

SFU BUSINESS

Alumni Profile



Dave Cobb

**Senior Vice President,
Revenue, Marketing & Communications
Vancouver 2010 Olympic & Paralympic
Organizing Committee
BBA '87**

Outstanding Alumni Award winner Dave Cobb combines his passion for sport and business in his new job with the 2010 Olympics.

Dave is senior vice-president of revenue, marketing and communications for the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. His responsibilities include sponsorships, television revenues, ticketing, licensing and merchandising, marketing, communications, and media relations.

The Olympic job is huge. What will be your biggest challenge?

I'm just into the job and what I'm really focusing on is trying to get a grasp of all the challenges, but I think the biggest challenge will be, "How do I go about doing it?" My background with Orca Bay and the Canucks involved quite a few similar responsibilities, but this is much bigger – it's a huge project and it's going to take a little time to fully grasp it.

I got a great start by going to Athens in August to see how they did things. It's been really exciting. I'm spending a lot of time in Toronto working with business leaders to get them involved – and I'm finding people really do want to be involved.

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What will be the most exciting part of the job?

I was with the Canucks for 12 years and I couldn't imagine another job that I'd rather do. But, guess what? I found it. I feel renewed, rejuvenated, and I can't wait to get to work in the morning to sink my teeth into it. I just got off to a fantastic start.

One of the things that is exciting is our commitment to making this Canada's games. It can't just be British Columbia's games or Vancouver's games. We are meeting with sponsors and participants who are relevant to all parts of the country. We really believe that what we are doing is for the whole country and also that it is more than just 16 days in February. We want to turn a generation of kids onto sports; through the Olympics we think we can increase the participation of kids and families in sports and in having an active lifestyle. Athletes can be role models. My six-year-old daughter watched the Olympics and said she didn't even know that girls could be wrestlers. Now she's interested in wrestling. She also wants to dive like Emilie Heymans. So if we can turn on even one percent of the kids we'll have achieved something.

Is there any concern after the Athens Olympics that there might be trouble filling the stands?

The biggest lesson I learned in Athens is how damaging inaccurate media reports can be. All we heard was the media telling people not to go to Athens because there would be problems. In fact, the games were marvelous. We have to get the word out properly. We will have the venues finished well in advance, so in the last two years we can host test events and focus on ticket sales.

How do you market an event like this to the world?

First, it's more than just the games – it's the entire Olympic experience, plus the place people are going to. We have the best of both – there are lots of reasons for people to come to British Columbia even without the games – and when you add in the games it becomes hard to resist.

"We see the whole country as putting on these games; we see it as an opportunity for Canadians to come together." We want everyone to be so proud of this Olympics.

We're working with our corporate sponsors on an eight-year commitment that will end in 2012 because we want the Olympics to be continued in some way. One of our challenges is to make the games relevant to more people in more ways.

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How did your SFU education help prepare you for this work?

The main things I learned at SFU were the lessons of discipline and establishing priorities. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for my SFU experience. I played soccer for the university and I learned about team playing and that it takes really hard work to combine academics and sports. It was important to learn those lessons early because they are essential for long-term success.

What are your best memories of SFU?

One of the highlights was winning an NAIA national soccer championship in Texas in 1983. The focus at SFU is on getting your degree first and then adding on sports so I had to work hard at both. At most U.S. schools it's the reverse – sports first, and then academics as the add-on. That's why SFU's achievements in sports are so extraordinary – you simply aren't allowed to let your grades slide if you want to stay on the team. The relationships that you build in sports are important too. I still hang out with some of my teammates from the year.

Was there anyone at SFU who particularly influenced you?

My soccer coach, Keith Watts.

Will you have any time for enjoyment and relaxation over the next six years? If so, what will you do to relax?

That's going to be one of the challenges. This is a six-year job so I have to figure out how to pace myself. I've got to find some downtime because this is a marathon, not a sprint. I'll spend most of my relaxation time with my wife and my daughter. I'm not going to sacrifice time with them.

The Olympics will be over in six years, then what?

I'll start thinking about that in five years. I'll be 47 when the games are over so I should have one or two careers left in me. I've been extremely lucky in finding two jobs that combine sports and business. Maybe I'll be lucky enough to find a third one after the Olympics.