

# When doping control pays a visit

*For six years, Guelph's Maureen Hay arrived at athletes' homes, unannounced, at any time of the year, to test them for drugs*



BY ART KILGOUR  
PHOTOGRAPHY • DEAN PALMER

Elite athletes, those at the top of their sport or trying to qualify for the Olympic Games, are tested regularly for drug use.

This happens at competitions, but also randomly, at any time of the year, usually at home.

Maureen Hay — a former national-level 800-metre runner and a sprints coach with Speed River Track and Field Club in Guelph — spent six years working as a doping control officer. She was the woman who shows up at your door at 7 a.m. and asks you to pee in a cup, with her watching the whole time.

She mostly tested track and field athletes and swimmers, although she also tested divers, roller hockey players, wrestlers and boxers. Her employer was a private testing company on contract with international sports federations. Her beat was from Montreal to Michigan, testing Canadian and U.S. athletes.

“I’d knock on the door unannounced, usually first thing in the morning. I’d spend an hour or more and would never let the athlete out of my sight,” she says. “After they urinated in a cup, I never touched the sample, but I also observed it the whole time. I was trained to not even walk behind the athlete, so as not to lose sight of the sample.”

She coached the athlete to divide the sample into two glass bottles, an “A” and a “B” sample. Once the bottles were filled, the athlete tightened their tamper-proof lids, put them in a sealed plastic bag then packed them in a shipping box. After that, they filled out the paperwork together, which gave all the details of the athlete and was linked to the samples only by a seven-digit number, common to both the forms and the bottles.

After leaving the home, Hay was in charge of sending the samples to Laval, Que., to a facility that tests all the urine samples taken from athletes in North America, on contract to the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Hay says it is not true that an athlete using drugs can evade a positive test as easily as drinking a lot of water before the test. Each time she took a sample, she measured the urine with a refractometer, a device that measures its density. If it was too dilute, she

would wait with the athlete, sometimes for hours, until a more concentrated sample could be provided.

The key to this sort of out-of-competition testing is the surprise factor. Ranked athletes have to disclose their whereabouts every single day and comply with a random testing request or face sanctions. An athlete can specify what time of day they’d like to be tested, a “window,” but have to be available for testing any day, whether at home or on the road.

“The higher-ranked the athlete was, the more routine they found the testing,” Hay says. “I even got to develop a bit of a relationship with athletes that I tested several times per year.”

She initially underwent five days of training in the testing protocol, and for six years, until last fall, it was her part-time job, “paying more money than supply teaching,” she says.

She never tested an athlete who was later found to be doping but, “in some cases, I tested athletes who went on to win world championships,” presumably as clean competitors. Hay can’t name the athletes for confidentiality reasons.

Visiting athletes in their homes allowed her to see another side of their lives. “Many athletes live in subpar conditions,” she says.

She says she tested a female U.S. boxer who was living below the poverty line. “It was alarming, and this was only a month after she had won an Olympic medal!”

Hay says there were three reasons she decided to become a doping control officer.

“Firstly, I was an athlete, and I was tested throughout my career,” from 1992 to 2001, she says. “Secondly, I was doing it to keep hope in the sport, like for our Speed River athletes here in Guelph. And thirdly, I did it because I was a coach and I want to maintain the integrity of our competitions.”

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