Media tips and guidelines
GBC clubs and events
Getting started

- Select a media liaison to oversee media relations for your club and events.
- This person should have experience working in communications and working with the media.
- Develop a media plan that includes
  - Specific and measurable objectives for the season or event. What do you want to accomplish, does it fit with the overall strategic plan and how do you know if it's successful.
  - Audiences: all members of the media. Don’t forget online and other non-traditional media sources.
  - Key messages – What do you want to say to the public. Your key messages will drive your media releases, interviews and media conferences.
  - Strategies – Broad statements that work to achieve your objectives.
  - Tactics – Specific actions to achieve your strategies (dates of media releases, media conferences, open houses, special events, etc)
  - List of collateral materials – what do you need to support your media efforts (media kits, biographies, etc.)
  - Resources – Who is needed to make this happen (volunteers, staff, coaches, athletes). Make sure everyone knows what the objectives are, and the expectations. Also include any budget requirements.
  - Evaluation – How will you know if the plan was successful? These should match up with the objectives and strategies.
- Get started!!
Media kits

A media kit is an information package about your club. Its purpose is to provide the media with relevant information about your club’s programs, coaching personnel and members. It contains a collection of information and articles aimed to address questions from the media.

What to Include and why?

There are many items that can go into a media kit, depending on the situation, the audience or the use. You may use it at media conferences, to introduce your club or event to a new reporter, on your website, etc.

Although a media kit should be comprehensive, do not include every promotional item or piece of marketing collateral ever produced by your club. You must remain focused in content development and only put information that is current and most relevant to your target reader.

Below is a list of standard items to include. This is only to provide ideas; you may not include all of these and may add additional – adapt as necessary.

Ideas to Include:

- Club history and profile (mission, objectives, etc);
- Current competitive athletes and levels
- Calendar of events
- Coaching personnel profiles and contact information (if permitted);
- Gymnast profiles;
- Gymnastics club contact information
- Previous year’s results
- Previous major award winners – club, GBC, Sport BC, Gymnastics Canada etc.;
- Website address;
- Recent media coverage – print media releases on club letterhead and link to media stories
- Story ideas – athletes to watch, upcoming events, importance of gymnastics for child development;
- Photographs and graphics

Start assembling part of your media kit, based on available materials. You can then add to it as you see fit and develop new materials. Once you’ve gathered all the necessary information, assemble it in a logical and well-organized format.
Media Releases

Sending out a media release is the best way to attract reporters’ attention to a story. It is often the only source of information the media has about your story, activity or event.

Media releases provide details about a subject and must contain, usually in one to two pages, what the journalists call the five “W”s: who is involved, what happened, where did it happen, when did it happen and why or how did it happen.

Most reporters or editors decide whether to read the release based on the first paragraph. Therefore it is important to answer these questions in one or two sentences in the lead (first) paragraph and making it clear and concise.

Using a media release

While it is important to be familiar with the writing style and requirements used by journalists, it is also important to understand the different types of media releases that can be used to promote your club’s programs and events.

1. Announcements

Announcements include award nominations and/or recipients, new personnel, new and improved facility or equipment. When writing an announcement, remember to also incorporate information that you feel is relevant to the announcement.

2. Competition or event recaps

There are three purposes to a competition or event recap:

- To provide information to the media who did not attend the event, with the hope they will still report it;
- To complement the information gathered by the media who did not attend the event but have missed a detail, statistic or quote;
- To provide content for your club’s communications (website, newsletter, etc) as well as GBC’s communications.

3. Previews

- These serve as a reminder to the media; and provide necessary information if the media wants to publish and/or prepare a preview of their own, set-up pre-event interviews, etc.
- Include all information relevant to the upcoming event, as well as historical information and anecdotal facts.
• Timing is everything. Send the preview with sufficient time for the media to react if they want to interview athletes and/or coaches, prepare a preview of their own, etc. However, be sure not to send the preview too early – it may be put aside and forgotten about.

• Monday to Wednesday is probably the most appropriate time frame to release a preview for an event coming up on the weekend.

4. Human-interest stories

Unfortunately, gymnastics is only one of many sports competing for media coverage. So, while the media may not always be interested in an event or competition, human-interest stories often attract the attention of journalists and their readers.

Subjects for human-interest stories include an athlete overcoming an illness or injury, family ties, athlete involved in noble humanitarian cause, etc.

5. Pitching a story

To get further coverage it may be necessary to contact media representatives directly and “pitch” a potential article or story to them.

• Contact the appropriate person, at the appropriate publication and/or program at the appropriate time.

• Send the media release or advisory as well as any background details, approximately one week before your event.

• Contact each reporter two to three days prior the event, asking if they plan to attend. Confirm whether or not they have received the information of if they require you to send it again.

• Recognize media deadlines, responding to requests for additional information or interviews as quickly as possible.

• Be prepared to provide information and to answer questions in detail.

How to write a media release

Who, what, where, when, why and how – these are the six critical ingredients of all news releases.

1. Headline

• The headline is the first thing – and sometimes the only thing – an editor will read. Release are often rejected as a result of a weak headline.

• The headline precedes the body of the media release.
• Only the first letter of the first word of the headline is capitalized. All other words in the headline follow normal Canadian Press style for capitalization.

• Bold-face and centre your headline.

• Create headlines with impact. The most effective words in a media release headline are eye-catching words like “announces” and “new”. Comparative words like “better” and “more” can also draw attention to your article. The headline is the “hook” that lures editors and reporters into reading more.

• Determine the most significant benefit to your most important reader will derive from the news.

• Try and state those benefits in seven words or less.

• Ask yourself if your statement is meaningful to someone not closely associated with gymnastics.

• Recommended to be a maximum of 45 characters long, including spaces.

• It should include an active verb.

• Delete pronouns, where possible.

• Write your headline when you have finished writing your media release and ensure that the headline and subhead are also restated in the lead.

2. Subhead

• This follows the headline and is another key hook or story angle. The subhead should also be informative enough to grab the media’s attention.

3. Placeline or place of origin

• This is the location (city, province in full and country) form which the media release is issued.

• We live in a global community now and media releases sent locally can end up on the desk of a media outlet anywhere in the world so always clearly indicate where the news originates from.

4. Lead

• This is the first sentence or paragraph that contains the five Ws (or at least who, what and when). It should be short (preferably one sentence) and focus on the most important news in the announcement.
- Use a strong, appropriate lead in all media releases. One of the strongest, most effective leads is a lead which is factual, straightforward and covers the 5 Ws.

- Many media releases are accepted or rejected on the basis of the headline and first paragraph.

- These introductory sections are often all an editor will have time to read.

- Many releases are rejected due to a simple downfall: failure to include any news in the lead.

5. Body

- The body explains the lead and provides additional information to develop a story. It will include the remaining Ws and how.

- It will also include answers to other questions the media is sure to ask about.

- The body may be two to five paragraphs long, depending on the announcement.

6. Quotes

- Quotes should be used throughout the release (with the exception of the lead). Typically, the first quote further explains the lead and is attributed to the key spokesperson. Write powerful quotes that a spokesperson could actually say. Quotes must be hooks and very newsworthy.

- Good quotes will encourage media who may not have time to interview anyone (due to tight deadlines, etc) to include the quote in their story.

- Effective use of quotes helps to achieve a journalistic style.

- In many cases, the individual writing the media release will make up the spokesperson’s quote to fit in with the story angle; ensure that the spokesperson approves those quotes before distributing the release.

- When quoting, always include punctuation inside the final quotation mark. “That’s a 15 per cent increase,” Smith notes. She feels this is indicative of the times and notes, “It’s how business is done these days.”

- Use the current tense when writing all your quotes. Use “he says” rather than “he said” or “Smith states” rather than “Smith stated.”

7. End

- This final paragraph is the information of least importance to the editorial media.

- It can be about tickets, telephone numbers to call for information, websites, etc.
8. -30-

- This signals the end of the media release copy.
- When type was set by hand, the symbol to signal the end of the copy was XXX (Roman numerals for 30). The media still recognizes this convention today.
- This is traditionally done by putting “-30-” on a new, centered line after the last line of copy.

9. Boilerplate

- After ending the release it is important to include the boilerplate.
- A boilerplate is a standard, reusable background information about your club and contact information for editorial follow-up.
- It describes the basics of the club, such as its age, number of employees, location(s), programs and the club web address where the editor can go for further details.
- Boilerplates can be reviewed and revised periodically, but they should maintain consistency. Wildly different boilerplates from one release to the next are unprofessional.

10. Contact

- This is the first and last name of the individual who the media can contact to get further information or set up interviews.
- Usually only one name is given, although in extenuating circumstances, there may be two names.
- Media today expect that the direct line, the cell # and a direct email address to be provided.
**Media advisories and alerts**

Media advisories and alerts are brief notices that advise the media of something they need to know about. They play a very specific role: to “advise” the media of announcement considered important.

These may be used for:

- Inviting media to a news conference
- Advising media of a crisis
- Notifying media of unusual situations such as photo opportunities, special guests, open houses, etc.

Media advisories simply identify the host organization; list the date, time and location; and provide an indication of the event. Don’t give away too much information or the media might no bother to attend.

**Tips**

Email your advisory to appropriate media contacts – your goal is media attendance and coverage.

Never send a media advisory or alert with information intended for a media release.

If you are hosting a newsworthy event or a photo opportunity with a newsworthy person (major announcement, introduction of a new program, an opening, presentation of an award, etc), use a media advisory to invite the media to attend.

- “Media Advisory” title should be used when notifying the media at least one week in advance.
- “Media Alert” title should be used when reminding the media less than three days prior to the event.

**How to write a media advisory or alert**

The format is similar to the media release and is one page in length. Only the body content differs.

For a media conference, the information should be succinct and brief so that there is just enough to interest the media in attending.

The lead will be the most important portion of the advisory. It must be newsworthy or there will be no interest in attending, but if too much, the media may opt to do a story without attending.
Writing: the basics

The majority of newspapers across the country currently use CP Style, a general and neutral style of writing developed by the Canadian Press, a news agency cooperatively owned by the media companies that own Canada’s daily newspapers.

To increase the chances of your media releases being published and distributed over the wire service, it is hence important to provide the information that is required in a format that is usable to journalists.

Using CP Style ensures consistency in your writing, including spelling, capitalization, word usage and space/length requirements, while also providing journalists with a “ready-for-print” release that requires minimal editing. (See appendix C)

Active voice

- Write using an active voice as much as possible, as opposed to a passive voice. Active voice helps to keep the material more current and encourages the perception that this is happening now rather than giving a sense that it has already occurred.

- With the active voice, the subject performs the action in the verb. With the passive voice, the subject receives the action in the verb.

- When writing, each sentence will have a subject, a verb and an object. To use the active voice, your subject should be the person who is doing something or acting in a certain way. Then change the verb into an action verb for an even stronger image. Active sentences are usually shorter, more precise, demonstrate stronger writing and denote action.

- For example look at a cougar and a squirrel. What will the cougar do when it sees the squirrel? Eat it.
  o Passive: The squirrel (subject) was eaten by the (verb phrase) the cougar (object)
  o Active: The cougar (subject) ate (verb) the squirrel (object)

Writing tips

- Avoid exclamation marks, which are considered to be used by amateurs. The only exception is when it is used in a quote.

- Avoid “throw-away” words and clauses. These are wasted words that don’t add to the statement’s intention (e.g. clearly, obviously, as reported earlier, as you know, basically, as can be seen, come and see, etc.)

- Confirm all statistical data (e.g. number of athletes, 10th or 11th annual, etc.)

- Avoid cliché expressions, unless absolutely essential.
• After the first full reference to a person (first and last name, position, company) all additional references should be by last name only.

• Avoid contractions (don’t, I’m, they’re, etc.) in the copy. EXCEPTION: using contractions in quotes is essential as it is imperative to write quotes in the way that people speak.

• Each sentence and paragraph should focus on a single thought.
Working with the media throughout the season

While the role of the media is to report the facts, it is important to cooperate with them, ultimately enhancing your chance of coverage and/or exposure. Consequently, it is important to understand the needs and requirements of your media, while also building a strong professional relationship.

Below, you will find a list of “best practices” for working with your media, which was adapted from the ComSID Best Practices Guide.

- Make contact with your reporters, confirm their needs and/or get to know them. Questions to ask include: When is their deadline? How do they prefer to receive the information? What is the best way to contact them? What is your primary focus – results, human-interest stories or both? Etc.
- Do not play favourites;
- Thank and/or acknowledge reporters when you receive good coverage or when you are pleased with their work;
- On the day of the event, reserve and/or assign seating location for media and make sure that they have all the necessary information, ie. game rosters, background information, etc.;
- At the beginning of the season, send each reporter a media kit and/or provide a list of resources available;
- Host a media “meet and greet” at the beginning of the season, providing opportunities for media to meet with both coaches and student-athletes;
- Ask for feedback and/or their opinions;
- Invite them to department functions, ie. banquets, dinners, etc.
Resources

The Canadian Press Stylebook - A Guide for Writers and Editors, The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling and other good writing resources can be purchased online at www.cp.org.

Other useful resources:


Appendix A: Sample media release

For immediate release:
February 11, 2014

B.C. gymnasts win 22 medals at Elite Canada
Olympic hopefuls win gold

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada – Twelve B.C. athletes returned home this weekend from Elite Canada in Gatineau, Quebec with 22 medals including seven gold. Headlining B.C.’s medalists were Scott Morgan (Flicka) and Shallon Olsen (Omega).

Morgan won two gold medals and a bronze in his first competition since recording Canada’s best result in men’s gymnastics in almost a decade at the 2013 world championships.

He landed a new vault, a handspring with a front layout and two and half twists, which ranks with the most difficult in the world to win gold with 14.350 points. He also won gold on floor exercise and added a bronze medal on rings.

“One of the things I was gunning for here was to land the new vault,” said Morgan. “It went pretty well in training even though it was extremely nerve wracking, then I slipped up a little in qualifying but was able to land on my feet in the finals.”

Olsen is one of Canada’s most promising young gymnasts and is eyeing a spot on the 2016 Olympic team. She won five medals during the weekend including silver in the all-around competition. She added gold medals on vault and floor and silver on uneven bars and balance beam.

Only 13, she would just meet the minimum age requirement of 16 if she qualified for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

“I’ve been thinking about the Olympics, especially since the start of the Sochi Games,” said Olsen. “I feel like I’m ready for it.”

Results from Elite Canada along with the Canadian championships in May, will count heavily in team selection for major upcoming international events this year, including the Commonwealth Games and Senior Pan American Championships.

Based in Vancouver, Gymnastics BC is the provincial governing body for the sport of gymnastics in British Columbia. Its mission is to provide, promote and guide a positive lifelong gymnastics experience. For more information about Gymnastics BC and its programs, please visit Gymnastics BC online at www.gymbc.org

-30-

Contact:
Sandra Lewis
Gymnastics BC
(B) (604) 333-3492 | (C) (778) 689-9007
email: slewis@gymbc.org
Appendix B: Sample Media Advisory/Alert

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604-333-3496 (Phone) 604-333-3499 (fax)
www.gymbc.org

January 27, 2014

Media Alert

Media conference to announce international gymnastics event in Richmond

Richmond, British Columbia - MLA John Yap and Mayor Malcom Brodie will join Gymnastics BC CEO, Brian Forrester, at the Richmond Olympic Oval on Wednesday, January 29 to announce a major international gymnastics event coming to Richmond.

Date: Wednesday, January 29
Time: 10 a.m. (PST)
Location: Richmond Olympic Oval, 6111 River Rd, Richmond, BC

Speakers:

- MLA John Yap (Lib-Richmond-Steveston)
- Mayor Malcolm Brodie (Richmond)
- Brian Forrester, CEO Gymnastics BC
- Jeff Thomson, Men’s Technical Coordinator, Pacific Alliance of National Gymnastics Federations
- Scott Morgan, Canadian National Team, men’s artistic gymnastics, 2013 World Championships floor finalist, 2012 Pacific Rim Gymnastics Championships bronze medalist
- Briannah Tsang, Canadian National Team, women’s artistic gymnastics, international medalist
- Anita Cirillo, Former Canadian national team member, trampoline gymnastics, 2006 Pacific Rim Gymnastics Championships

Gymnastics was one of the most watched and attended sports at the 2012 Olympic Games, highlighting its public appeal.

Please RSVP to Sandra Lewis at 604-333-3492 (B), 778-629-9007 (C) or via email at slewis@gymbc.org.
Appendix C: Quick CP Style Guide

The following is a list of key CP style points and techniques to keep in mind when writing media releases. Refer to the CP Stylebook as your complete reference.

- CP Style uses the Canadian Oxford Dictionary for its authority on spelling.
- Hometown and/or place of birth – Do not use postal code abbreviations. For Canadian provinces and territories, use the following abbreviations after the name of a community: Alta. N.B. N.S. Que. B.C. Nfld. Ont. Sask. Man. N.W.T. P.E.I.
- For months used with a specific date, abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. Spell out standing alone or with a year alone.
- City names used as team names take singular verbs; team titles usually require plural verbs – for example: Vancouver is last. / The Canucks are last.
- Long-established and well-known leagues and/or organizations such as the National Hockey League and the Canadian Football League may be referred to in first reference as the NHL and the CFL. Initials are permissible on second reference for clubs and Gymnastics BC. For example Kamloops Gymnastics Trampoline Centre should be spelled out in the first reference followed immediately by its initials in brackets. On second reference, refer to the club simply with their initials, i.e. KGTC.
- Capitalize major sport events and/or trophies, such as the Olympic Games, the Canada Games, BC Games, etc. On second reference, refer to them simply as the Games, the Cup, etc. Provincial, national and world championships are NOT capitalized – write Canadian gymnastics championships.
- Because more than one championship is awarded at most gymnastics events, it is plural. For example, Gymnastics BC championships.
- In general, spell out whole numbers below 10 and use figures for 10 and above.
- Symbol usage – Always use per cent in the body of your release; % is used in headlines.
- Gender – be careful to avoid sexist language. Use women’s, men’s, male and female; NOT ladies, gentleman, girls or guys.
- Dates – CP does not use today, yesterday or tomorrow. To avoid confusion, use the specific day of the week. Using the “seven-day rule”, name the day if it falls within seven days of the current date: on Wednesday, next Tuesday or last Saturday. Outside of the seven-day rule, use the date (May 5). For significant events and in sports schedules, it is customary to give the day and the date.
- Time – Typically, the exact time of an event is unnecessary. Instead, simply give the reader a sense of time by describing the scene. If time is a vital component of your sporting event, give a specific time. The championships will begin at 9 a.m. with the final session scheduled for Sunday afternoon.
- Write 5 a.m., not 5:00 a.m. Time is written in figures, except for noon and midnight (not 12 noon or 12 midnight).