

Commonwealth Games Interview

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Interviewee: Darcy Wallingford

Interviewers: Danielle Miedema and Katherine Vahrmeyer

I. Getting to the Games:

Darcy Wallingford participated in the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh Scotland. At the age of twenty, Wallingford represented Canada in the 100 m and 200 m breaststroke. Overall, Wallingford placed seventh in the 100 m and sixteenth in the 200 m at the games.

A. How did you get started in your particular sport?

Wallingford's parents believed that their children should be physically active after school. When Wallingford was in grade school, his parents pushed him to participate in a sport that he felt would be fun. Wallingford chose to swim.

B. How did you get selected?

Wallingford participated in the Canadian National Championships held at the Olympic Stadium in Montreal. The top two winners of each event would be selected to represent Canada at the Commonwealth Games. Wallingford placed within the top two for both the 100 m and the 200 m breaststroke. As a side note, Wallingford mentioned that he was "not a fan" of the pool in Montreal. He thought that the pool was not a "fast pool" and it was too deep. (Fast pool = little resistance from waves)

C. What were your training regimes for the games?

For seventeen years, Wallingford trained six days per week, two times per weekday: one and a half hours in the morning and two and a half hours in the afternoon, and two and a half hours on Saturday morning (8:00am till 10:30am). In the winter months, Wallingford started his training at 5:30 am till 7:00 am and then practiced for two and a half hours after school (4:00 pm till 6:30 pm). During the summer, Wallingford had his practices at 6:15 am till 7:45 am and practiced in the afternoon from 4:00 pm till 6:30 pm.

Wallingford did not complain about his swimming routine. In fact, he stated that although he does not follow his routine now, he misses it and still wakes up early. Wallingford still swims every now and then.

D. What did it mean to you to participate in an amateur event?

Wallingford felt that being a participant in an amateur sport was an honour. He was proud to represent Canada, whether or not he was paid. Wallingford had the opportunity to be a paid member of the Canadian National Team (by the Government). He has great respect for professional sport, but believes that there is more pressure to perform well when there

is money involved. Overall, Wallingford was proud to be an amateur representing Canada at the Commonwealth Games.

E. How did you travel to the games? How long did it take?

Meeting the other 402 members of the Canadian team in Toronto, the group collectively traveled in one F747 to Scotland. In total, it was a six-hour flight and a two-hour bus trip to Edinburgh. Wallingford stated that this was a great time to meet and talk to other members of the Canadian team.

II. Significant Memories:

A. What was your best memory of the games?

Wallingford recalled two separate events that occurred at the Commonwealth Games which were worth noting. First, during lunch in the cafeteria one day, Wallingford had the extreme privilege of meeting Princess Diana. It was only a 10-15 second conversation, but it was still an honour to meet a member of the Royal family. Wallingford also remembered seeing other members of the Royal Family at one of his swim meets. He stated: "It was nice to have the respect of the Royal Family". Another significant event was the closing ceremony of the Commonwealth Games. Whereas at the opening ceremony, each team walked in with their respective country and flags, at the closing ceremony, all athletes marched on the field as one large group. It was emotional for him to be part of a very select group of athletes, from around the world, representing their country's honour. The ceremony lasted two and a half hours, but to Wallingford it felt like fifteen minutes.

B. What was your worst memory of the games?

Wallingford's worst memory of the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh were the bomb scares. While warming up thirty minutes prior to a meet, Wallingford and other swimmers realized that there were no spectators in the stadium. Security came in and individually removed swimmers from the premises. Wallingford, taken outside in his swimsuit, joined the other five thousand people questioning what was happening. Police and bomb squad units found and removed two suspicious packages from the building. No one knew what was going on, but later understood that the Queen was to make an appearance at that meet.

C. What did it mean to you to represent your country?

Wallingford took pride in representing Canada. He stated that it was a great privilege and honour to hear his country's anthem echoing through the stadium. Wallingford also stated that it was tough for him to focus after they announced his name, and the country he represented, in the final match. He also felt good, yet nervous, knowing that all of Canada was rooting for him.

III. Issues around the Games:

A. Were there political / cultural issues that you remember that surrounded the games?

Wallingford recalled that the boycott was one of the main political issues that surrounded the games. Immediately after stepping off the plane, reporters swarmed the members of the Canadian team, questioning their opinions of the boycott and how it would affect the competitions. Wallingford recalled that his friend, Alex Polman (now the coach of the Australian Commonwealth team), told reporters that they came to Scotland to swim. If people were there, then they were there and if they were not, then they were not. The boycott did not affect the attitudes of the Canadian team. Wallingford agreed with Polman, stating that it was their loss for not competing. He also stated that this incident (boycott) did not essentially affect the competitions because Britain, Australia and Canada were the “powerhouses” of the games.

B. Who paid for what?

Wallingford revealed that the Canadian Government paid for the transportation and accommodations of the team. The government also provided each member with a Canadian tracksuit to be worn throughout the event.

C. Were females treated equally?

Wallingford believed that women swimmers were treated as equals at the Commonwealth Games. They received equal pool time and shared similar routines to that of the men. Female matches were held in the same stadium and were run at alternate times to the male events. Wallingford had great respect for the women who made it to the Games because they represented a minority of the country and were competent, superior athletes.

IV. History of the Games:

A. What do you know about the history of the games?

Wallingford stated that he knew a lot more about the Commonwealth Games around the time that he participated in them. Wallingford learned a lot about the history of the Games from his father, a member of the Canadian track team in the 1966 Commonwealth Games. Consequently, Wallingford knows a lot about the track and swimming competitions in the Commonwealth Games because of his frequent conversations with his father over the years.

B. How do you view the progression of the Commonwealth Games?

Wallingford stated that the Commonwealth Games have lost their luster and have become overshadowed by professional sport over the years.

According to Wallingford, the games are no longer the “anticipated main event”, but rather are one of many sporting events to watch. The hype and enthusiasm over the games has decreased, especially due to their periodic and short time frame. Moreover, Wallingford stated that another reason the games have become overshadowed is because of the numerous American stations that promote professional sports. Wallingford believed that this overemphasis of professional sports in American society was due to their lack of involvement in the Commonwealth Games.

V. After the Games:

A. How did the Games impact your life?

Wallingford felt that the games were spectacular at the time and will always have a special place and memory in his heart. He also stated that the Commonwealth Games were a stepping-stone to his participation in the PANAM Games. Overall, Wallingford declared that participating in the Commonwealth Games was a crowning achievement and an important part of his life.