

More Than A Medal.

By PWCI President, Paul “Sonny” Marshall

I’m writing this as the 2006 Winter Olympiad is coming to a conclusion. Like many of you, I always find viewing the Olympics to be a compelling and exciting experience.

But, just the other night I witnessed one of the most inspiring acts of sportsmanship that I’ve ever seen in the world of athletic competition. Actually, I can take it a step further, by saying that I’m not sure that I’ve ever seen anything quite like it in any field of endeavor.

In women’s cross country skiing, one of the Canadian women challenging for the lead in the Team Sprint event broke a ski pole. It was a disaster, and she could have lost her race.

But then, in the purest demonstration of the Olympic spirit, Norway’s cross-country ski team coach, Bjornan Hakensmoen, raced to hand the Canadian competitor a new ski pole to replace her broken one. It is only because of this unselfish act that Canada ultimately won the silver medal. Without his quick and selfless action they would not have had a chance.

Making this even more significant and awesome, was the fact that Norway finished a non-medaling fourth. The Norwegian’s act of sportsmanship cost his team a medal, but it won his country worldwide respect and admiration. Seems to me it was well worth it. The coach, when asked about his actions from the global press corps covering the event, responded by saying simply “that he only acted like any sportsman would in a situation like that”. This wasn’t the first time, an Olympian demonstrated acts of enormous generosity and selflessness. It happened in 1936 in Berlin when, under the watchful and hate-filled eyes of the Nazis, the German long jumper Luz Long gave advice to American Jesse Owens to help him qualify for the finals and go on to win a gold medal that could have been Long’s. It happened in 1964 at Innsbruck when Italian bobsledder Eugenio Monti helped a team from Great Britain win the gold by giving them an axle bolt to repair their sled. In the Olympic Games, the difference between the glory and joy of victory and the crushing disappointment of defeat can be inches or fractions of a second — or a spontaneous act of sportsmanship. And, it should be the same in the business world, also.

All of us at PW strive to conduct ourselves in the same spirit with all that we work alongside of. No, not just with Owners, but everyone—regardless of their rank, role, or relationship to us. When a guy asks for a hand, we give him two. When someone needs propping-up, we provide a sturdy support. We don’t merely pay lip-service to “how can I help”, but we actually do it. We see our role as bringing out the absolute best in everyone, and that often times comes with making a sacrifice of our own self-interests with the proverbial “one for all and all for one” mindset. We ask for nothing in return, except that we’d hope that our good deeds will be returned in kind when we’re the ones with “the broken pole”.

Years from now, hundreds of 2006 Winter Olympians will be able to sit their grandkids on their knees, medals in hand, and proudly tell of their well-deserved competitive victories. Yes, each will, no doubt, be an inspiring story of how years of disciplined training, a competitive spirit, and a belief in yourself can lead one to the Olympic medal ceremony.

But just think of the story—and the message—that the medal-less coach Bjornan Hakensmoen will be able to share.

