

RBC OLYMPIANS SET THEIR SIGHTS ON LONDON'S SUMMER GAMES

RBC is a proud supporter of the Olympics and Paralympics, and gives an extra boost to several dozen Canadian athletes through the RBC Olympians program. RBC Olympians act as community ambassadors by giving motivational speeches to school children, community groups and RBC employees, drawing on the lessons they've learned in training for and competing in the Olympic Games.

In turn, the athletes are provided with the opportunity to learn valuable skills by working in various different roles at RBC. This work helps to prepare them for life after sport and gives them funding to help them realize their Olympic and Paralympic dreams.

Meet three of our 37 RBC Olympians and follow them to the London 2012 Games.

ANDREW RUSSELL

SPORT: SPRINT CANOE

With four boys in their family, Andrew Russell's parents could have been well on their way to forming their own basketball or hockey team. But instead, following in Andrew's father's footsteps, canoeing became the family sport.

Andrew, 28, grew up in Dartmouth, N.S., where recreation revolved around the Banook Canoe Club. His father was a national champion and his brothers took to the sport, too. In fact, he shares a place on the national team with his younger brother Benjamin.

"There's something special about being on the water," Andrew said in a recent interview from his training camp in Indian Harbor Beach, Fla. "I have a real passion for it, for sure."



Andrew Russell
Sport: Sprint Canoe



Sandra Sassine
Sport: Fencing

That passion is obvious from Andrew's accomplishments so far, and his drive to compete in next summer's Olympic Games. He and his partner placed fifth in the 500-metre, doubles canoe race and sixth in the 1,000-metre race in the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. And they won silver medals at the Pan American Games in 2010 in the 1,000-metre and the 200-metre races.

"I like to challenge myself," Andrew said. "And there's something about pushing yourself beyond what you naturally think is possible and arriving at a new goal, only to set new ones."

For the Olympics, he's focusing on the 200-metre singles event, after a setback at the Pan American Games in October 2011. This means he probably won't compete in the doubles events next summer. He returned to Nova Scotia for Christmas and concentrated on dry-land training there through January. He heads back to Florida in early February, where he'll train intensively with the Canadian team until their national team trials in Georgia in early May.

Andrew has been an RBC Olympian for several years, working about 15 hours per week in public affairs and event management in Halifax, as well as making presentations to

RBC employees, schools and community groups about things such as goal setting and teamwork.

"What's really great about the program is that it involves aspiring athletes, Olympic athletes, athletes who've recently retired," said Andrew, acknowledging that being an elite athlete means it can be hard to develop professional work experience. "They're helping with every step of the athletic pursuit."

SANDRA SASSINE **SPORT: FENCING**

Fencing is one of the less well-known Olympic sports, but to Sandra Sassine, it has always been second nature. She started when she was six years old, the daughter of two fencers, one of whom – her dad – coached the national team. Over two and a half decades, she has all but mastered two of the three weapons used in the sport – the foil and the sabre – and she's ready to make her mark in the Summer Games.

"The passion of my father taught me the love of the sport," 32-year-old Sandra said from her home in Montreal. "I never tire of this sport. It's been 26 years, and I still have a lot of stuff to work on."

Sandra's current standings almost guarantee her a spot in the London competition this summer in the sabre event, which is characterized by quick movements and quick attacks. But with World Cup competitions in Portland, Oregon; Orleans, France; London, Istanbul and Moscow over the winter and spring, plus training in Germany, the Ukraine and back in Canada, she's not resting on her laurels.

And she doesn't rest when she's at home in Montreal, either. Sandra says she enjoys her work with the RBC Olympians program because she likes to inspire people to achieve their goals – whether in school or in the workplace.

"If you want to achieve a high level in your work, you have to love your work," Sandra said. "It's the same for an athlete. If you're not passionate about what you do, you cannot achieve the highest rank."

Aside from fencing, Sandra is passionate about teaching and is only a few months away from completing a degree in education. When she retires from being a full-time athlete, she would like to coach athletics at a CEGEP, a Quebec pre-college school.

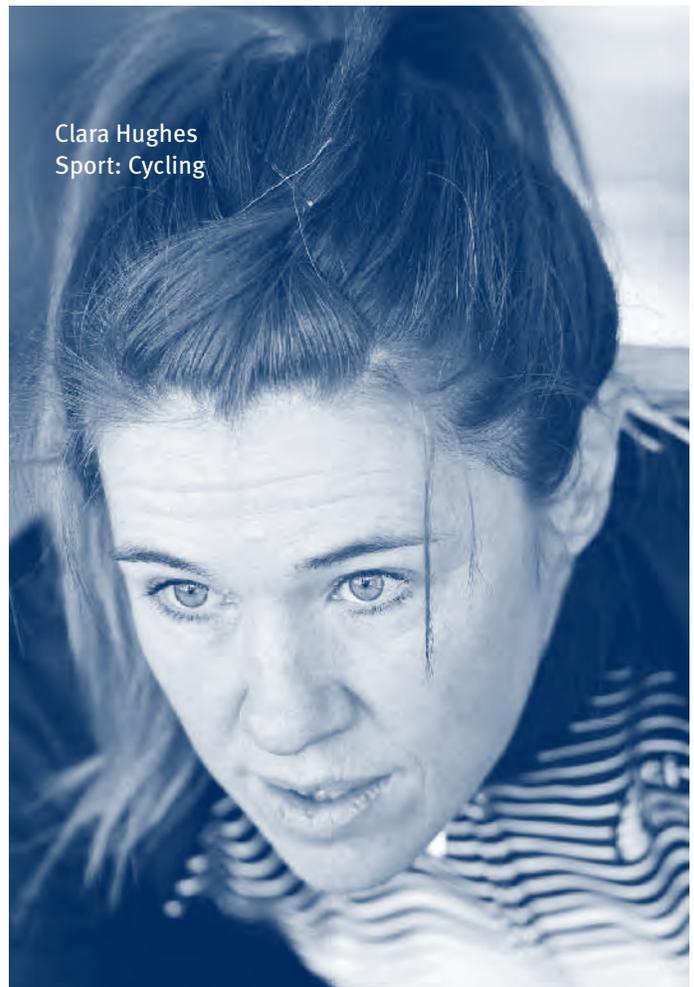
While failure isn't something that Sandra has dealt with a lot in her life, she said it's always part of her lessons, especially when speaking with young people.

"If you fail, it doesn't matter," she said. "You stand up and you play again. If they learn that from a very young age, it will last with them forever."

CLARA HUGHES **SPORT: CYCLING**

Six-time Olympic medalist Clara Hughes is the only Canadian to ever have won medals both at the Summer and Winter Olympic Games. She started out as a cyclist, winning bronze at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. Then she switched to speed skating, bringing home the gold from Turin's 2006 Olympic Games and carrying the flag for Canada in Vancouver in 2010. Now, after hanging up her speed skates for good, Clara is training for the Summer Games once more.

"I think I have a really good chance," Clara, 39, said recently from Montreal. "I actually only came back to cycling a year ago ... and I've basically proved to myself in every race that I've done that I'm one of the best in the world at what I'm trying to do. It puts me in the place of showing legitimate potential of being on the podium in London."



To get there, Hughes will train through the winter in Utah and Arizona. Utah's high elevation makes training there a great challenge, but "the dumps of snow there are incredible," according to Hughes, which means bicycling outdoors is impossible. So she heads to Arizona for 10 days at a time, where she can test herself on snow-free roads and lower altitudes.

One of the great things about being an RBC Olympian, according to Clara, is the ability to give back. RBC grants each RBC Olympian \$5,000, which they can use to support a cause that's important to them. Clara would like to direct the funds she receives to the northern Manitoba projects of Right to Play, an international humanitarian organization that uses sport to drive social change.

"My goal is to show them that I really care and to have kids up there be able to learn sport as I have and have it change their lives," Clara said.