

Tricia C.M. Smith

Class of 1985

Silver medalist, rowing, 1984 Summer Olympic Games, Los Angeles, USA; Olympic competitor, 1976 Summer Olympic Games, Montréal, Canada; 1980 Summer Olympic Games, Moscow, USSR; and 1988 Summer Olympic Games, Seoul, Korea



From Day One

Four-time Olympian: 1976, 1980, 1984 and 1988. Olympic silver medalist, Commonwealth Games Gold Medalist and seven-time World Championship medalist. Six-time recipient of both the Sport Excellence Award of the Government of Canada and the BC Premier's Athletic Award, and nominee for the BC Athlete of the Quarter Century. Member of the UBC, BC and Canadian Olympic Sports Halls of Fame. Named Canada's Chef de Mission for the 2007 Pan American Games, and recipient of the 2006 Carol Anne Letheren International Sport Leadership Award, in recognition of her 30-year contribution to sport as a competitor and volunteer leader.

Interesting to think what we might have lost if, in 1976, the Olympics had not finally opened rowing to women. "I'm Chair of the Women's Commission for the International Rowing Federation," says Tricia Smith, "and we've supported a Ph.D. project being completed by a UBC student on the history of women in rowing. Reading the draft of her thesis, I realized how much we were a part of the early days for women in international rowing. It is incredible. Now I understand why men had difficulty seeing where we fit in. It was totally new to them, and I was there as a young woman saying, 'What's your problem?' not knowing that they had never seen us there before. Going to the Vancouver Rowing Club and not being able to touch the men's equipment." She pauses. "Rowing equipment." She laughs.

Smith grew up on the beaches near UBC in a big family that didn't differentiate between boys' activities and girls'. She swam competitively until she was 16 (and her sister Shannon is an Olympic medalist in swimming), when a former teammate who had already entered university issued a challenge she couldn't refuse: "You should come out and row, it's really fun and the eighth person for the women's eight keeps sleeping in." Smith recalls having to get up before the CBC came on the air. But as soon as she got on the water, she says, "I loved it from day one."

Her long Olympic career coincided with her years in law school, where typically students could not take a single semester off without losing an entire year's work. She recalls, "Professor Reid was incredibly good to me in terms of making it possible for me to train and compete as an Olympian and also attend law school." Smith is currently a partner at Barnes Craig & Associates, managing claims for liability insurers, providing risk management consulting and acting as an arbitrator on sports issues. She talks about carrying athletic skills such as goal-setting and teamwork into her work as a lawyer, and remembers being dismayed early in her career by the typical understanding of teamwork: "I'll take what I need for myself first and then of course I'm dedicated to the team," she recites. "Yeah, but if you just all work together as a team, there will be more at the end for yourself and your family!"

She's living proof. In 2001, UBC awarded her with an honorary doctorate for her involvement in international sport, international sport development and sport and the law. "That was a huge honour," she says. "I'll never forget my dad in the front row of the balcony of the Chan Centre and the wonderful smile on his face." Smith is a member of the Executive of the Canadian Olympic Committee, a board member of the International Council of Arbitration for Sport and a volunteer with Legacies Now. She was the first woman to be elected Chair of Sport BC, was a board member of the Rick Hansen Foundation and was part of the Bid Committee for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. "You get to a point in your life where you find you can actually be part of the decision-making process that can change things for the better," she says, "and I'm very proud of that."