

Canadian attire

The 2010 Olympic styles mean big business, exposure for Ralph Lauren, Nike and others

BY BRYCE HUBNER



Burton's U.S. snowboarder competition gear.

Yes, we love the races, but at Games-time, let's face it, we also love the Olympic Opening Ceremonies. The acrobatic and percussion display in Beijing was among the highlights of the 2008 Games, but beyond the performance spectacles, Opening Ceremonies have become akin to red carpet walks at the Oscars — people can't wait to see what their favorite athletes will wear.

This dynamic isn't lost on the world's major brands, and just as they do for Angelina Jolie on Oscar night, designers are lining up to dress our Olympic stars.

The Olympic Winter Games provide an opportunity for companies to essentially own — for a few weeks — a nation's competitors independent of a given athlete's individual endorsement deals. Let's say, for example, Susie Skiracer has an endorsement contract with Adidas, which pays her millions to wear its brand whenever she appears in public. At the Olympic Winter Games, Adidas is out of luck when Susie wins downhill gold, because she'll climb the Vancouver podium wearing the USOC's official Nike "Medal Stand" jacket. Nike reaps the benefits of those Olympic images — far more lasting than any other win Susie Skiracer can produce — forever. You get the idea.

A few years ago, Ralph Lauren signed a deal with the USOC that makes it an official sponsor of the U.S. team through the 2012 Games in London. American athletes will show off the company's designs and outfits at the Opening Ceremonies, the Closing Ceremonies, and during many public appearances at points between — except on the podium, which Nike owns exclusively.

Ralph Lauren took a lot of heat for its 2008 Beijing outfits because the Polo logo on the uniform's left breast dwarfed the relatively understated Olympic



Resi Stiegler (pre-injury) and Ted Ligety model Ralph Lauren's U.S. Olympic team apparel.

COURTESY BURTON; RALPH LAUREN; SPYDER; VANOC

rings on the opposite breast. But you can expect more of the same when our athletes roll into Vancouver and Whistler.

"The Olympics are the ultimate branding opportunity," David Lauren, Ralph Lauren's senior vice president of marketing, told the Associated Press shortly after the initial designs were unveiled. "There is an interest in what athletes are wearing, but what people really want is what's commemorative, so they can hold on to something that's a piece of history."

In November, the USOC debuted Ralph Lauren's "U.S. Closing Ceremony Parade Outfit" along with Nike's "Medal Stand" jacket on NBC's "Today Show" (huffingtonpost.com/2009/11/04/ralph-lauren-winter-olymp_n_345386.html). U.S. Ski Teamer Emily Cook and snowboarder Gretchen Bleiler were among the athletes who modeled the debut on "Today." The Opening Ceremony outfit, however, is being kept under lock and key. Ralph Lauren representative Amanda Schilt tells *Ski Racing* that it won't be revealed until early February, right before the Games begin.

Of course, most of what you'll see on the Vancouver athletes is already for sale to the public, and Ralph Lauren has taken the wear-what-your-favorite-athletes-wear idea to another level by adding an Olympic element to their popular "The Create Your Own Collection." Pick your favorite color and paste your name and favorite flag to any of a variety of Polo shirts. Click the "US Olympic" tab on Ralph Lauren's website and you'll see alpine World Cupers Ted Ligety and Resi Steigler expertly modeling "The Create Your Own Collection" and more.

Functional fashion

We're obviously not fashionistas at *Ski Racing*. Most of us simply like to ski and be outside and wear something that works, which is why we kind of dig the way Burton has outfitted U.S. Snowboarding for the Vancouver Games. During competitions, riders will wear faux-tattered denim-style pants and cozy down jackets featuring a hunter's plaid comprised of unobtrusive red, white, and blue. The garb is patriotic without being overbearing, and it makes us feel as though we could be in a Vermont tree stand waiting for a 16-point buck to come along.

The Burton uniforms are functional, too, made from high-tech Gore-Tex fabric that's designed to perform in extreme cold and the potentially warmer, wetter climate around Vancouver. According to a recent press release, the company's riders are partly to thank for the fashionable functionality, as Burton held a roundtable discussion with top pro-snowboarders and Olympic hopefuls including Elena Hight, Mason Aguirre, Danny Davis, Kevin Pearce, Jack Mitrani, Luke Mitrani, Steve Fisher, Scotty Lago, and Louie Vito to review design concepts for the outerwear before arriving at the final creation. Keep an eye out.

Spyder's "slippery" speed suit.



In October, Spyder announced it will outfit both the U.S. and Canadian alpine Olympic squads with an unprecedented new "slippery" speed suit. The suit is reputedly the fastest ever made. Spyder says it has "refined the surface texture on the top face knit, reducing the coefficient of friction against the wind. The new 'slippery' surface has less texture than past fabrics, and was proven in wind tunnels to shave off precious hundreds of seconds from racers' times." An entertaining video (<http://www.pitchengine.com/free-release.php?id=30268>) of wind tunnel and on-snow testing, replete with commentary from the product's development team and American downhiller Steve Nyman, complemented the "slippery" suit announcement.

What does the "slippery" suit look like? You'll have to wait and see. Spyder spokesman John Dicuollo tells *Ski Racing* that a prototype for the American team was kicking around media outlets this fall, but that the final design will not be unveiled until Feb. 10 during a Spyder/USSA open house in Whistler. Presumably, Alpine Canada will unveil their "slippery" suit around the same time.

Unlike Olympic garb from Ralph Lauren and Nike, Spyder's new speed suit won't be available for the public until next winter. In the meantime, you can score commemorative gear and clothing from everybody else by visiting company websites or heading to teamUSAsShop.com. **SR**

Mitten Mania

The Hudson Bay Company created Canada's official 2010 Olympic Winter Games apparel.

Canadian alpine Mike Janyk, alongside Canadian legends like hockey star Steve Yzerman, helped model HBC's Olympic outfits when they were released this past fall. With the exception of a horribly misguided moose sweater — or is it a deer? — the HBC line is very sharp, and citizens of the host country can't seem get their hands on it fast enough.



The most popular item to date is a pair of red knitted mittens (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKC6bN3u4eU>), adorned with the iconic Canadian maple leaf on both palms and "Vancouver 2010" on the backs. HBC spokesperson Shari Burnett says the company literally cannot keep enough mittens on the shelves to support demand. (Remember those berets from the Salt Lake Games? Same idea.) Having sold 1.5 million pairs as of Jan. 13, HBC expects — if they can produce 'em fast enough — to sell nearly 3 million, or enough for nearly 10 percent of Canada's population, by February.

Indeed, every living creature north of the border — from a visiting Prince Charles to a Nunavut muskox — seems to be sporting a pair of the little red wonders. The best part? Proceeds from the mittens support "Own the Podium," a nonprofit entity established for the express purpose of supporting Canada's athletes in their pursuit of Olympic glory.

