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VANCOUVER OLYMPICS | FEBRUARY 13, 2010

# Canada Group Makes Medals Its Business

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By KEVIN HELLIKER And GEOFFREY A. FOWLER

VANCOUVER—Canada's drive to win Olympic gold at home, a goal that eluded it in two prior Games, has a secret weapon this time.

It is a reclusive group of business leaders that provides a select group of Olympic hopefuls with special assistance, from the latest equipment to sports psychologists. B2ten it is called.

Nobody owes it more than Jennifer Heil, the world's top-ranked mogul's skier, known as Canada's golden girl. For years, B2ten has supplied her with physicians, personal trainers, nutritionists and specialized coaches—aid the 26-year-old credits with transforming her from an unknown to the top-ranked competitor. Preparing for the moguls competition Saturday night, Ms. Heil said, "Without B2ten, I wouldn't be competing at the level I am today."

The roughly two dozen donors to the group hail from some of Canada's wealthiest and most reclusive families, including the Bronfman and Desmarais clans. But don't look for them on the B2ten Web site. Just as cryptic as the group's name, which stands for Business 2010, is its management structure.

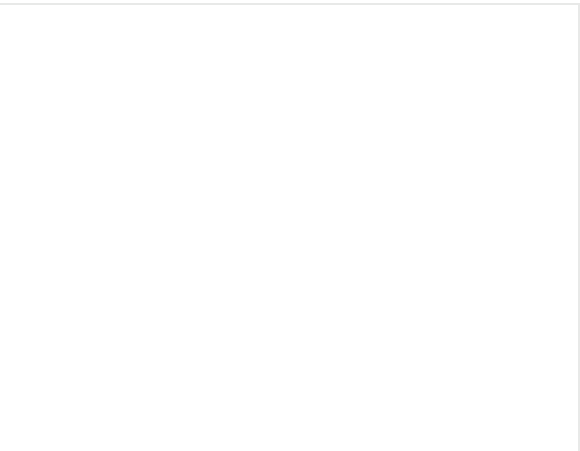
The site features lengthy profiles of B2ten-sponsored athletes but names neither donors nor officers. It doesn't mention that the Bronfman family accountant keeps books for the nonprofit. In keeping with an old-fashioned reverence for quiet money, gifts from B2ten don't result in the splashing of any names or logos on equipment or uniforms.

Yet the group could have a significant effect at these Games. Of the 206 Canadian Olympians in Vancouver, 18 belong in the B2ten stable. "We've got 7% of Canada's athletes going to the starting line," said J.D. Miller, a Montreal banking and mergers consultant who helped to launch B2ten several years ago. While not exactly making a prediction, he said, "How about if they won 25% of Canada's medals?"

B2ten is smaller and quieter than a government-run effort to boost Canada's performance. That program, called Own the Podium, has raised about \$120 million to spend over several years in a bid to win the medal count in Vancouver, something Canada has never come close to achieving.

B2ten has been spending \$1 million a year, although on far fewer athletes and, it says, with a total absence of administrative costs. "It's no secret that private enterprise is more efficient than government—it has to be to survive," said Mr. Miller, adding that every cent of every B2ten dollar goes to help athletes.

Although a certain competitiveness exists between the two programs, together they represent a one-two punch that could give Canada an edge here. Over seven years, going back to when the British Columbia city won the 2010 Games, Own the Podium has sought to develop a large field of young athletes and provide them with upgraded facilities, coaching and equipment.



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## Medal Count

Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
United States of America	2	2	4	8
Germany	2	3	1	6
France	2	0	3	5
Canada	1	2	1	4
Switzerland	3	0	0	3

Full Medals Table



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## Vancouver Olympics Photos



But in some cases, the potential and the particular needs of athletes have been overlooked amid that effort, and that's where B2ten steps in.

Without Own the Podium, teenager Patrick Chan might never have emerged as a top-level Canadian figure skater. But to reach his potential, Mr. Chan wanted services that Own the Podium couldn't or wouldn't provide: one special instructor to elevate his jumps, another to improve his spins and a third to analyze his dance movements.

An application to B2ten won him those teachers and more, including a retreat with sports psychologists who, he says, helped him overcome his fear. In the past year, Mr. Chan won several championships. He now ranks first among Canada's male figure skaters and ninth in the world. "I am so grateful to B2ten," he said.

Bobsledder Helen Upperton and her teammate ranked fourth after the 2007 season, which she felt was because of the poor quality of her sled. After B2ten bought her a new sled, along with other equipment and a full-time mechanic, she and her teammate reached the podium in five out of eight races the next winter, twice finishing first. "Thanks to B2ten, I'm going into the Olympics feeling that I have a chance," she said.

Another example is bobsledder Lyndon Rush. As driver of the third-ranked two-man team in Canada, he felt certain he could perform much better on a newer sled than the 1992 model the country's bobsled team had handed him. The two higher-ranked teams had newer sleds.

Mr. Rush applied to B2ten. It was like applying for a job, he said: "They asked a million questions and did a lot of research, particularly into my work ethic."

They also wanted assurance his new teammate, Lascelles Brown, would remain part of the team. Mr. Brown had won a silver medal at the 2006 Olympics.

After B2ten bought the two a new sled, for \$70,000, they quickly rose to become the top-ranked Canadian team, and they enter the Vancouver Games ranked fifth in the world. "B2ten is why I have a chance at winning a medal at these Olympics," Mr. Rush said.

Experts say the group represents a new wrinkle in private funding of Olympic ventures in a private-enterprise system. There have always been so-called amateur-sport angels, such as the late Milwaukee philanthropist Jane Bradley Pettit, whose passion for speed skating led her to finance construction early last decade of a now-renowned arena in that city. An angel turned demon was John duPont, who used his share of the duPont fortune to support U.S. wrestling team until, inexplicably, he killed an Olympic wrestler in 1996, a crime for which he remains in prison.

As for groups, the 75-member board of trustees of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association raises or contributes millions a year for American Olympians on skis. But the list of those names is well publicized, and the board amounts to one of the most prestigious clubs in America. And only ski disciplines benefit. Investment banker Thomas Weisel, a trustee and former chairman of the association, says private enterprise hasn't sufficiently supported sports like bobsled, speed skating and biathlon, which he argues should receive greater contributions from government.

B2ten stands out for comprising a group of business leaders in support of Olympians of every kind, and in exchange for no publicity or sponsorship benefits. "Maybe there's a bit of a socialist or collective quality to it," said Stephen Bronfman, grandson of Samuel Bronfman, founder of Seagram Co.

"These are extraordinary human beings who happen to be athletes," he added.

"These relationships could lead to careers beyond the Olympics."

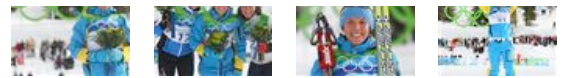
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