



The Journey of the USOC Summit 2002

by Nikki Stone

I vividly recall showing up for my first SUMMIT Steering Committee meeting and being overwhelmed by the power, experience, and expertise in a room full of accomplished leaders. I remember asking myself if I could really help lead a program that would contribute to future Olympians achieving their ultimate dreams. How could I offer anything when these athletes were already obtaining the experience and knowledge of Norm Bellingham (Canoe/ Kayak Gold medalist), Bonnie Blair (5-time Speed Skating medalist), Cami Granato (Women's Hockey Gold medalist), Jack O'Callahan (Men's Hockey Gold medalist), Diann Roffe (2-time Alpine skiing medalist), Paul Wylie (Figure Skating silver medalist), and, later, Mike Conley (triple-jumping 2-time medalist).

Then I quickly realized that we each had something unique and valuable to offer, but there was still a common thread that bound our different experiences. I came to realize that we all shared the common intense desire to develop a program that would help bind the current athletes, share mental and physical techniques, and instill the belief that the athletes could extend their limits and break the podium barrier.

Many people asked why we would put so many volunteer hours into such a program. This question was answered for each of us after the very first SUMMIT 2002 weekend. We all realized that the rewards were much more than the cost. These sentiments are evident in the comments of Bonnie Blair: "It wasn't just a giving process. I feel I even became more motivated in my own life experiences as a retired athlete. It was also wonderful to get to know so many athletes from other sports and learn what they go through, and what their sport is really all about like curling, skeleton, luge and aerials. It was way better than any 'up close and personal' I have seen during any Games." These feelings were further echoed by Jack O'Callahan: "I definitely took more out of my involvement in the SUMMIT program than I gave, and I know I gave a lot. I learned so much and feel so fortunate. The prospect of giving back to the athletes is what enticed me and brought me to the SUMMIT."

Each year, we introduced new themes and ideas ("Overcoming Adversity", "Being in the Zone", "Stepping It Up", etc.) and implemented new exciting activities. Several of the Steering Committee members gave such inspirational speeches that they not only motivated the athletes, but almost encouraged the rest of us to make a last minute comeback. And each year our goal of helping these athletes to become the strongest, most united U.S. team to ever enter an Olympic Games was becoming more and more attainable. Paul Wylie recalls, "For me, it was the personal one-on-one time that the athletes got with each other that made the SUMMIT unique. Instead of meeting their teammates for the first time in the Village, there was structured and unstructured time to



get together and realize what they had in common. To hike a mountain or to sit in a circle talking about the challenges facing them as athletes (and hear how others were dealing with them) made everyone bond as Team USA from the first SUMMIT through the Games. It felt great to see all of the ideas the Steering Committee had worked evolve and come to fruition at the SUMMITS”.

How rewarding it was to receive a letter from a participating athlete writing, “[D]riving from the Snowbird [resort] home I cried almost the whole way. I had told myself hundreds, maybe thousands, of times that I would win a medal in 2002; however, after the Summit it was the first time I really believed I could do it.” To have a hand in their Olympic preparations was quite an opportunity. As Norm Bellingham said recently, "It was a great privilege and honor to get to know so many of these remarkable athletes as they were in the midst of pursuing their dreams ... I found the experience to be both humbling and inspiring".

And the high point of the whole experience had to be seeing the athletes compete in the 2002 Olympics. We not only knew almost all the American athletes who received medals and personal bests at the Games, we knew those athletes on a far deeper level. We dreamed with these athletes, we sweated with them, we shared secrets with them, we believed with them, and then we pumped our fists with them as they realized their Olympic dreams had become a reality.

I know that every one of the Steering Committee members will walk away from their experience with SUMMIT 2002 a better, more fulfilled person. I think that all of our feelings are best summed up in the words of Jack O’Callahan, “The SUMMIT 2002 was the perfect program at the right time created by a dedicated committee to support a great group of hungry, young American athletes who for two weeks, and maybe forever, colored the skies over Salt Lake City in Red, White, and Blue. I strongly encourage all former Olympic champions, especially the class of 2002 to dive into future SUMMITS, to share their experiences, and give of themselves to maintain that vital link with our athletic future. I can honestly say that my SUMMIT experience was every bit as rewarding as winning my gold medal and I will always treasure the memories of both.”

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