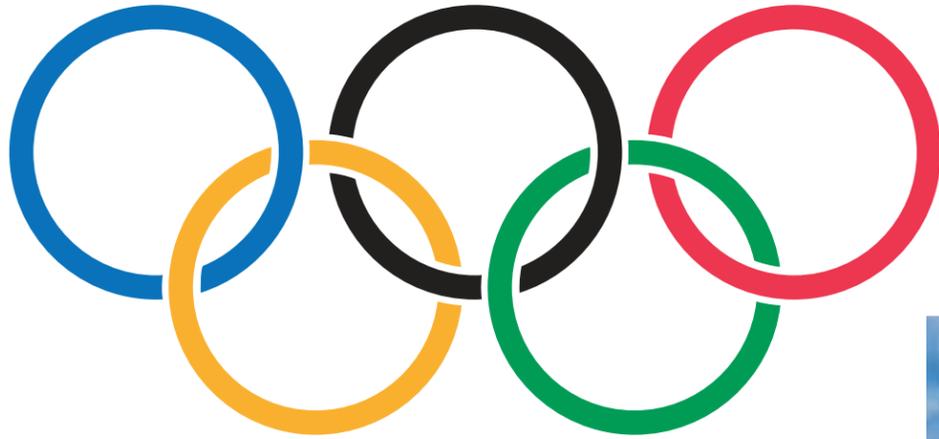


PASSING THE TORCH

by Todd Devlin



BY ANY MEASURE, INTEREST IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES HAS NEVER BEEN GREATER. THE WORLD'S LARGEST SPORTING SPECTACLE HAS A BROADER GLOBAL REACH TODAY THAN EVER BEFORE, AND VIEWERSHIP OF THE GAMES CONTINUES TO CLIMB.

It's no surprise, then, that the demand for information about the Games, both from a journalistic and scholarly perspective, is also on the rise. At Western, that means the International Centre for Olympic Studies (ICOS) is plenty busy.

"The field of Olympic Studies is growing exponentially," said ICOS Director Janice Forsyth (pictured opposite). "There are so many researchers now involved in different aspects of the Games, and it's our job to inform and to weigh the issues from different perspectives."

Those issues cover a broad spectrum: size and scope of the Games, amateurism and commercialization, media coverage, gender balance, anti-doping efforts, and issues of sustainability, just to name a few.

"Our primary responsibility is to be a resource to researchers, to students, and to the public," Forsyth said. "We open up a space for critical dialogue."

That has always been the mission of ICOS – the generation and dissemination of academic scholarship focused on the socio-cultural study of the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement.

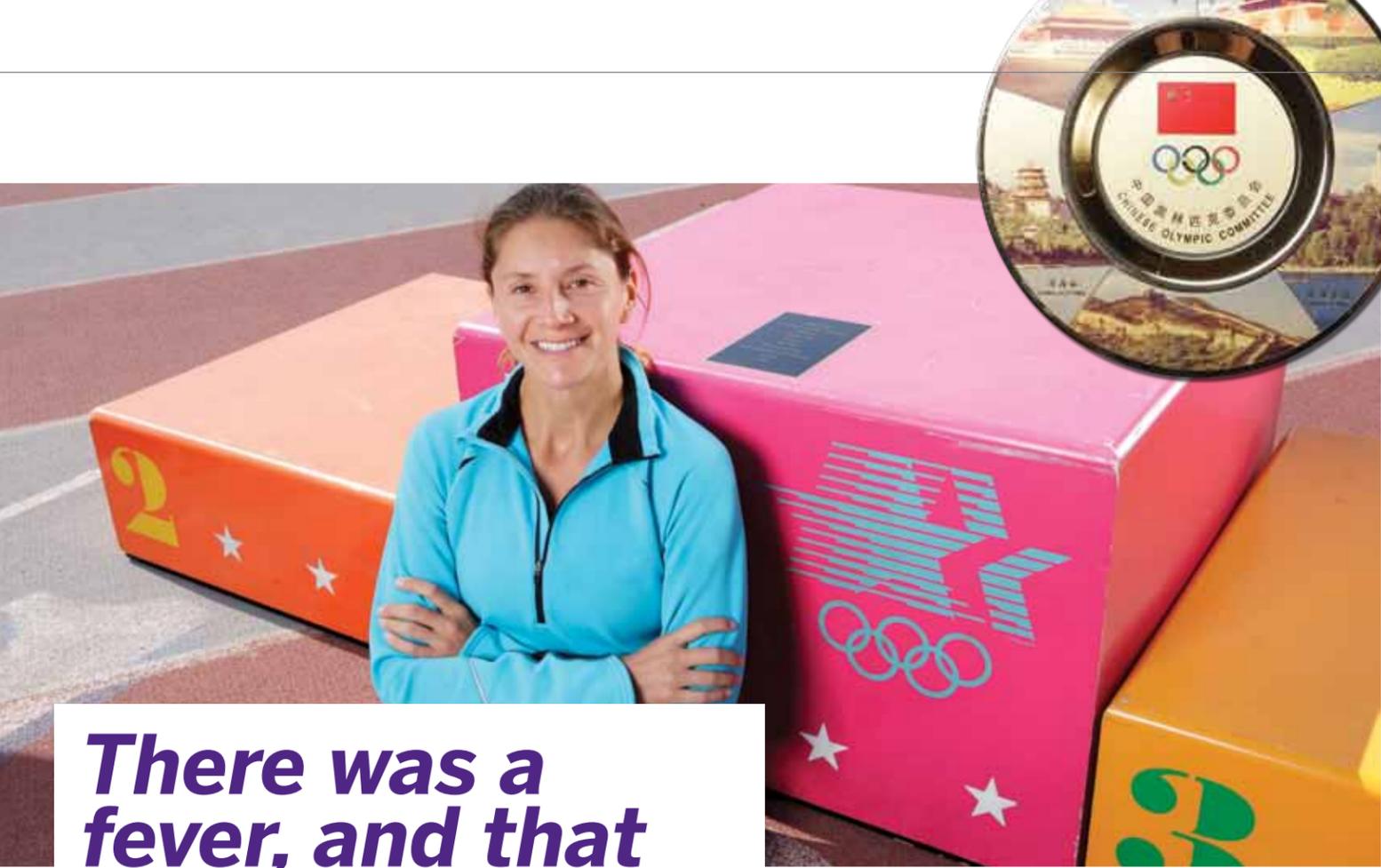
In achieving that mission, the centre produces an annual international journal (*Olympika*), hosts a research symposium during Olympic years, offers a regular guest lecture series, and maintains a home on campus (Arthur and Sonia Labatt Health Sciences Building – Room 317), in which researchers, faculty, students, and members of the general public can visit.

ICOS was established in 1989, and it was the brainchild of Bob Barney, a longtime Western professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS). It was the first of its kind in the world and remains the only one in the Americas.

The idea, Barney says, was conceived prior to the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. With a Soviet Union-led boycott on the horizon, it became apparent Canada would move up considerably in the medal standings.

Our primary responsibility is to be a resource to researchers, to students, and to the public





There was a fever, and that fever penetrated into Western and into the summer school and continuing education

"There was big interest in Canada for those Games," Barney said. "There was a fever, and that fever penetrated into Western and into the summer school and continuing education."

The Western professor taught a six-week course that summer that included three weeks in the classroom and an unforgettable three-week trip to a pre-Olympic symposium in Eugene, Oregon and then to the Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

It was out of his preparation for that course and the realization that there was a lack of scholarly work in the area that Barney saw the value in developing a centre for Olympic studies.

"Hardly anyone had written any serious scholarship about it," he said. "I could count the books in the English language on one hand, so I said, 'this area of inquiry needs examination. It needs a body of knowledge, and it isn't there.'"

Barney guided ICOS from its beginning until 1997. The directorship duties were then passed on to current FHS Associate Dean Kevin Wamsley. A former graduate student of Barney's, Wamsley was a natural fit for the role, which he held successfully for nearly a decade.

In January 2010, ICOS passed the torch to Forsyth, who came back to Western from the University of Alberta to become the centre's third full-time director.

"I was really excited by the challenge of the job," she said. "And because of my previous experience at ICOS and the people I had met there, I thought it would be a great way to make a contribution back to the centre and to the university."

Under Forsyth, a former Western student who completed her own master's and PhD under the supervision of Wamsley, ICOS continues to grow. In addition to its traditional offerings, the library has recently expanded to incorporate Paralympic materials as well.

Meanwhile, the centre continues to be prominent in the media, as each of the three directors serve as experts on a number of topics surrounding the Olympics. With the public's ever-growing interest and today's 24/7 news cycle, the Games are now in the media year-round.

"A day doesn't go by where you're not hearing something Olympic-related, whether it's Sochi or Rio [the sites of the 2014 and 2016 Games, respectively], or athletes like Lance Armstrong or Oscar Pistorius," Forsyth said. "It's our job to educate and inform the media and the public to help better understand the issues."

Forsyth is passionate about that job, and the director says she's ready to lead ICOS into the future.

"I have come in at a pretty interesting time, considering the worldwide interest in the Games," she said. "We're already the most established Centre in the world, outside of the IOC Centre in Lausanne, Switzerland, but we're going to have to find new and creative ways to keep our place in the growing industry."

CURRENT FHS OLYMPIANS

Nine current members of Western's Faculty of Health Sciences have been part of the Olympic Games as either an athlete, coach or official.

TOM OVEREND
 Director – School of Physical Therapy
 Speed Skating: 1976 (athlete)

ANGIE SCHNEIDER
 Associate Professor – School of Kinesiology
 Rowing: 1984 (athlete), Silver Medallist

MARITA KLOSECK
 Director – School of Health Studies
 Badminton: 1996, 2000 (official)

JANICE DEAKIN
 Provost
 Women's Basketball: 1996 (official)

ALEX BRUCE
 Student
 Badminton: 2012 (athlete)

AL MORROW
 Lecturer – School of Kinesiology
 Rowing: 1976 (athlete) 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012 (coach)

RAY TAKAHASHI
 Lecturer – School of Kinesiology
 Head Wrestling Coach – Western Mustangs
 Freestyle Wrestling: 1976, 1984 (athlete)

VOLKER NOLTE
 Assistant Professor – School of Kinesiology
 Rowing: 1996, 2000 (coach)

JIM WAITE
 Head Golf Coach – Western Mustangs
 Curling: 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010 (coach)

