Canada, and globally, would render a July 24th start date unsafe.

Athletes' commission members, Rosie MacLennan (trampoline), Mark Pearson (Field Hockey), Diana Matherson (Soccer) and Melissa Humana-Paredes (Beach Volleyball) are the four athletes that were on this call that are officially qualified for Tokyo 2020. Their voices were the most important ones while all of us other athletes are now retired from the sport. It was clear that our stance was that we implore the COC to take on leadership towards this pandemic and to protect our Canadian athletes around the country. The unfair ask of the IOC towards the athletes to keep training while being in self isolation or socially distancing themselves as directed by our government was just not viable for all of you that had the slight chance of competing in late July. The unfairness of not being able to train properly compiled with the puzzle of qualification quota before July and public health safety resulted in the decision, we all know today. We commend the COC for taking a solid stance in such uncertain times giving Canadian athletes some certainty while

protecting and prioritizing not only our health but the health of the entire Canadian population.

Although it might look like a very drastic decision, I'd like to point that during the calls we (athletes) had suggested that if there was a vaccine or a massive drop in cases before July 2020 the COC would revisit their decision. It was then noted that conversations at the highest level and data showing that the African continent and South America are just beginning to spike lead to no scenario within 6 to 8 months where it would be safe. So, by removing this suggestion it eliminated any incentive for our athletes to continue training against recommendations of our governments and health officials.

My goal with this message is to point out that in this unprecedented decision that our Canadian sport governing body did use the voices of the athletes to take on this larger-than-sport pandemic.

If you have any other questions or issues concerning this topic, please feel free to get in contact with me.

**Hugues Fournel**

Member of Canadian Olympic Committee Athletes' Commission.

Olympian in London 2012 – Rio 2016