



**I'm a woman on the move
Anne McIlroy**

For decades, the Olympics have guarded against men who pose as women and vice versa, but now the way is open for competitors who change their gender altogether. This weekend, a Canadian who went from male to female may clear a major hurdle in the race to be the first of her kind in the Games. But on the sidelines, Anne McIlroy reports, others are asking: 'Is this fair?'

Kristen Worley grabs a large pink gym bag out of her car and walks into the women's change room at the Forest City Velodrome. She emerges in skin-tight racing gear provided by a potential new sponsor and carefully tucks her ponytail into an aerodynamic helmet for her final workout on her home course before the women's national track cycling championships, being held this weekend in Dieppe, N.B. A good showing will give her a shot at qualifying for next year's Olympic Games in Beijing. At 39, Ms. Worley is a serious contender; she has a commanding presence among the other cyclists as she travels the London, Ont., track's steep curves at 50 kilometres an hour. And yet the muscles in her thighs and arms look beefy; they don't have the definition you might expect in someone who grinds through five or six hours a day on a bike.

The cycling skills are a holdover from what she calls her "previous life," but the extra fat is the result of leaving that life behind. In 1996, as a man named Chris, she started taking hormones to begin the process of becoming a woman. Five years later, surgery completed the transition. "If I were to take my clothes off, you wouldn't know," Ms. Worley insists. "I'm no different than any woman who has had a hysterectomy." It has been 55 years since an ex-GI named George Jorgenson realized his dreams and shocked the world by traveling to Denmark for surgery and returning to the Bronx as Christine Jorgensen. Hard numbers are still difficult to find, but a research paper presented this week at a conference in Chicago suggests that as many as one person in 500 feels estranged from his or her body. These people are so distanced from their assigned sex that they are desperate to change it. As a result, parents are more accepting of children who feel this way, and so are schools. Last year, a boy was admitted to a South Florida kindergarten class as a girl. A year earlier, the boy who had been elected to head a Toronto high school's student council came back after the summer holidays as a girl, and officials made sure students and teachers alike were sensitive to the situation.

The trend also has spread to the pantheon of physical perfection: athletics. A growing number of transitioned athletes now compete at an elite level. Professional mountain biker Michelle Dumaresq won the Canadian women's downhill championship last year and Danish golfer Mianne Bagger has earned a berth on the Ladies European Tour. Like Ms. Worley, both were once men, and there are those who contend that, when it comes to world-class athletics, they simply aren't the same as other women. They challenge the notion that it's fair to have competitors who were born and raised as males pull up to the starting line with women.

At the same time, a growing number of sports experts now counter that argument; in fact, many contend that because of what they've had to do to their bodies, transitioned women are really at a physical disadvantage. But Ms. Worley insists that the real issue is one of equality for people like her - both in sport and in broader society. She dreams of carrying the Canadian flag into the Olympics' opening ceremonies, of sending a powerful message that people who change gender aren't mentally ill or sexual deviants, that they're normal and can lead healthy, successful lives.

She, for example, is an elite water skier as well as a competitive cyclist, has a successful career as a design engineer and is in a loving relationship with the woman she married when she was a man. They live in Toronto and hope to start a family. "I'm a woman on the move," she says as she pulls off the track for a pit stop to make adjustments on her new bike. Sweat drips off her face, carrying flecks of mascara with it. But is Beijing really in her future?

Sports have been part of Kristen Worley's life for as long as she can remember, an escape from the overpowering anxiety she felt even as a four-year-old, when her parents told her to toughen up or dressed her in blue and grey, not the bright colours she craved. Born in 1967, she was adopted as a baby into a sport-minded, middle-class family in Mississauga. Little Chris had a sister four years his senior and when he got older he would skip family sailing expeditions so he could stay home and dress up in her clothes, play with her dolls, try her makeup, or relax in her sleigh bed. Looking back, Ms. Worley says it's too simplistic to describe that she felt like she was trapped in the wrong body. It was more like there was a profound disconnect: She saw herself as a girl, yet to everybody else, she was a boy. "Your brain is telling you one thing and your body is telling society something else."

Adolescence was difficult. The anxiety got worse and the troubling thoughts were becoming harder to suppress. It took a toll. Chris became anorexic and depressed; he started drinking, hanging out with older kids and smoking pot. Every month or so, he would break down and start to shake and cry, but he couldn't tell his mother what the trouble was. He didn't know. He would see the odd reference in magazines or on television to men who became women. "Oh,

my God," Ms. Worley remembers thinking. "That is too far out." He feared that he might be gay. "I don't have a homophobic bone in my body. But I knew in my heart that this was something different." Unable to express such feelings properly, "I suppressed everything." Enter sports. Already a competitive water skier, Chris took up cross-country running and became friends with a group of top athletes in high school. That led to mountain biking and road racing, which he loved in part because it gave him an excuse to shave his legs. But he was serious about cycling and dreamed of making it to the Olympics. "Sports saved my life," Ms. Worley says. It provided an outlet, something positive to focus on, a way that Chris could so exhaust himself that he could fall asleep rather than lay awake feeling anxious. But then, during a road race in London, a crash took 20 riders down, Chris among them, and he broke his pelvis. He was 18 and thought he would never ride again.

LOST AND FOUND

The months that followed were painful, both physically and emotionally. Sports had been his life and, without the training regime and the races, he felt lost and left out. Then he reconnected with Alison, an old acquaintance, and recalls that when they started to talk in a bar near Peterborough's Trent University, it was as if everyone else at the table had faded into the background. When they were married in 1993, Chris still believed that he could conquer what he was feeling. "You think that you can hold it off, that if you do masculine things, it will go away," recalls Ms. Worley, who now believes that Alison had a sense of what might be coming. "I don't think it was a huge surprise to her." After leaving Trent, Chris had studied graphic design and illustration at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto and then begun to work in animation. While in New York for a business meeting, he had an acute anxiety attack. "I don't know what happened, but it felt like the bottom floor dropped out of my life," Ms. Worley remembers. "All the years of suppression overcame me physically and that on-off switch was staying on. ... All those cross-gender thoughts weren't going away." Chris made it to the airport and sat there sweating, shaking and thinking: "Oh my god, I'm in trouble." With the assistance of his sister-in-law, he sought medical help, but was horrified by doctors who made him feel like a deviant. He was told that he would have to divorce Alison and should prepare to be rejected by the people he loved. "I tried to hang myself," Ms. Worley says. "I tried to drown myself - twice." Eventually, Chris found a physician he was comfortable with and began the transition to womanhood, choosing the name Kristen to make things easier for family and friends.

The couple have stayed together, but Ms. Worley says the change hasn't been easy for Alison. "We've been through a lot of challenges. ... It is really about the relationship. A lot of people don't seem to understand that. I am very lucky." No longer in touch with her adoptive family, she now considers her in-laws her mother and father - Worley is their name. She hesitates to discuss her transition but is thrilled with the results and laughs when told no one would suspect she was once a male. On the other hand, she is wary of rejection and wonders how

each person she meets will react to her. Before that last workout in London (the velodrome is the closest indoor track to Toronto), she met at a nearby Tim Hortons with Paul Gonsalves, a potential sponsor and distributor of Blue Competition bikes. He didn't seem to be aware of her past and she didn't bring it up, but afterward she worried that their deal - a new bike at cost - would fall through if Mr. Gonsalves weren't comfortable with who she really is. Afterward, Mr. Gonsalves said he knew all along, but didn't want to make Ms. Worley uncomfortable. Some sponsors might think twice, he said, but all he wants to do is "help an athlete accomplish her goals and not allow equipment to be a limiting factor."

During a break later that evening, Ms. Worley tells another cyclist about her past. A former captain of the national junior women's hockey team, Heather Logan is also competing at the cycling championships this weekend. At first, she was skeptical, she says - not certain that Ms. Worley should be included. Now, "I would want her hormone levels to be checked, but I guess it is fair."

JUMPING WITH GIRLS

The only man ever to admit to entering the Olympics as a woman is Hermann (Dora) Ratjen, a German who bound his genitals for the 1936 Berlin Games and placed fourth in the women's high jump. Two decades later, he said the Nazis made him do it. No transitioned athlete has ever taken part - openly, at least. But in 2004, the International Olympic Committee put in place rules that would allow it. Those rules require a confidential evaluation no earlier than two years after an athlete has undergone surgery to remove either ovaries or testicles. Surgical alterations of genitals also must have been completed by that point. (Women who become men are at an added disadvantage because but their reconstruction can cost three times as much, and the results are imperfect.) Ms. Worley has had to submit her medical records and blood work to four separate panels: the two organizations that oversee cycling and water skiing in Canada and the two that govern international competitions in both sports. (Water skiing is not an Olympic sport, but its federation is pushing to have it included.)

As well, she had to undergo questioning, something she found very difficult. Now lobbying for a more sensitive approach, she describes a conference call she had with officials of Water Ski and Wakeboard Canada as "gross." "They were all men, and I'm sure they were thinking, 'Why would someone do this to themselves? Why would they cut their penis off?' "Joseph Quigg, the national team's physician, was in on that call and has since become a strong supporter of Ms. Worley. He prepared for the interview by searching the scientific literature but could find very little about male athletes who had become women and whether they might enjoy a competitive edge. Before long, he came to the opposite view: that Ms. Worley had a physical drawback because other women produce small amounts of natural testosterone in their ovaries and adrenal glands. It's a conclusion that Sport Canada, the governing body for athletics, now shares. "There is a growing body of evidence to show that transitioned

females actually compete at a disadvantage to all other female competitors," according to a government background document. "transitioned women do not produce, nor have the means to produce, testosterone - a fundamental hormone for both men and women.

"Testosterone enables the body to build muscle; allows muscle recovery during and after physical activity; supports heart and lung development and recovery; supports, regulates and burns body fat; regulates weight and the immune system; and provides overall drive and energy." Last year, organizations such as the Canadian Olympic Committee, Sport Canada and the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport struck a committee to address the ignorance surrounding transitioned athletes. And Ms. Worley says she has lobbied hard to change the official view, telling the Canadian Academy of Sport Medicine and government bureaucrats how she lost muscle strength and had trouble controlling her weight. "I became an apple," she says. Crashing fatigue has been another pitfall. She'll be in the front pack in a road race, then suddenly have no energy and fade to the back. But not everyone feels that all the evidence is in. Can someone who grew up with lots of testosterone really be at a disadvantage compared with "women who have never had increased levels?" asks Gabriela Tymowski, a sports ethicist at the University of New Brunswick. "Right now, we don't know. We have competing rights - Kristen's right to compete at the highest levels of sport and the rights of other women who have trained ... with the female physiology from day one."

Dr. Tymowski says she put the question to students taking her course on ethics in sports and almost all of them felt that someone who used to be a man would have the upper hand. But three years ago, officialdom came to the opposite conclusion. In 2004, both the cycling and the water-skiing associations restored Ms. Worley's accreditation, this time as a woman. They recommended that the international bodies governing their sports do the same, and those bodies agreed. The rest is up to her. "I just have to cycle my butt off."

OLYMPIC LONGSHOT

The practice doesn't finish until 9 p.m., and even then Ms. Worley seems reluctant to get off the bike she is test-driving, the one she hopes will carry her to a berth on the national team in the 3,000-metre pursuit - an event in which two competitors start at opposite sides of the track and try to overtake each other. But making the qualifying time - 3:51:07 - is just the start. Under IOC rules, Canada can't send someone to Beijing unless it has a rider in the world's top nine, says Kris Westwood of the Canadian Cycling Association. So, as well as making the national team, Ms. Worley will have to do well at international competitions, so "chances for us qualifying for the Olympics are pretty slim."

But Ms. Worley says she has a shot. "Remember Lori-Anne Muenzer?" she asks, referring to the 38-year-old Edmonton legal secretary who went from nowhere to gold in Athens. So she has been training hard (up to six hours a day on the bike,

plus weights) - but hasn't interrupted her bid to change how people think. And change is slowly coming about. Doctors have begun to take a different approach to treating the condition formally known as gender identity disorder, or gender dysphoria. A number of clinics, including one in Toronto, now give transgender adolescents drugs that delay puberty and stop the development of secondary sexual characteristics, such as breasts. Hormone therapy can begin as young as 16, with sex-reassignment surgery at 18.

Ms. Worley wishes she'd had surgery as a teen - and that more doctors were like Herbert Schreier of the Children's Hospital and Research Center in Oakland, Calif. "We don't use the term 'gender identity disorder,' " Dr. Schreier said in an interview. "We call it 'gender variance.' The disorder comes in the minds of others." She also is fighting to allow transitioned women to take small amounts of testosterone, which would improve their health but is currently against Olympic anti-doping rules. And she has taken up the cause of Santhi Soundarajan, the Indian runner stripped of her silver medal in the 800 meters at the Asian Games last year after failing a gender test. Ms. Soundarajan may have androgen insensitivity syndrome, the term for people who are born with male sex chromosomes - XY instead of XX - but develop as females because their bodies don't respond to male hormones.

In a letter to IOC president Jacques Rogge, Ms. Worley argues that Ms. Soundarajan should never have been subjected to gender testing. Outside athletics, she works with young people and, last summer, when she invited some of them for a day of water skiing, one boy said he had always felt like a broken toy. That, she says, is the kind of stigma she hopes to erase by speaking out and becoming a role model - by pushing as hard as she can on the track. "When we think about each other, about men and women, male and female, we are all in the grey," she says. "It is not black and white for any us."

Anne McIlroy is The Globe and Mail's science reporter.

Michelle Dumaresq

She won the Canadian downhill mountain-biking championship last year, but her golden moment was marred when second-place finisher Danika Schroeter appeared on the podium with a T-shirt that read, "100 Per Cent Pure Woman Champ 2006," as her supporters in the crowd jeered. Ms. Schroeter was suspended for three months by the Canadian Cycling Association, but the incident still rankles. "She fouled the glory of that win. I earned it fair and square," says Ms. Dumaresq, who was born male but became female in 1996, after hormone therapy and sex-reassignment surgery. She didn't start to compete until becoming a woman and, at first, the other cyclists didn't take much notice. Then she started to win, and a rival launched a petition in protest. Ms. Dumaresq, now taking a year off the World Cup circuit, says it is hard to be one of the few athletes who are "out," but she claims she has received thousands of e-mails from people like her. "You would be shocked how many transathletes

there are, in every sport you can imagine." Only a few are known to the public, she says, such as NASCAR driver J.T Hayes, who has had trouble getting back on the circuit since undergoing surgery to become Terri O'Connell in 1994.

Mianne Bagger

Unlike cyclist Michelle Dumaresq, Danish-born Mianne Bagger was a professional golfer as a man. But she says her experience has been positive since she started playing against women in 2004 because most of her rivals have accepted her. "Some people were cautious, but once they met me and played me, they got over it rather quickly." She says she can't hit the ball as far as she did before her transition, but it is hard to say how big the difference is because better clubs have cushioned the blow. Even so, she is certainly not as powerful as the top women on the tour. Their drives can travel 300 yards, while hers go around 235 yards.

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Inclusion of Transgender Athletes on Sports Teams

<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/Content/Articles/Issues/Homophobia//Inclusion-of-transgender-Athletes-on-Sports-Teams.aspx>

Tackling transgender issues

http://www.athleticmanagement.com/2008/03/tackling_transgender_issues.html



Lambda 10 Project

www.lambda10.org/transgender