

Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching Online >>>>>

© 2004 Coaching Association of Canada, ISSN 1496-1539

November 2004, Vol. 5, No.1

An Olympic Coach's Journal

by Laryssa Biesenthal

Introduction

Comparatively few Canadian women coach high performance sport. Fewer still achieve an Olympic coaching position. One who did is **Laryssa Biesenthal**, not so long ago a stalwart of Canada's national rowing team and now a successful high performance coach. When Laryssa was appointed to coach Canada's lightweight women's double at the 2004 Olympic Games, the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching* asked her to keep a diary of her Olympic journey. Sharing first-hand a woman's experience in coaching at the highest level would, we thought, provide our readers with a rare look behind the scenes and would shed light on the demands and the rewards of the profession when practised by women.



We are not disappointed. Writing with candour and perception, Laryssa chronicles the meticulous preparation, the commitment, the sheer hard work that turned the double into an outstanding team. She is frank about her triumphs and her disappointments and offers thoughtful reflections on lessons learned and future goals.

The *Journal* is indebted to Laryssa for adding this diary to her heavy Olympic workload. We believe that the effort she put into the task will interest and inspire women coaches at every level of the coaching spectrum. — Sheila Robertson

NOVEMBER 2004 FEATURE

An Olympic Coach's Journal

by Laryssa Biesenthal

I was very fortunate to have the great opportunity to coach Canada's lightweight women's double at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens.

Before I begin, I think it is important that I share some background information about myself so that you have a better understanding of why and how I coach.

I, too, was an Olympic athlete and competed for Canada at the world and Olympic level for six years, from 1995 to 2000, winning silver and bronze medals at four world championships and two Olympic Games. At the 1996 Games, I won a bronze medal in the quad sculls, and after switching disciplines from sculling boats to sweep, I won bronze once again at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. (There are two disciplines in rowing — sculling, which has two oars, one in each hand, and sweep, with one oar in both hands. Boats in sculling are the single, double, and quad. Sweep events are pair, four, and eight.)



I began rowing at the University of British Columbia [UBC] in 1990. Before I picked up an oar, I was one of those athletes who was not very talented. I am one of a family of four kids. The two boys were the excellent athletes when we were growing up. Whether it was ice hockey, baseball, or whatever my brothers chose to do, they did it easily and exceptionally well. My sister was also a natural athlete, excelling at basketball, volleyball, softball, equestrian, and running. Whatever sport she tried out for, she always made the team. Then there was me. ... Sure I tried out for teams, but,

honestly, I was scared. Scared of getting hit in the face with the softball — my parents still laugh at how I used to put the glove in front of my mouth to catch a ball, protecting my braces-filled mouth. In volleyball, my fingers always got bent back; basketball involved moving and bouncing a ball at the same time, and that was difficult for me; equestrian, I was OK; running, I could do that. So I ran around my dad's fields and around Walkerton, Ont., where I grew up, eventually competing at the provincial level. When I moved west to attend UBC, I thought I would run cross country for the school. However, all that changed in September 1990 when I joined some women from my residence in trying out for the rowing team. I fell in love with the sport and have never looked back.

Imagine being from small-town southern Ontario and finding yourself rowing around Stanley Park in the early morning, being on the ocean, surrounded by beautiful scenery, including mountains, and a fabulous cityscape. I loved being in a boat. I loved the technical aspect of the sport, always pursuing the perfectly executed stroke, the drive to always push yourself to get better and fitter, and working together to make the boat go fast.

In rowing, length of stroke is important, which is why most rowers are quite tall and long of limb, and thus usually capable of a long stroke. At 5', 7.5", I am not a tall woman and, thus, I was not a coach's dream athlete. Early in my career, more often than not, I was told that I was too small and short to row. I took this feedback and went out alone, spending hours in my single scull learning how to make the boat go as fast as possible, perfecting my technique.

I have been coaching almost as long as I have been involved in the sport. It was a part-time job that fit nicely around my full-time training schedule. I coached at all levels from learn-to-row to high school, master, club, university, and special needs. Since my retirement in 2000, I have coached at the Pan American Games, the World Universiade, the Commonwealth Championships, and the World Under-23 Championships and continued to put in many hours at high school, club, and university regattas.

I bring to my coaching all the lessons learned while I was an athlete. Many of the values I have and methods I use in coaching are the result of what I learned from my own coaches, including things I thought coaches did well and things I believe should never happen at the high performance level. Drawing on knowing how to make a boat go fast and my experiences of sitting on numerous start lines at world championships, World Cups, Pan American Games, and Olympic Games, I hope to help the athletes I coach to be able to get as much enjoyment and personal satisfaction and success from being the best rowers they are able to be.

Laryssa's Olympic Journal

December 30, 2003 – Named as coach of lightweight women, eight-month contract through to the Olympics. Yippee! I am so excited. I am looking forward to the challenge of working with these women. As an athlete, I had the opportunity to live out my Olympic dream; since retiring, it has been my goal to help other athletes reach their potential and fulfil their own dreams.

I want the athletes to get as much enjoyment and satisfaction from the sport as I did. I know I will run a fair camp and that technically, physically, and mentally, I know what it takes to stand on the podium at the Olympics. Now I want to share the enjoyment and experiences I had in the sport to fast-track the athletes I am coaching, to be the best, faster rowers they possibly can.

January 4, 2004 – First day of Olympic camp. Five athletes competing for two seats to represent Canada at the Games. Boat qualified for the Olympics last year by coming fifth at the worlds, 9.53 seconds out of first. Go over training and selection for the next period. Goal is to be the best we can be as individuals. The top two individuals will make the fastest double.

Will have the athletes go through a rotation this next period, meaning all five will row together for a period of time. Will also do group sessions in the weight room and dryland work on the Concept II (rowing ergometer). Once a week we will have a meeting to discuss training, what is going well, where the athletes would like to see change. Ask each athlete for her technical and physical goals throughout this next period.

End of January – First round of selection over; group went from five to four. One athlete really stepped it up, winning five out of six races, losing one by less than a second. She topped it off by pulling a personal best and a solid score on the Concept II a couple of days later!

In my experience, during the Olympic year some athletes really step it up and excel, while others succumb to the pressures. Instead of just putting their heads down and training, pushing themselves as hard as they can go, some sit and think themselves out of being the best they can be. I believe this is what makes and breaks Olympic champions; the difference between the doers and the thinkers. Try not to think too much — just do.

February – Two-week camp in Sacramento, Cal. Nice to be in the sun and warmth. A couple of the athletes are having injury problems. Is it the way I am coaching the stroke? Am I emphasizing something wrong? I had many injuries as an athlete, and now the athletes I am coaching are getting injured. These are some of the questions going through my head. I check with the team doctors and the other coaches. They tell me that I am on the right page with training and doing core ball exercises. I am coaching correctly; the athletes' injuries are the result of years of training, rowing, and utilizing incorrect muscle groups. With a group of only four athletes, of course it looks a lot more obvious when more than one is out with an injury! We are coming up with ways to do the work on the bike and different exercises in the gym to simulate

the rowing motion. I also mention to them that when I was injured, I used visualization to try to keep my mind "rowing sharp". On a good note, I am starting to see the technical changes move SLOWLY in the right direction.

March/April – All four are working really hard; some are out for longer than anticipated with injuries, but still doing lots of good work cross training. Continuing to see improvements with technique and boat speed. Moving to Ontario for final selection and preparations for first World Cup.

May 9 – Selection is always difficult, probably more so in the Olympic year because for most athletes it is the last selection after four years, and for many, it's the end of their days as an athlete. When I was an athlete, I wanted fair selection — black and white, no grey areas, no favoured athletes, no special circumstances for any athlete. Each had to prove her way into a boat. This gave me confidence sitting on the start line that each individual sitting in my boat had earned her way there. I carry over these values as a coach.

The selection model we followed shows us who the top two individuals are. In the model we will use, each woman will race with the other three women in camp. At the end, we will see who moves the double the fastest with each other person. This will prove to me, and the others in the group, that you have what it takes to make the double go as fast as possible, no matter who else is in the boat with you. I believe these two individuals will then develop into the fastest crew as the selection model removes all of the subjectivity. I believe this will transfer into confidence in the other person you are sitting in the boat with. No doubts. You both have earned your right to be sitting in your seat.

The two chosen have been first and second as individuals on three different occasions over the past year and they ended one, two again. Thus, the double is picked. Now the focus switches from trying to be the top two individuals to being the best double. Now we're getting ready for our European tour where we will race at three different regattas to begin the preparation for Athens.

When I was competing, post selection some athletes would say, "I have sacrificed so much to be here, and now I am being cut. Let me have another chance." First of all, how is pursuing a passion a sacrifice? Sure, you have put other areas of your life on hold, but did you not have the choice to do this? Who made you pursue this dream of competing at the Olympics? You did — no one else. If, on the day, you are beaten by someone else, then someone on that day is better. End of story. At the Olympic Regatta, there is no second chance. Selection is similar. You must be up for it on any given day and ready to be at your best. As on race day, there are no second chances. I carry over this belief as a coach.

May 22–23 – Duisburg, Germany. First international regatta of 2004; race open category so they don't have to weigh in (lightweight women must weigh in at 57 kg average) so soon after flying. We arrive just three days before the first race. I want the athletes to take the least amount of risk of getting sick while travelling at the start of our European tour. Thus, I think it's better for them to not have to worry about weight but travel comfortably and race the open category, knowing they won't face any of their future competitors. The experience of going to the start line will still be of great value.

Four times on the start line, four wins! Learn a lot from this regatta. How the three of us approach race day, who gets nervous, who gets quiet, who gets giddy, and how each responds to different scenarios. I am attempting to establish patterns and norms here at Duisburg and at World Cup #2 in Munich, Germany, and World Cup #3 in Lucerne, Switzerland, of how we will perform on race day, so that when we get to the Olympics, we each have our race day routine established.

May 27–29 – First race as Canadian Lightweight Double of 2004. World Cup #2 in Munich. Twenty-three entries racing for the first time against competitors we will meet at the Olympics.

For the double, Munich is excellent racing. Again along this journey to the Olympics, we decide to go out and learn as many lessons as we can. For example, what our competitors are like, race profiles of different crews, where our race plan needs more emphasis, evaluation of pre-race warm up. As well, each individual has her own personal technical goals to try to maintain to help the boat go fast.

Result: Second to Germany, last year's world champions. Best of all is how the women raced, really gutsy, never giving up, and really starting to ingrain technical changes while under pressure. A great start to the 2004 race season!

From my experience as a high performance athlete, the first World Cup at the start of each year is similar to going for a swim, dipping your toe into the water, checking the temperature. If you come out of your first race 'way off the pace (that is, dipping into freezing cold water), you go home, or to your next training camp, and go back to the drawing board because something isn't working. Seating order in the boat? preparation? taper? If you dip your big toe in and do OK, what worked well? You also question the competition. Who is here? Are there some of the top athletes or boats to get a true indication of your speed? I found as an athlete that I would always leave the regatta hungry for more. If we did poorly, what could we improve on? What, if anything, went well? Go to the next camp or period and put our heads down and train like crazy. If we did well, we would also train harder because we knew all the crews would train extra hard to catch up. We, too, had to step it up to stay on top.

The experiences of never being content as an athlete are ingrained in me today as a coach. In my experience, you should go into a regatta with a goal. The obvious one: to go out and race hard. But also personal technical goals. For example, sit up the entire race, hold the knees, swing. Keep the races process-oriented.

May 29–June 14 – Training camp in Erba, Italy. Awesome! Lots of good work and technical changes made, really starting to come together as a double simply by rowing and spending time together in the boat. By the end of camp, the double have been in the boat together a month, and the learning curve is still going straight up, as they are still getting used to rowing together. Some of the doubles they are racing against have been together for a number of years and some are, like us, a relatively new combination.

June 15–20 – Move to Lucerne for World Cup #3. Our last chance to learn something about racing before the Olympic regatta. Carrying on with the theme of learning something about themselves as a double and their competition every time the boat is put in the water. Every race or row is an opportunity or a step on the way to making yourself the best rower you can be. This World Cup has gold, silver, and bronze medallist boats entered from last year's worlds, so will be a good indication of the calibre of competition.

To my eye, which is probably biased, the double is moving well. The German and Romanian doubles also look good. The Australians have an injury in their camp, and thus their top double will not be racing. All in all, with 18 entries, should be some good racing.

Result: Win their heat, win their semi, WIN the FINAL! A great regatta for the double, and again all three of us learned a great deal. One of the lessons learned is that they are a competitive double in an extremely tough field. If they take care of what is going on in their boat, the speed and the results will take care of themselves. You can only control how *you* move your boat, and if you do this to the best of your ability, you have to be happy with that. If another boat moves faster, but you still race a good race, then for that day, that boat was better. Today, we were the best boat on the day.

I, too, learn some lessons throughout this tour. I have established my pre-race routine as a coach, how I go about writing the taper, which workouts the athletes thought worked for them during this period, how I act, and what I do on race day. I tell them to enjoy the win and their feelings today. When we get on the plane tomorrow, all three of us should get excited about going home, putting our heads down, and working on getting even faster.

I think about how as an athlete I had so many great experiences over my six years representing Canada internationally. But I must honestly say that today felt so good when the women pulled into the dock beaming, so happy about what they had accomplished. I am so proud of them and so happy for them, of how hard they have worked over these past months, and today of how they raced. It's the best feeling!



June 22 – Where can we improve over the next eight weeks until the Olympics begin? Had a talk with both athletes and discussed where we go from here. Everything is brought out in the open — mental prep, physical prep, right down to whether or not the two of them will walk in the Opening Ceremony. We are having the mindset of leaving no stone unturned. Trying to be as best prepared as we can.

June 22–July 28 – Training camp takes place in London, Ont. The women work really hard through this period. I ask a lot of them, and they go out and really try hard, whether it is technical changes I ask of them or tougher workouts. I am really impressed by the work ethic and dedication of both athletes.

July 28 – Today we depart Canada for Europe! First stop, Milan, Italy, and then we catch a bus to Erba for our final training camp — same place we did our training camp before heading to Lucerne for the World Cup, a little over a month ago.

July 29–August 7 – The women put forth a great deal of effort with their training through this final period, and once again we have a great two weeks in Erba. Preparation is pretty much finished, and now comes the fun part — the final pieces of work, the taper, and then the racing! As an athlete, I loved this final stage of the journey, the final steps getting ready to race. I loved to race! The time when all the hard work and preparation is put on the line to see who can come out best on the day.

Now that I am coaching, I feel completeness. The three of us have worked really hard, and as I go through the checklist of what we could improve on coming out of the win in Lucerne, I see that everything on that list has been worked on and improved.

August 8 – Row in the morning, pack the trailer. The boats leave for the two-day journey on the trailer to Athens. At 4 p.m., bus departs, taking athletes, coaches, support staff to Milan airport to fly into Athens, where we go through accreditation and move into the Olympic Village.

August 9 – Wake up in the morning and walk through Village to breakfast. The Village is great, buildings and layout really well done. Looks very similar to the Sydney Olympic Village, same buildings and layout. However, this Village has ancient ruins and an ancient aqueduct. There is a beautiful gym and a pool on-site for the athletes. I can see myself spending hours burning out my own thoughts in the gym.

Staging takes place, Canadian Olympic Committee orientation, security briefing, and then we catch the bus to the course. A 55-minute ride to the venue. The venue is great. Absolutely beautiful course and buildings. The women and I find where the boat will be racked and then walk through the venue finding out where everything is: weigh-in area, lounge, resting area, cafeteria, showers and change room, boat weigh-in area, storage. We walk over to the 2 km course: outstanding! Our boats have not arrived yet so we catch the bus home and do a cross training session.

August 10 – Rig the boat up, and the double goes out for their first row on the Olympic course!

August 10–12 – This is the final stage of the taper, so the women are rowing once or twice a day, short in duration, keeping in touch with race pace.

The women test the start system out. (At the start, each lane has a person holding the stern of the boat to keep the boat in place and all boats even off the start. The start system comes out of the water and then the bow of the boat is put in it and it holds the boat straight in the lane. When the start horn goes off, the “clogg”, as it is called, drops back down under water, and boats begin racing.) They back the boat into the start, the system sounds, and the clogg comes up, pushing the boat right out of the water and, in the process, putting a hole in the boat!

Things happen, and it is all about how you deal with them. This is something I learned from my coach over my six years with the national team. Around race day, you cannot control all the extenuating circumstances, but you do your best to deflect all the pressures and stressors onto you, the coach, to keep the athletes on task, focused, and ready to race. The starter did not mean to sound the system and put a hole in the boat. It was an accident. Thus, you do the best you can with the cards you are dealt. Sure it was not ideal to be fixing a hole in the boat three days before race day, but that is why we have the boatman on-site.



Not to worry. We have a great boatman who fixes up the boat, and it looks like new.

The draw came out today. We are Heat #3 at 8:44 a.m., on August 15. Our draw is Lane 1, Cuba; Lane 2, Australia (silver medalists at last year's world championships); Lane 3, Canada; Lane 4, Denmark; Lane 5, Argentina; Lane 6, Great Britain.

Three more days!

August 13 – Opening Ceremony day! The women begin racing in two days! We discussed the Opening when we returned from Europe in June. I talked about what would help the athletes be at their best on race day. Since the regatta starts on the 14th, with the doubles the first race on the 15th, I asked them to consider the heat and the lateness of the Ceremony and come to a conclusion between the two of them about what they wanted to do.

The double will be watching the Ceremony on TV in the athlete's lounge in the Village, as they decided that this is best for them in their final preparations to race. I go to the gym, do some preparation work, and watch a little of the Opening on TV.

August 14 – The Olympic Regatta begins today. It is divided into a Day 1 and Day 2 format. We are a Day 2 event. All Day 1 races have heats today, with Day 2 races beginning tomorrow. Thus, the course is closed from 8 a.m. on, so we could either train early or wait till the course reopens after all the heats at 1 p.m. The three of us decide to go early, as this is going to be our routine for the week, and it will not be as hot. The final row today is lots of sharpness drills, with the last trip down the course a simulation. I ride my bike beside them for the 8 km. To my eye, they look ready to race. At 6 p.m. we have our pre-race meeting and go over the timeline — departure from the Village, weigh-in, nutrition, meet with me, hands on the boat, push off time from the dock — for the next day. I find it hard to believe how fast these eight months have gone. We began this journey toward the Olympics 225 days ago, and now it is upon us, less than 15 hours away.

August 15 – Up at 4 a.m. as I want to have breakfast before I meet the women on the 5 a.m. bus. Who am I kidding? I've been up since 3:30! I go to the food hall; it is intriguing how quiet the Village is at this time of day. Get my coffee, yogurt, and fruit and go over my notes and timeline for the upcoming morning. Everything is finished, as I knew before I opened the book. The women will do a pre-row of 4 km, weigh in two hours before the race, and then meet with me one last time one hour before pushing off the dock at 8 a.m.

I always feel kind of useless around regatta time. I find it funny when coaches congratulate other coaches at regatta time, saying "Good job, Canada." I always look at them politely and say thanks, but in my head I am saying, I didn't do anything today; the women did. They are the ones out there racing. By the time we get to the regatta site, I feel my work is finished. It is now time for the athletes to take what they have learned and done over and over, time again and again in practice, and execute it to the best of their abilities on race day. I call myself the shoe carrier, because that is what I do: Once the women push off the dock, I carry the shoes from the Out dock to the In dock. Oh yeah, I relay any pertinent information, clean the boat, tighten everything down, but once they push, everything is out of my control. In my transition from athlete to coach, this is what I find the hardest. As an athlete, you control how you race; a coach has no control over how the athlete races. Yes, in training you try to develop norms, patterns that the athlete will follow on race day, but once race day comes along, I kind of figure I am like a mother bird pushing the baby birds out of the nest: Fly now or fall to the grass below. During training time, coaches do a lot, but I figure the biggest thing to do on race day is to not show your emotions, be calm and level-headed. Once I push them off, I watch and hope with all my heart that all the lessons I have tried to teach them have sunk in.

The women joke with me about my title as "shoe carrier" on race day, saying I do more than carry the shoes. Yes, the other days of the year I do, but on race day, that is what I do.



The ride to the course is smooth. The driver is blaring Greek music. Seems odd playing this type of music so early in the morning, as it is music I solely relate to a different time period, dinner to be precise.

The pre-row happens in the dark at 6 a.m. The women put the boat on stretchers (a mechanism that holds the boat off the ground so I can work on it), shower, relax, weigh in, take care of nutrition, and then do what ever else they do as part of their two-hour pre-race ritual to get ready to race.

Once the boat is on stretchers, I begin my own pre-race ritual of tightening, checking, and rechecking to make sure every bolt and screw is tightened and all equipment is in top working order. I then clean the boat inside and out, put it back on the rack, check the wind conditions, see if the regatta is on schedule, and then wait until it is time to meet with the women and push them off the dock to warm up to race.

Today is windy, so the boatman and I decide to put on the wind guards to try to keep extra water out of the boat.

Meet with the women, walk with them to the dock, and push them off to race. Walk along the course and watch the first two heats. We are heat number three. My stomach is in knots, as always. This is another thing I find very difficult now as a coach. As an athlete, I was nervous, excited, ready to go, but when I pushed off the dock and began rowing, I had a job to do. Today I push off the double, watch them row away, and wonder, "Have I helped them enough? Could I have done more?" The helplessness is overwhelming.

Today we race well. However, Australia races better, and we are second, just over three seconds back. We now go to the repechages on August 17 at 4:15 p.m., as only the winners of the heats go straight through to the semi-final. The ideal route is to win your heat, but it is not too detrimental in a week-long regatta to have to go through the rep, as it gives the crew another opportunity to race.

The women learn a few lessons today and believe they can and will race better on Tuesday. Do 6-km drills with my feedback and work on what the women think they can improve for Tuesday.

August 16 – It's quite windy, no races today, but do 8 km of drills. Pre-race meeting for rep tomorrow.

August 17 – The rep is at 4:15 p.m., so the women do not have to rise so early. Get up around 8 a.m., go for a light jog, breakfast, bus to course at 12 p.m., pre-row, and weigh in at 2:15 p.m. I go earlier. As an athlete, I felt more comfortable waiting for races at the course, and I follow the same routine now as a coach.

Follow the race in the van that is assigned to coaches. It's me and two coaches from the Netherlands in the van.

The double have a great start, solid first 1500 m of the race, then with about 250 m left to go, catch two bad strokes (in rowing we call them crabs, where the blade gets stuck in the water and stops or slows down the speed of the boat). With these two bad strokes, we go from leading the race to falling back and coming second to the Netherlands crew, who we had beaten four times this summer.

The race is excellent for 1750 m, and then comes the mistake that costs the women the win.

Draw for the semi-final. Only the top three move into the A Final, which means they have made the top six and then have the opportunity to race for a medal at the Olympics. The draw for the semi is Lane 1, Spain; Lane 2, China; Lane 3, Australia; Lane 4, Poland; Lane 5, Canada; and Lane 6, Denmark.

August 18 – Training only today, preparing for the semi-final tomorrow.

August 19 – Semi-final 8:40 a.m. Bus to course 5 a.m. Ready to go! Have had two so-so races, now ready to have a great one.

Women come fourth by 0.98 of a second. Olympic dream of standing on the podium is over as we now head towards the B Final, positions 7–12. The women say they had a good race, but as racing and competition in the lightweight women's double at the Olympics is so tight, they needed a great race.

Wow. The feelings in Lucerne were intense when the double did well. But today, when they did not do as well as I, the double themselves, and the rest of the coaching and support staff expected, the feeling is indescribable. It hurts to the core of my being that I have failed. What could I have done better? Have the competitors gotten that much better? What went wrong? All of these thoughts plus many, many more are running through my head. My stomach feels hollow. If I feel like this, I know the double is feeling a million times worse.

Give the women the day to be alone or with friends to support them through this tough day. I feel that this is needed, some time to deal with the emotions that all are feeling. We came into this regatta fighting to be top four in the world and will now be fighting to be top 12.

Meet with the women nine hours after the semi. All have had time to get emotions in order, and now must focus on racing for 7th–12th positions on August 21 at 11:10 a.m. The goal of racing at the Games, to be as best as you can be, is still their job here at the Olympics. Of course, we wanted to be in the race for 1st–6th position, but this is the hand we are dealt and now we must rise up to this new challenge. We are here to compete and race.



August 21 – Women had a good race and came eighth.

This was a tough week on the double, and today, to race the B Final, it is hard to get up for. You train for so many years with the dream of racing your best and to stand on the Olympic podium. When that dream is over, I can only imagine how tough it must be to go out again and fight to get the best possible ranking. The field was deep this year. As always, competition gets tighter and tighter closer to the Olympics and especially in the year of the Games. Eight boats all within two seconds. But this is sport; this is what draws everyone in — the challenge of being at your best every day and giving respect to your competitors when they are at their best, even if you, for whatever reason, are not at yours.

Today, I am still reflecting on the eight-month journey I travelled as Canadian Lightweight Women's Coach. I believe this is how you continue to learn, think, and evaluate. What went well? What could have been done better? Could I have done anything else? Reflecting on performance, whether good or not what you expected, is how we get better.

I ponder what happened in Athens. This experience has driven me to try to become a better coach, although I have realized that I am not the one racing. When the athletes push off, the race is ultimately in their hands, not mine.

As a coach and a person, I want to continue to grow. To do this, I must meet many challenges along the way. I know that these past eight months were the first in what will be a coaching career filled with many highs and lows. The true test of how good of a coach I will be is how I step up and meet each challenge and situation that is thrown at me along the way.