

Chandra Crawford Retires

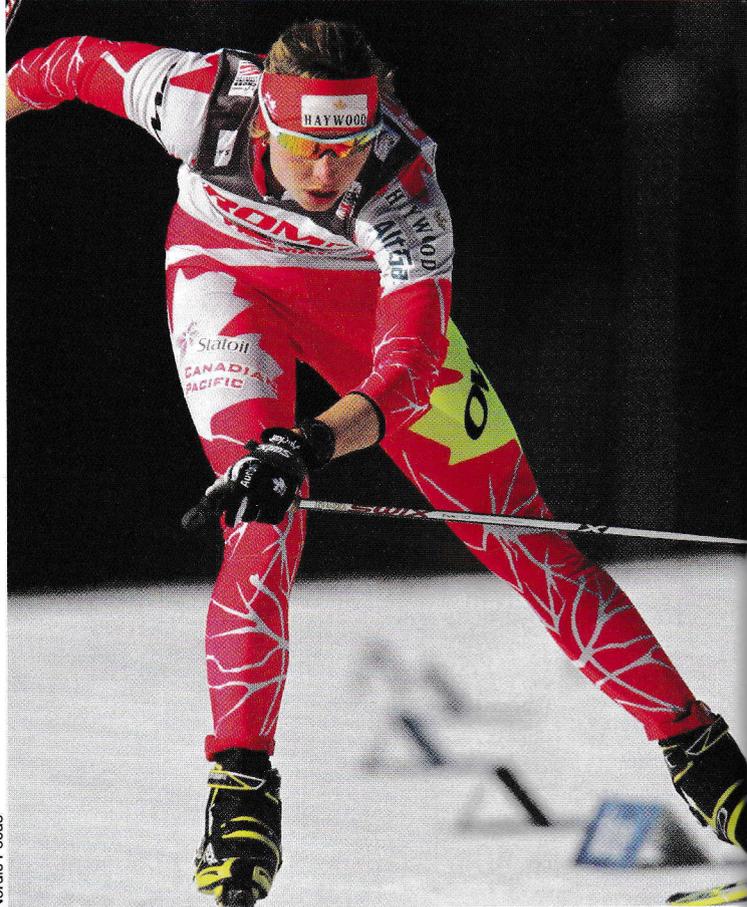
Olympic Champion Embarks on New Course, Turning in her Skis and is Focusing on a New Career of Empowering Young Women

by Lisa Evans

Chandra Crawford captured the hearts of Canadians when she won Olympic gold in the women's cross-country sprint at the 2006 Turin Games. The 22-year-old's enthusiastic singing of "O Canada" atop the podium was one of the most endearing moments of the Games. But perhaps the greatest legacy Crawford will leave behind after closing the chapter on her competitive career is Fast and Female — the organization she founded in 2005 to empower young women through sport.

Crawford, now 30, announced her retirement from competitive sport on March 27 at the Canmore Nordic Centre, the place where she took her first step on skis as a child and where she had her first World Cup victory. "It was just the right time for me," she says of the ending of her career.

Following the 2006 Games, Crawford won her first World Cup gold medal in 2008 in her hometown, Canmore, Alta., followed by a second World Cup



Nordic Focus

(clockwise from the top) Chandra Crawford was one of the best female sprinters in the world; her Fast and Female organization may be her greatest legacy; a young Crawford delivers stunning Olympic gold for Canada in Torino in 2006.



Heinz Ruckemann



Fast and Female

gold in Lahti, Finland. Her surprising yet stunning gold-medal victory at Turin in 2006 made Crawford a household name. Ankle and lower-leg injuries requiring surgery before the 2010 Vancouver Games put her at a disadvantage — Crawford finished 26th. Training on her own, she was a long shot heading into the Sochi 2014 Games and didn't advance past the qualifications, finishing 44th.

Although these results were a far cry from her 2006 victory, Crawford says she has no regrets and described these last Olympic memories as personally impactful. "The feeling of having done my all, of being satisfied with an unimpressive result and . . . that deep feeling of peace at the end of a race that didn't give me the results that I wanted, but did give me the 10 out of 10 on the personal [side] and everything that I wanted to get out of it," she says. Putting forth one's best effort and measuring success against oneself are lessons Crawford hopes to impart to other female athletes through her organization Fast and Female.

Crawford and other National Team athletes founded Fast and Female in 2005 to help empower young women in sport. The organization hosts events led by athletic champions who serve as role models and inspire girls to gain the confidence and leadership they'll need to reach their full potential, both in life and sport. From 50 girls in 2006 to now more than 2,000 across Canada, the organization has grown more than Crawford ever imagined.

Now that she's put the brakes on competitive sport, she's excited to roll up her sleeves and get more involved. She will be spending the next few years taking courses in leadership and business to provide her with the skillset required to run and grow the organization.

"Fast and Female expresses the values I have drawn on as an Olympian — resilience, confidence, positivity and leadership," said Crawford. "We are in need of immediate and sustained effort to increase the health of all kids and impact the self-confidence of girls. Empowerment through sport is working to do this."

Although closing the chapter on her competitive career, Crawford will surely continue to be a force in Canadian sport.