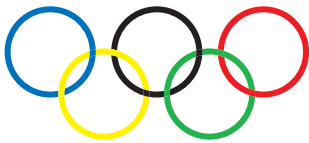




A Competitive Spirit

The place is Torino, Italy, home of the **2006 Olympics**, "where a lifetime of work can be measured in seconds." Thousands of athletes from nearly 70 countries compete as a worldwide audience of two billion people watches on television. Robert R. Prazmark '75 is counting on it.





The Olympic Rings

The best known symbol of the Olympics

Represent: The unity of the five continents

Colors: Red, blue, green, yellow and black. The colors were chosen because each nation had at least one of these colors in their national flag at the time the icon was established.

Proposed by: Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic movement, in 1914

Debuted: 1920 at the Olympic Games in Antwerp, Belgium

Prazmark is president of Olympic sales and marketing worldwide for IMG, the world's largest sports marketing agency representing the United States Olympic Committee. He is responsible for the \$200 million sponsorship program needed to support the U.S. Olympic Team. He's the man behind the creation of global corporate sponsorship programs, which continue to ensure that athletes, no matter how poor, can compete at the Olympic Games.

And he's also responsible for this familiar line: **"If you go, take your camera and your Visa card because the Olympics don't take place everyday and they don't take American Express."**

Rob Prazmark's affiliation with the Olympics began shortly after the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. They were the first Games in Olympic history to have corporate sponsors and the first since 1932 to ever turn a profit (\$225 million). To keep the economic momentum going for subsequent Games, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) called on Prazmark to market the Olympic rights worldwide.

"Up until then, there were only two companies that marketed globally: Coca-Cola and Kodak," recalls Prazmark, who was then

vice president and general manager of ISL Marketing USA, the exclusive marketing agent for the IOC. "It was my job to find emerging companies that wanted to take their brands global. For a company to put its brand alongside the five Olympic rings makes it instantly recognized worldwide."

Recognition isn't cheap. In 1985, Prazmark presented American Express with a \$14.5 million sponsorship for the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, Korea. The credit card giant had been a corporate sponsor of the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, and tried to negotiate the price down. Meanwhile, Prazmark offered a similar deal to its competitor: VISA. The company signed immediately.

"With the stroke of a pen, thousands of banks around the world won the right to put the Olympic rings on their credit cards," says John Bennett, chief marketing officer for VISA in 1985. "We were the market leader in terms of card holders and service establishments but what we really needed was a global platform to get the word out."

Prazmark provided VISA with that platform and in doing so, became a pioneer in the arena of global sponsorships. He went on to secure multi-million dollar Olympic contracts with FedEx, 3M, Texaco, and Bausch and Lomb, among others.



But it wasn't always an easy sell. In 1998, several members of the IOC, including its president, Tom Welch, were accused of accepting bribes in exchange for their vote for Salt Lake City as the site for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games (the scandal broke after the site had been announced). Although Salt Lake City was selected and the IOC members, including Welch, resigned, the resultant lack of sponsorship threatened to cancel the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic Games.

"People were very concerned," explains Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, who took over as president of the Salt Lake Organizing Committee (SLOC) in the wake of the scandal. "They didn't want to associate their company or their brand with the scandal so we looked to put on a full-court press with a highly capable marketing team."

Romney looked no further than IMG and Rob Prazmark. Together, Prazmark and Romney knocked on the door of every major corporation in America to turn the Games around.

"Rob approached every company assuming they were anxious to become our sponsor," recalls Romney. "For him, we had the best product and he was doing them a favor by introducing them to the Olympics. His enthusiasm and confidence led to some very unusual successes." Among them was the

on-line job-search agent monster.com. "We secured a superb sponsorship from them for \$12 million," notes Romney. "I thought it was a long shot but Rob had such confidence, he made it happen."

Prazmark's message was so convincing because he emphasized the true meaning of the Olympics. "It is about history and it's about tradition," Prazmark told executives. "It is not about a bunch of guys in suits. It's about the athletes."

To drive the message home, Prazmark produced a DVD of unforgettable Olympic moments such as the Miracle on Ice Celebration (1980), Mohammed Ali lighting the cauldron in Atlanta (1996) and Dan Jansen winning the gold medal in Lillehammer (1994). Romney says, "These great moments of Olympic glory underscored that the Olympics were not about scandal but instead about heroic athletes."

Prazmark also reminded executives that corporate sponsorships help support aspiring Olympic athletes from the world's poorest countries such as Ethiopia, Niger and Botswana. "These countries have no way of funding the athletes themselves," says Prazmark. "So the money from these sponsorships helps preserve the Olympic ideal by ensuring participants are representative of

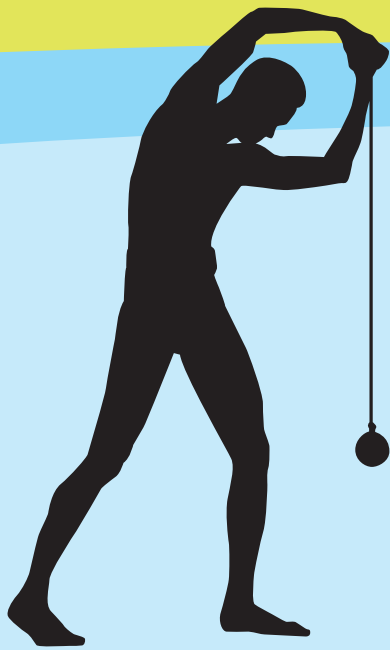
the world's best athletes."

And if that wasn't convincing enough, Prazmark simply refused to take no for an answer.

"They don't mean 'no' until they tell you 'no' four times," says Prazmark. "The first time they must not have understood what you were presenting. The second time they say 'no,' is usually a request for additional information. The third time, they are negotiating with you and really mean 'yes.' But if they still say 'no' by the fourth time, they don't see the value in your proposition and are going to get replaced by someone else."

Prazmark's persistence has certainly paid off but his work is no small task.

Securing multi-million dollar corporate sponsorships involves constant travel. During a typical week, this father of four (ages nine to 22) might jet off to London, then to Lausanne, Switzerland (headquarters of the IOC), then back to the states for a meeting on the West Coast before returning home to Connecticut, where he and his wife, Elizabeth, live with their family. Globetrotting is a way of life for Prazmark, particularly in the year leading up to the Olympic Games. His roots, however, originate in Buffalo and while he rarely has time to return, he did visit *alma mater* in May to speak as part of the



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PRAZMARK AND DAUGHTERS KATIE, (FRONT) AND SARAH, AT THE COLLEGE'S DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI DINNER IN NOVEMBER.

Distinguished Guest Lecturer Series in Sports Management and in November to accept the college's 2005 Distinguished Alumni Award.

Born in Black Rock, Prazmark lived in the Queen City until he was five when his father, **Ronald J. Prazmark '55**, took a job with Lockheed Martin in California. The family later moved to the Washington, D.C. area but returned to

Buffalo when Prazmark's father accepted another job opportunity.

Prazmark had just graduated high school so the move back to Buffalo was almost like starting over in a new town. As a way to meet new people, he took on leadership roles at Canisius. Prazmark was president of the Undergraduate Student Association and student leader for freshman orientation for several years. He was also a great cheerleader for the Golden Griffins, often recruiting students to pep rallies and basketball games. Prazmark's studies and extra-curricular activities were full-time work. Still, he always held a variety of other jobs to pay his way through college. Ron Prazmark recalls Rob's entrepre-

neurial ambitions when he was a teenager. "He raised and sold guinea pigs at Macy's department stores, washed windows, even shoveled snow to make extra money."

Prazmark's interest in advertising was sparked by a seminar course at Canisius, taught by Maxwell Ellis, former assistant professor of management/marketing, who also served as president of his own agency, Ellis Singer and Webb Ltd. The guest lecturers, hands-on projects and first-hand accounts from Ellis provided students with a very clear picture of advertising. Prazmark was hooked.

"It was the only class I aced at Canisius," says Prazmark. "In fact, I was on academic probation first semester of my junior year!"

Armed with ambition, direction and a Canisius degree, Prazmark found work selling television advertising time for network affiliates in Washington D.C. and New York City. By the early 1980s he was hungry for network television sales. Coincidentally, that's when Prazmark found himself seated on a commuter train next to **Anthony C. Rocco '48**, who was then vice president for business development/sales for ABC and responsible for marketing such programs as Monday Night Football and the Olympics. The men did not know each other but when Prazmark overheard Rocco mention Canisius to his wife,

he struck up a conversation.

"At first, I didn't want to talk to him," recalls Rocco. "But my wife said, 'Come on, he's a nice boy. He's somebody's son. He's a Canisius boy.' So I said, 'All right, come over here, tell me who and what you are.'"

It took only a train ride for Prazmark to impress Rocco enough to recommend him for a position at ABC, where Prazmark was responsible for sales and marketing of all network news programs.

"Rob is the kind of guy who knows where he is going and how to cultivate relationships," says Rocco. "It has always been a common denominator for people from Canisius to help one another, especially if the talent is there and Rob certainly has talent."

Rocco also introduced Prazmark to **Gene F. Jankowski '55, HON '03**, former president of CBS Broadcast Group. Prazmark says he was grateful for the mentorship he received from Rocco and Jankowski. And Rocco says he watched Prazmark's rapid professional success with pride.

"The vice president in charge of news sales at ABC left in 1984 to take over a company that did Olympic licensing," says Rocco. "He took Rob with him. That's how impressed he was."

That company was ISL, where Prazmark brought in that now infamous VISA deal.

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Since his time at ISL, Prazmark has taken the lead in several other prominent marketing projects with NASA, the Dallas Cowboys and the Smithsonian Institution. In fact, a casual visit with his children to the Smithsonian in 1991 became the catalyst for the largest traveling exhibit in history. Prazmark saw the museum's cornerstone, and noted that in five years it would reach its 150th anniversary. He contacted the museum and eventually led the effort to secure more than \$40 million in corporate sponsorships to fund a national tour, advertising and a party on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

While Rob Prazmark readily admits he never basks in the glory of a deal but rather moves quickly on to the next, he says the Smithsonian project was personally rewarding.

"When we were in Los Angeles, school buses were lined up for miles to see the exhibit," recalls Prazmark. "To think that a child, who may never have the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C., saw a moon rock in this exhibit and then dreamed of going into space really touched me."

Although it may not have been the obvious goal, Rob Prazmark has provided opportunities to make dreams come true for countless people, including Olympic athletes, spectators and the businesses who count on the Games. His drive, persistence and business acumen help preserve the ancient tradition and reputation of the Olympics, so that for generations to come, competitive spirits from around the world can come together to strive for personal excellence and global unity.

XX Olympic Winter Games Torino 2006

FACTS & FIGURES

Sports:	Seven
Disciplines:	Fifteen
Competition Sites:	Eight
Athletes:	2,500
Medals to be Awarded:	84
Judges and Referees:	650
Journalists and Media:	10,000
Spectators:	One million

Source: www.olympic.org

