

OPINION & EDITORIAL

Editorial

Positive test for Canadian Olympic hammer-throw champ worrisome

With the commencement of the Sydney Olympics just around the corner, headlines seem to be focusing on drug testing and steroid abuse.

Hammer-throw champ, Robin Lyons, was suspended from the Canadian Olympic team after she tested positive for the drug Norandrosterone at the Canadian Olympic trials in Victoria last month. Norandrosterone is a by-product of the anabolic steroid Nandrolone.) Lyons is one of many Olympic athletes who has tested positive for the drug in the past year.

The main problem with the test for Norandrosterone is that positive results can occur as a result of natural metabolites in the body, so how can scientists be sure these athletes are truly guilty of taking steroids?

After researching the topic, I found an article in an August 1999 issue of *New Scientist* entitled "Dope Tests on Trial." As of that time, anti-doping scientists said their "tests have been expertly calibrated to avoid such pitfalls," meaning there was virtually no margin for error in these tests. If an athlete's urine sample contains more than two nanograms of the substance per millilitre, the athlete will be reported as testing positive.

When Lyons was tested, her first urine

sample was well under the new limit of five nanograms per millilitre. Because the test can easily 'made' negative by athletes who attempt to superdilute their urine immediately before testing, Lyons was re-tested and found to have nine nanograms/ml. This was enough to consider her guilty.

The drug does, however, occur naturally in the system and Lyons continues to argue she has never knowingly taken the drug. She believes, therefore, she was wrongfully dismissed from the team.

My question is, how can the doctors who test for this drug jeopardize the success of an Olympic athlete with that amount of reasonable doubt? As an athlete, I have had dreams of playing big league baseball but I would never take a drug to better myself - the risks are just too high. Being wrongfully accused and, therefore, losing my chance to play would enrage me.

Athletes are getting faster and stronger but drugs do not always play a part. It seems with these new tests drugs are expected in competitive sports such as the Olympics. Doctors should make a test fail-proof before they accuse athletes.

Good luck to Robin Lyons - I hope your case will change things and tests will be better regulated.

• *Cindy Brown, Managing Editor*

God-awful time in the 'land of god'

Touristic tales of tension in Israel

In this week's Peak from Simon Fraser University (www.peak.sfu.ca), Erin Fitzpatrick provides an insightful historical perspective on the nation known as Israel (or Palestine, if you prefer.) But hers is only one of many perspectives of the perpetually embattled nation.

In 1992, I was a teenager on a mission. It was late fall (I bailed from classes mid-semester to travel) and the winter days loomed ominously ahead. What began as a relaxing European rail journey had become a desperate race for the sun.

Holland and France were bitterly cold. Portugal and Morocco provided a brief respite from the winter chills, but border difficulties in Northern Africa prevented further travel south.

Then on a rainy day in Rome, it was decided: Shannon and I would make it to Bethlehem for Christmas.

We spent four blissful days baking on the deck of a Greek boat as it took us from Greece to Cyprus. Meanwhile, the temperature at home in Calgary hit minus 35. That boat then took us to the Israeli port city of Haifa. The week that followed would prove to be anything but dull.

When you set foot on Israeli soil, you instantly know you're in a place like no other on earth. Some people can sense the millennia of history in the soil beneath them. Others claim they can feel closer to God. It represents the Holy Land for many religions, after all. As for myself, I only noticed the hate and tension that surrounded me.

We barely stepped off the dock in Haifa when we were greeted by alarms and frantic soldiers. Apparently,

somebody had left a bomb at customs. It turned out later that James, a fellow Canadian we met in Greece, had left two oranges and some toilet paper at the desk. Oops.

The paranoia that I witnessed that day shadowed me for the rest of my time in the country. It was as if it was bred into all the ubiquitous, Uzi-toting teenagers. In the land of God, everybody was everyone else's enemy.

I had my camera stolen on Christmas Eve by some thug, only to retrieve it when a massive Fijian gentleman came to my aid. Apparently, the soldiers and rooftop snipers in Bethlehem that night weren't concerned with mere thieves. Maybe they were busy guarding Jennie Garth.

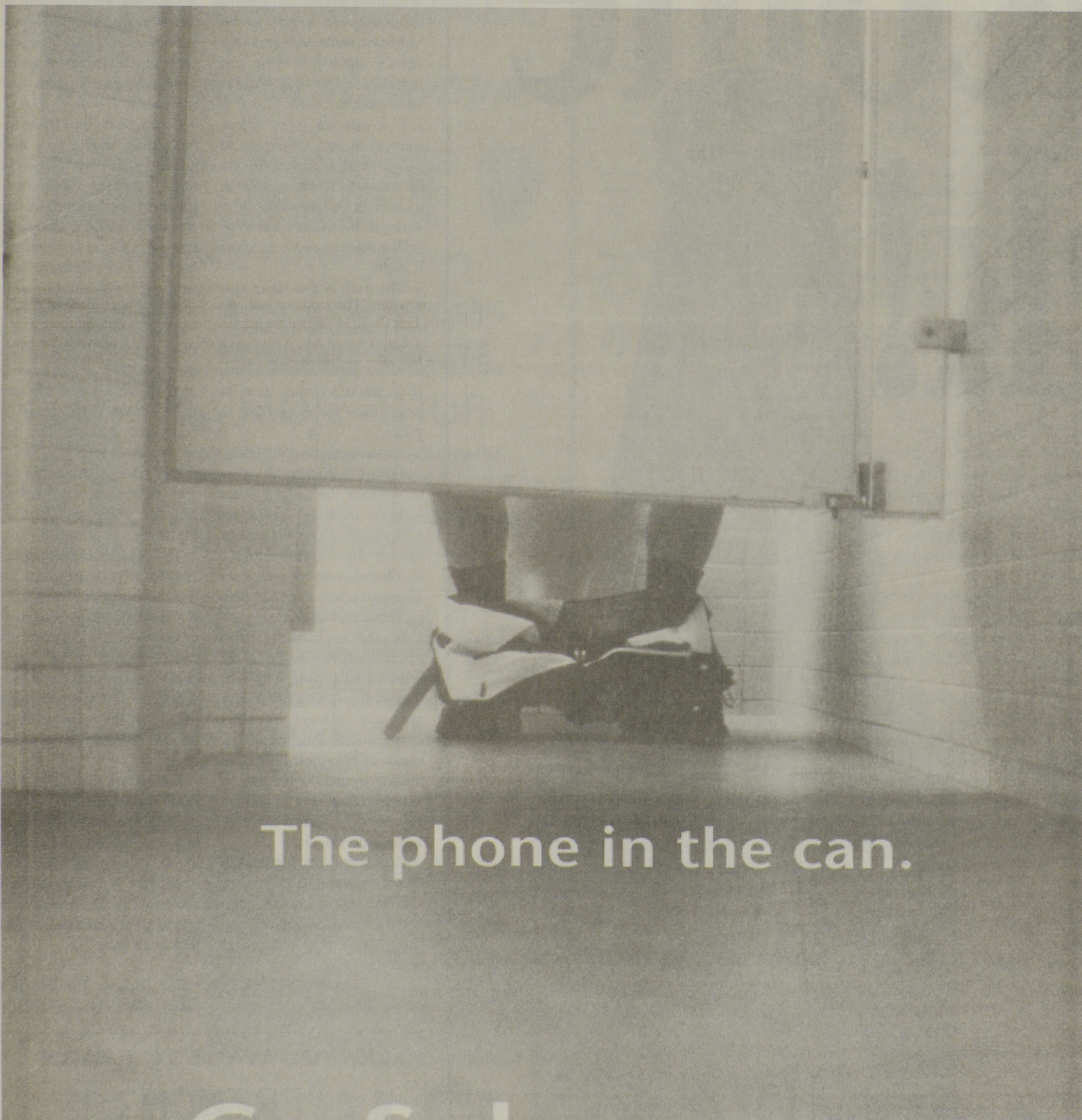
The next day, I was mugged and hospitalized, then detained by police for two days for some unknown crime. Nobody would tell me what. In the station, I heard screaming Palestinian kids as they were presumably pummelled in the adjacent room.

My last day in Israel began like my first. With a bomb scare. At the airport. It continued with four hours of interrogations by customs officials, and finished with a pre-flight body-cavity search. I can tell you that I was never so happy to see a cold, rainy Amsterdam.

• *Dee Hon, features editor, The Peak, Simon Fraser U.*

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