

It's no LOL matter: Olympic athletes warned more tweets might equal less medals in London

By GERALD IMRAY AP Sports Writer

LONDON (AP) -- Hello (at)Twitter world!!! I'm at (hash)Olympics. Shd be training not tweeting ... LOL

Laugh if you like, but there was a bit of a buzz Friday about athletes risking their medal chances with every "tweet" and "like" on Twitter and Facebook.

"I have found quite a close correlation between the number of tweets at competitive times and the level of under-performance," said Sebastian Coe, a two-time Olympic gold medalist in the 1,500 meters and the head organizer of what is being dubbed the "Social Media Games."

"From a personal perspective, when I was an athlete I just wanted complete and total focus," he said. "I knew it was my time and that they don't come around that often. If I was focusing on trying to defend a title I wouldn't be reading Twitter, I wouldn't be interested in it. Why would I?"

British tennis star Andy Murray echoed those sentiments.

"You don't want to be on it (Twitter) too much," Murray said Friday. "It's a bit like sitting on a computer 20 minutes, 30 minutes before your match. You wouldn't be advised to do that. The same applies with tweeting or mobile phones, I would have thought."

While agreeing that social media is popular and fun, "Can't talk. (hash)training" may be the most apt tweet or status update, especially at the games. And it's far less than 140 characters.

"It's good to keep in contact with your family and friends," Australian shooter Alethea Sedgman said. "But sport-wise, it's better to focus without Facebook."

The Australian cycling team doesn't use social media during competition time. No RTs for them, maybe just some RTTs (remember to train).

"Cycling have taken their own initiative and other sports are looking at ways of doing that," Australian team chef de mission Nick Green said.

There's no doubt that over the next month Twitter and Facebook will probably get you closer than ever to Olympic athletes.

At the London Games, their tweeting will tell you more than you need - or maybe want - to know about their lifestyles and everyday habits.

For instance, Michael Phelps doesn't like the new U.S. swim team caps. Usain Bolt is hungry for chicken. American hurdler Lolo Jones is a virgin.

It's a window to what they think, what they eat, what they listen to and watch. Basically, how they live.

Jones, by the way, says she's waiting for the right man. TMI?

"There is no doubt that social media has been and can be a distraction," said Green, the Australian chef de mission. "I've also said it can be used in a very positive way and the athletes are working out where those boundaries are."

Social media is OK, tennis player Elena Baltacha said, "so long as you're sensible and you're not tweeting as you walk onto court."

Maybe the craze is even wearing off for some sports stars.

"I actually haven't done it (tweet) for a couple of months," said Murray, who didn't even tweet about reaching the Wimbledon final a few weeks ago.

Many Olympic teams now have guidelines on how athletes can use Twitter and Facebook and other online platforms, setting boundaries for controversial posts. It's especially relevant this year, with social media clearly being embraced by the International Olympic Committee.

The British Olympic Association, which watches over 542 athletes - the biggest team at the games - has compiled a list of "Dos" and "Don'ts."

In addition to warnings about swearing and unsuitable posts, the BOA notes that tweeting also could give the opposition a boost.

"DON'T ... Forget your rivals may be reading," the BOA says. "Other competitors may gain confidence if they read any comments you make about poor form in training, feeling tired, upset or low on confidence."

And there's one more reason for athletes to beware social media: It doesn't actually make you very sociable.

"There's so many things to see and do here," Sedgman said. "There's better things to do than sit on your butt and play on Facebook, as much fun as that is."

TTYL.

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