

# The Just Word Podcast

## Transcript of Episode 16 – The business of Olympic Sports

**Pat Bolland** 00:00

Angela, it's truly a pleasure to meet you. I, you know, I used to coach at a very high level and I know what it is to take the time out of your day, and to talk to somebody like me. Thank you.

**Angela Whyte** 00:12

Thank you for having me. I'm happy to be here.

**Pat Bolland** 00:15

Okay, Angela, I got to ask because I assume ... Are you still competitively running?

**Angela Whyte** 00:21

Um, well, yes. I was putting in a stint to try to make the 2020 team but unfortunately, I got injured. But that's the life of sports. And so at this point, I'm still trying to make a decision on where I go next.

**Pat Bolland** 00:36

Okay, and we'll discuss that. But before we do, I want your impression of the #TokyoOlympics. Did you enjoy them?

**Angela Whyte** 00:45

Of course, I mean, I'm a sports fan. And obviously I'm of track and field fan and track and field is kind of one of those bookends of the Olympics. So it was an amazing meet. Fantastic performances, we saw examples of goodwill, in the men's high jump with the sharing of the gold medal.

**Pat Bolland** 01:04

Oh, that was really cool.

**Angela Whyte** 01:06

Yeah, I mean, you just don't. It was something that we needed, especially with all that we have been going through. And I'm, I'd like to give thanks, among so many people to Tokyo for, for putting it on during a difficult time.

**Pat Bolland** 01:21

No question. It seemed to me to be a pretty fast track too.

**Angela Whyte** 01:26

Yeah, arguably, probably one of the fastest fastest tracks ... a lot of the performances even in the opening of the the women's 100 meters. These times in the heats, like you knew, right, from that point on, it's a fast track, you're going to see some great performances.

**Pat Bolland** 01:44

Right. Okay, so then you've been to three Olympics. So you didn't make it didn't make Tokyo but you were in Rio, and two more before that, what was your favorite?

**Angela Whyte** 01:54

Which of my games was was my favorite?

**Pat Bolland** 01:56

Yeah, I might as well throw in #Commonwealth and #Pan-Am as well...

**Angela Whyte** 02:00

I would say, usually, always, the first is going to be your most favorite, because it's the first time that you've, you know, been stamped an Olympian. And mine was, I mean, I'm biased, but mine was particularly special because it was in Athens. So that's the birthplace of the Olympics. So it felt a little bit, I don't know, like symbolic in that way that it was back to its birthplace. And I had a great performance there, probably, you know, taking in everything for the first time it helped me make the final for the women's 100 meter hurdles. If we're talking Comm... I always love #CommonwealthGames. It's a like kind of a smaller family of countries. And that's one where some of our para-athletes get to join us. So it's an integrated event. So I've always enjoyed the para... sorry, the Commonwealth Games, and I've been lucky to go to two when they were hosted in Australia. It doesn't get any better than that. And of course, Pan-Ams... I've enjoyed every major meet that I've been to whether it was successful or not just being able to meet a whole bunch of people being in a different place in the world, and do something that I love.

**Pat Bolland** 03:14

Okay, then roll it back a little bit. How did you get started in the sport? Track is kind of a unique sport? And as I recall, you're from Edmonton. How did ... did you have a hero or something along those lines?

**Angela Whyte** 03:29

You know, I think it as it usually does, because it comes from family. So my dad's Jamaican-born and he immigrated to Canada. And track is huge in Jamaica. So I always, whenever the Olympics came on, he would always call me into the living room to watch and I think I got my first ... like ... introduction to track that way. But then it wasn't really until junior high when you start getting more involved in organized sports, I played volleyball, I did basketball. And then in the summertime, I would do track. And then eventually as I moved through high school, I loved volleyball, I thought I was going to be a professional basketball player. But it ended up that I went and did track and got a scholarship to the United States and everything kind of went from there.

**Pat Bolland** 04:13

Yeah, when you think about those scholarships in the United States, there's where the money is coming from, when you're an amateur, if you will, How many years did you have those scholarships so that you could support what you like to do?

**Angela Whyte** 04:24

Yeah, so normally it's a four year, so depending on, I guess, like you go to like a four-year institution, it's four years, although you can spend five if you red shirt. So I was one because I ended up transferring and wanted to spend an extra year with my, then new coach. So I spent five years under scholarship in the United States and the NCAA system.

**Pat Bolland** 04:50

Okay, so then that paid a lot of your bills. But you've been in this sport for ... gosh, I was trying to do the math. It's got to be 25 - 30 years.

**Angela Whyte** 04:59

Not, not quite 30. But getting close. I'm coming up on I guess my first Canadian team was back in, I'd say 2000, 2001. So we're getting pretty close to that to that 30 You definitely 20 years involved in the sport.

**Pat Bolland** 05:18

Yeah. Okay, so then if you're, if the sport is paid for, for the five years, that you're at university, what happened to the other 15? It's not free, how did you make ends meet,

**Angela Whyte** 05:31

You get creative. So, um, I was lucky, I had a great relationship with my coach and decided to stay in the States and and run post-collegiately. Um, initially, obviously being a Canadian, you have to worry about a visa in the States. So I ended up working for the university. At first, I was a tutor-coordinator in the athletic department. And then I moved on to be a graduate assistant, working for the track and field team. So I did that for a couple of years. So I graduated in 2003. With my undergrad, and then moved into a graduate program, which - two birds, one stone - you get school paid for, and you get a little bit, you can get a little bit of money to help pay your bills. But I also, at that point had performances because I'd been on national teams where it's called carding in Canada. So it's a stipend that the Canadian government, specifically #SportCanada gives to athletes, that helps to take some of the stress off, it helps pay the bills. And at that point, it was about \$1500 a month. So enough, and I was in a small town in the United States, Moscow, Idaho, specifically. So my cost of living was really, really low. So between the two, I was able to make ends meet until I ended up getting sponsored.

**Pat Bolland** 07:02

Okay, and I want you to walk me through that sponsorship process overall. But before you do, is your system and the way you went through, unique, you know, the way you paid for things is that way every most people do it.

**Angela Whyte** 07:18

It's hard to say I feel like a fair bit of athletes will do it that way, a lot will stay on with their collegiate teams, and work, like as a graduate assistant to help them not only just gain access, because you got to think right there, you're taking care of facility costs, because you're either if you're a volunteer or graduate assistant, you can use the facilities that the institute that you're at. So that means your weight room, you don't have to pay for weight room, you don't have to pay for track access. So that helps to take that cost off. Now it's a matter of, like, how do we pay every day bills, so just regular life bills - rent,

power, internet, all that kind of stuff. And that's where certain people will get creative, the either go for, like, are able to get sponsors, or again, a lot work part time jobs, a lot of athletes will work part time jobs. And I think for the most part, that's how a lot of athletes will will try to get it done.

**Pat Bolland** 08:19

Yeah, remember Home Depot had a program for a while where they would have athletes in the stores was great, because you met these Olympic athletes or, or high quality athletes, I don't know whether that's still in force. But that would be an example of what you're talking about part time job with corporate help, if you will.

**Angela Whyte** 08:37

Yeah. And it's really tough for athletes, because again, we have to look regular life, but then we're also doing something that's not so normal, right? Depending on your sport, I know for myself, I spend up to maybe four hours of day training, and that could be up to like, five, six times a week. So in that time, you know, like, you can't just have a regular 9-to-5 job because you need to alot some time for your training. And then on top of it, your recovery. So those are other costs, too. When it comes to physio, chiro, nutrition, all those things go into making an athlete be able to achieve their dreams. And those are costs that the normal public probably don't take on regularly. So athletes do have to find a job that and that's why that Home Depot program was fantastic because they knew that these athletes at some point we're going to take off for maybe a month or two training camp, but to be able to have enough money for them to support themselves as they also had needed the time the freedom to go where they needed to go.

**Pat Bolland** 09:44

Okay, then talk to me about your sponsorship. How did it come about? Did you go bang on doors or did they approach you or how?

**Angela Whyte** 09:53

No, so after ... I think I had made our world championship team and then I was put in contact with a manager or an agent. And so a lot of times managers or agents, they take over that role are able to kind of shop you around to different companies and get sponsorship. So I was with one manager at one point, and then after the Olympics wasn't really seeing any monetary gain. So I moved to another manager, a management group over in the UK, who was really well connected with Adidas. And so essentially, if you're with that group, they're able to get you a sponsorship with Adidas, and that comes with a retainer. So essentially, salary. And I was a, I was on that for a few years, sponsored by Adidas, which, at that point, I was I didn't have to, I was able to have a an O-1 visa, because I was a sponsored athlete, that helps your case, to be an O-1 visa, which is outstanding or extraordinary-ability visa. And so I no longer was in school and didn't need, between my sponsorship and carding from Canada, I was able to make ends meet.

**Pat Bolland** 11:10

Well, just, I assume, because there's still a lot of travel who picks up the travel bill.

**Angela Whyte** 11:16

Yeah. So again, when you're at a certain level, a lot of your manager can take care of it. So I mean, I didn't really have to do ... some athletes will take on that role, where they're figuring out travel and stuff. But for the most part, depending on the meet, when you go over to Europe - and that's where most of our meets take place - The meet directors have an allotment. So what they do is give each athlete a certain amount of money to travel to the meet. And what managers try to do is get you in X-amount of meets so that you pool-in all the travel money that each week will give and hopefully, net out at zero at least.

**Pat Bolland** 11:56

Okay, then, oh, did you have to do anything for the sponsorship? Did you have to hold up an Adidas shoe and a commercial or do something like that?

**Angela Whyte** 12:04

No. And for the most part, you don't see, like ... it's different than professional sports where you see a lot of athletes ... well ... the big professional sports I should say, because track is now professional, with athletes getting sponsorships and things like that. A lot of the athletes, because track and field has so many athletes, not every athlete is going to be a spokesperson for a brand, especially a big brand. So all I had to do was wear their product at meets essentially ... and that was advertisement enough. And so they all have like a stable of athletes that are recognized at meets because you're wearing their their kit for that year. So people can tell 'Oh, that's an #Adidas sponsored athlete, that's a #Nike sponsored athlete'. And so these companies just try to get the best of the best and have them at, hopefully the biggest meets. And so once it comes down to the Olympics, our national organization is sponsored. So currently sponsored by Nike, whereas I was an Adidas athlete, so I would just wear their shoes. And so that was it ... so Yeah,

**Pat Bolland** 13:15

Was that a conflict?

**Angela Whyte** 13:17

I mean, sometimes there can be a conflict because athletes love to obviously show support for whomever is paying their bills. So when we're at a training camp, or around the village, we want to wear like, say for instance, I want to wear Adidas, but our team is sponsored by Nike, so they have a certain responsibility to that company. So there could be some conflict there. But I think for major games, you know, the companies know that we kind of have to adhere to whatever our team is sponsored by.

**Pat Bolland** 13:52

Okay, so now, harkening back to the Olympics, I love the opening and closing ceremonies, I watched them all end-to-end... like some of them are hours and hours long. But you must build friendships with athletes in different sports. Even if you're just standing in the stadium watching what's going on. You're chatting to the people next door to you. A) Do you form friendships with swimmers or rock climbers or whatever other sport is there? And B) do they talk about their finances?

**Angela Whyte** 14:19

Yeah, I mean, I've been lucky to meet people from different sports. A lot of times, you know, athletes kind of stay within their sport, but at the major games, yeah, we're one team. And so you get to meet people, especially before the games. In Canada, at least we try to have athletes from different sports go to kind of a conference to get to know each other and meet each other before the games because once you're at the Games, it's hectic and you're really focused on your event. Also teams come in and out. So if you're a first-week athlete, you're in first and the second week, athletes sometimes are held back so we don't always get to cross paths. But yeah, I have met athletes and connected with athletes from other sports. And yeah, we do talk about finances, because if you're not the top of the top, then it can get pretty hard to try to be able to support yourself as an athlete to reach these teams. Some have to go about and work harder than others. But I think finances are always ... because again, there are no retirement plans, really, do you know what I mean? And a lot of times we forego the normal route to ... to earning and a lot of that money is spent on your sports. So there's not a lot of savings. And sometimes we do, we kind of harken back to the bartering system, where we build relationships with athletes. So I know friends overseas, and if I'm coming over to a meet, they might be able to help me out by putting ... by lodging me or or whatever the case might be. So a lot of it is relationships, and not necessarily just money, but an exchange where if you come over here, I'm going to help you out. If I come over there, you're going to be able to help me out.

**Pat Bolland** 16:11

You are what I call an experienced couch-surfer.

**Angela Whyte** 16:15

You athletes tend to be experienced couch surfers, for sure. And, and I think that's one beautiful thing, it can be really hard. But a lot of times it's the relationships that really make dreams come true.

**Pat Bolland** 16:30

Okay, so now, where do you go from here? I think you've studied crime and justice. Is there a career in law for you? Or do you see yourself in athletics? Talk to me about your future.

**Angela Whyte** 16:42

So ... my dad, obviously, the reason why I took Crime & Justice studies, I was interested in that area. And my dad did, he was like, 'You know what, you know how to argue. So you should probably consider going to law school'. But then I got my master's in sports psychology. And I was coaching - I coached in the NCAA for about 10 years. So at this point, you know, after, you know, not making the team in Tokyo, and I mean, athletes always have to kind of think about the next ... like, athletes retire twice, right? A lot of people if they get into a career, and it's a long lasting career, they retire once, but we retire twice, once from sport, and then once from whatever else we move on to next for me, I can, I do and I really hope to stay involved in sports, whether it's in coaching, maybe even in more of an administrative role, where I'm helping to ... in an overall, kind of in a bigger picture, get the things that athletes need to be successful. So at this point, I'm not quite sure, but I hope something is ... something good is around the corner that I feel like I can be helpful and make some change.

**Pat Bolland** 18:02

Where are you now, like physically, you were out west for a long time? Are you back in Canada?

**Angela Whyte** 18:08

Yeah, so I'm in 2016. After those games, I decided to move back to Canada. I'm originally from Edmonton, Alberta, but without a coach there I moved out to Toronto. So I'm currently in Toronto, Ontario.

**Pat Bolland** 18:21

And can I come and watch your workout?

**Angela Whyte** 18:24

You definitely can it gets pretty ugly though

**Pat Bolland** 18:26

'Cuz I live in Mississauga?

18:29

Yeah, it takes it takes a long time. But yeah, you definitely definitely can.

**Pat Bolland** 18:32

I can't imagine. Like you're you're sprinting, your thing is hurdles, 100 meters, how can you train for four hours, that's my curiosity. I mean, I can coach ... I coached lacrosse, for instance. And to convince somebody to do an hour, hour-and-a-half practice was sometimes difficult ... 4 hours?

**Angela Whyte** 18:50

You got to understand, like, it's not four full hours of just non-stop because guess what, we probably all keel over and die from it. So, I mean, you spend probably about 45 or so warming up. And then, within the workout, we take time, we take breaks because depending on the workout... we can take up to 10 to 15 even 20 minutes between runs. If you're trying to get a high quality run, then you can take a little bit of a break, get some nutrition and then you're into the weight room for about an hour, 90 minutes probably max. So I mean the time spent with the resting and and getting, you know meals in and then also on top of that there's a recovery. So after you're done making sure you're cooling-down well, you got to hit the pools as far as the cold tub things like that. So I factor that all in as a part of it. So I'll spend like four hours out of the house doing that those types of activities.

**Pat Bolland** 19:44

I gotcha. Okay. But you know, as you went through that list of things, you do the cooling down and the training rooms and those kinds of things. Do you have a trainer?

**Angela Whyte** 19:54

So yeah, like have a coach, so, we usually have like a track coach, that works primarily on anything on track, and then a strength and conditioning coach that works on our weight room stuff.

**Pat Bolland** 20:07

Right - and they're all getting paid by somebody that ... I mean, the athletes, I can see the athletes getting sponsored by Adidas or whomever, are the coaches and trainers? And are they usually affiliated to an institution, for instance, who's paying the bill?

20:21

Um, oftentimes, yes, so I was working out of the #AthleticsCanada East hub, which is located at York University. So all of those coaches are supported by our national sport organization, #SportCanada, things like that, that that goes in there. But some athletes do go with coaches that are not affiliated with a National Training Center or things like that. So those coaches, at times will, especially if you have an athlete that is making a lot of money, what they'll do is they'll take a percentage of that. Same thing with your manager, so whatever they get you in a sponsorship, they're gonna take a percentage of it. So which is, standard 10 to 15%. A coach can take another 10% on top of that, or maybe you work out a deal where you just pay them a flat rate to train you. But a lot of coaches again, a lot of it's on goodwill, where they just want to see - they're passionate about coaching - and they want to see athletes be successful. They don't charge their athletes. I know, when I was in Idaho, and with my coach that was with the longest in my career. A lot of times it was like, if he needed any help on the track. I was there because he was coaching me and not asking for payments. I did a lot of time, like spent a lot of time volunteering for the track team. So there was an exchange. So sometimes it's not just the monetary exchange. It's a exchange of services of sorts.

**Pat Bolland** 21:44

Yeah, Angela, tremendous insight. Thank you. The business of sports, I think is fascinating at the best times, and you just enlightened it.

**Angela Whyte** 21:52

Yeah, well, thank you very much. Yeah. And, you know, we see, we always see kind of the big four if you will - NHL, NBA, baseball, hockey, or football. And we think that's how sports always goes. But then there's all these other sports - Olympic sports - that go about the business side a little bit of a different way.

**Pat Bolland** 22:11

Yeah. Do they ever. Fascinating. Angela, thank you.

**Angela Whyte** 22:16

Thank you very much for having me. Appreciate it.