

OLYMPICS NEWS AND NOTES

Supporting America's Olympic Athletes—One Dollar At A Time

(NAPSA)—Before speed skater Bonnie Blair, the most decorated U.S. woman in Olympic Winter Games history, could dream of winning a gold medal, she knew she would need to train in Europe to make the 1984 Olympic team. The youngest of six children, Blair needed financial support to make her Olympic dream come true. Thanks to a generous \$7,000 donation from the Champaign (Illinois) Policemen's Benevolent Association, Blair was able to take the trip overseas and earned a spot on the team. Over the next ten years, she earned five Olympic gold medals and set several world records.

In Blair's case, as is the case with hundreds of other Olympic athletes, there's no question that she had the determination and dedication to excel in speed skating. She started skating with her brothers and sisters at a young age, and in her early teens, she decided to dedicate her life to the sport. However, sometimes skill, speed and talent are not enough for athletes who dream of competing in the ultimate challenge of their career—the Olympic Games.

For this reason, Blair and 1992 Olympian Summer Sanders have joined with Visa USA, a 20-year Olympic sponsor, to raise \$1 million to help Olympic hopefuls make their dreams come true. Every dollar will count, with all donations going directly to the development of U.S. Olympic and Paralympic team hopefuls.

With qualifying meets that require extensive travel and training schedules that exceed the hours of many full-time jobs, Olympic hopefuls need a tremendous amount of financial support



for training, equipment and transportation costs. Unlike other countries, America's Olympic and Paralympic athletes do not receive sustained, direct federal funding. Instead, athletes must rely on the support of their families, communities and sponsors to help defray expenses.

In Blair's situation, her community pulled together to send the talented speed skater to Europe so she could train and prepare for the Olympics. This is just one of hundreds of tales from Olympic hopefuls who have needed financial support to make their dreams come true.

"So many athletes have talent and desire but never get the shot that I had to pull it all together," Blair said. "Without the support from my community, my dreams could have been permanently put on hold. We want to give the thousands of young hopefuls out there the chance to dream big and chase it."

An example of parents who have made tremendous sacrifices comes from Terin Humphrey, a gymnast, who earned two silver medals at the 2004 Olympic Games. At age nine, she began training and to help with her expenses, her parents often worked multiple jobs. Humphrey's parents helped clean the gym where she trained and her father,

a banker by day, built houses in the evenings and on the weekends to earn extra income. Humphrey's Olympic journey truly became a family affair.

There are so many other stories of Olympic hopefuls who have prevailed under extraordinary circumstances. For example, Paralympian Marlon Shirley, 2000 gold medalist in the 100 m., was abandoned by his mother at age three and lived on the streets of Las Vegas. Currently, he is training at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, hoping to break the 11-second record in the 100 meter dash. If he breaks the record, he'll become the first American athlete with a leg amputation to do so.

Through the Dollar for the Dream Program, donations can be made online at www.visa.com/journey, and Visa will match every dollar donated up to \$2 million.

"This program will help bring athletes closer to their dreams and the public closer to the athletes they cheer for and support," said Blair.

Everyone who makes a donation will receive a limited-edition, commemorative pin designed by Visa with input from 15 Torino Olympic and Paralympic hopefuls, including Michelle Kwan, Bode Miller and Derek Parra. The minimum donation is \$1.00 and there is no maximum. With vivid, colorful representations of the Olympic cauldron and Olympic rings, the pin serves as a badge of support for America's athletes.

The Visa Dollar for the Dream Program begins in October and extends through December 2008.

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