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## CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL

### NATIONAL CONVENTIONAL TELEVISION PANEL

#### CTV re coverage of the fatal luge accident at the 2010 Winter Olympic Games

(CBSC Decision 09/10-0895+)

Decided November 12, 2010

R. Cohen (Chair), H. Pawley (Vice-Chair, Public), D. Braun (*ad hoc*), M. Harris (*ad hoc*),  
F. Niemi, T. Reeb

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#### THE FACTS

On February 12, 2010, just prior to the commencement of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, a Georgian luge athlete named Nodar Kumaritashvili experienced a tragic accident during a practice run at the Whistler Sliding Centre. He flew off his luge coming out of a steep turn (corner 16, called “Thunderbird”), was projected off the track, and struck one of the support posts. The accident was caught on film by CTV (a member of the Olympic Broadcast Media Consortium and the principal English-language broadcaster of the Games), and was broadcast at various times that day, both as news of the accident was breaking and again later once it had been confirmed that Kumaritashvili had died from his injuries.

The video was approximately 40 seconds in duration. It showed Kumaritashvili going down the luge track at a very fast speed (said to be 143 km/h). Multiple cameras were placed along the track so that the television audience could see his and all other runs from different points along the track and at different angles. When the luger flew off the sled, viewers heard a clang, which was presumably the sound of the luger’s helmet hitting the post. Kumaritashvili’s limp body was partially obscured by other posts in front of the camera, but the CTV audience saw a number of people, mainly on-site medics, running towards the man.

As mentioned above, CTV broadcast the video a number of times on February 12 (complete transcripts and fuller descriptions of each of the following broadcasts can be found in Appendix A). The first occasion was at 11:23 am Pacific Time, as news of the accident had just reached reporters. CTV was covering the end of the Olympic Torch Relay when it interrupted that coverage to interview CTV Whistler Bureau Chief, Sarah Galashan, who explained that the accident had just happened and that the athlete had been transported to hospital. Just before showing the video, Galashan said:

And up at the Sliding Centre, we've just heard of, uh, a very sad and disturbing, uh, incident. Um, during the training, uh, a Georgian athlete has, uh, experienced a crash in the sport of luge. We are going to show you some video here, but first, uh, uh, we have to warn our viewers, we do not know the condition of this athlete and this video is very tough to watch.

After showing the video, she went on to describe the track and to answer questions about the situation from the two CTV British Columbia news anchors, although not much information about the incident was known at the time.

The accident video was shown again about half an hour later with the warning from anchor Mike Killeen,

And we do want to warn you, uh, that we do have video of this accident. Uh, it is very graphic and we really do want to warn you that, uh, what's about to come is not pleasant. But, uh, it was an accident at the Sliding Centre. Take a look at what happened.

On that occasion, the footage was followed by updates from CTV reporter Farhan Lalji who reported that Kumaritashvili was suffering from life-threatening injuries. Lalji also spoke with Canadian former luge athlete and Olympic broadcast analyst Chris Wightman about the track and what could be done to prevent other accidents.

By 2:58 pm, the unfortunate news that Kumaritashvili had died from his injuries had reached reporters. As CTV British Columbia anchor Bill Good reported,

The International Olympic Committee has confirmed that an Olympic athlete has been killed after a crash at the Whistler Sliding Centre. Our Whistler Bureau Chief Sarah Galashan is following this story and we should warn you, the images of the crash are disturbing.

Galashan introduced her update with the following warning and the accident video was shown again:

Bill, down here in the Village, the celebration has started. But up at the Sliding Centre it's a very different story. The track was built to be difficult. It is technically challenging and with a vertical drop like the one we see there, we're getting record times recorded. We are also seeing crashes. But never anything like we've seen today. Once again, a warning that the video we're about to show you is difficult to watch. And the outcome is just devastating.

This update also included clips from a press conference that had been held earlier at which the Chief Executive Officer of the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee expressed his shock and sadness about the death. Galashan also provided a brief description of the luge track and the information that further training had been postponed while officials investigated the track. A few Olympic spectators and participants gave short interviews during which they expressed their views on the tragedy.

The story was again covered during the *CTV National News* that evening at 11:24 pm following the broadcast of the Olympic opening ceremony. That newscast was anchored by Tom Clark, who again warned viewers about the disturbing footage:

Good evening from Vancouver. On this night of Olympic celebration at this highly anticipated moment of the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Winter Games, the world has paused in shock and sadness. At midday today, in a final training run on the luge track, the dreams and the life of a young Olympian from Georgia came to an end. Tonight, amid the spectacular Opening Ceremonies, the bravery of the athlete and the tragedy of his death were marked for the entire world to see. Our coverage contains video that is disturbing, but necessary to tell this story. We start with CTV's Todd Battis in Whistler tonight.

Battis' report included information about the nature of the accident, additional footage from the International Olympic Committee's press conference, as well as scenes of other, non-fatal accidents that had also occurred on the track prior to Kumaritashvili's run. The newscast itself concluded with a photograph of Kumaritashvili and the words "In Memory of Nodar Kumaritashvili, 1988-2010" and the remark from Clark, "And as we leave you tonight, please take a moment to think about Nodar Kumaritashvili, the 21-year-old Olympian from the country of Georgia who died so tragically in practice today."

The CBSC received a total of 145 complaints about the broadcast of the luge accident on various stations, dates and times. Of those, 80 complainants provided enough information (specific station name, broadcast date and time) for the CBSC to pursue the complaints. Of those 80 specific complaints, only three individuals filed Ruling Requests, which sought the CBSC's further investigation of the broadcasts. Although the accident footage may have aired on other occasions, the broadcasts described above are those identified by the three complainants who filed Ruling Requests. The CBSC is only able to comment specifically on those particular broadcasts.

The complainants were concerned that showing the footage of the accident, including the moment of the luger's impact with the post, was extremely disturbing for viewers and was also disrespectful to the deceased luger and his grieving family, friends and fellow athletes (the full text of the three complaints, as well as all other correspondence, can be found in Appendix B). CTV's position was that the story was in the public interest and "the visuals were integral to the story and to informing Canadians about this unfortunate tragedy. [...] After much consideration, we decided to make available the images of the Georgian luger run in connection with news reports about this tragedy."

The broadcaster acknowledged that events covered in the news are often tragic and shocking and that, in this particular case, the “images shown were not gratuitous or exploitive” and CTV had “[done its] best to strongly warn audiences that they may find the video disturbing.”

## THE DECISION

The National Conventional Television Panel has examined the complaint under the Article 6.0 of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters’ (CAB) *Violence Code* and Article 4 of the Radio Television News Directors Association of Canada (RTNDA – The Association of Electronic Journalists) *Code of (Journalistic) Ethics*, which read as follows:

### *CAB Violence Code, Article 6.0 – News and Public Affairs Programming*

6.1 Broadcasters shall use appropriate editorial judgment in the reporting of, and the pictorial representation of violence, aggression or destruction within their news and public affairs programming.

6.2 Caution shall be used in the selection of, and repetition of, video which depicts violence.

6.3 Broadcasters shall advise viewers in advance of showing scenes of extraordinary violence, or graphic reporting on delicate subject matter such as sexual assault or court action related to sexual crimes, particularly during afternoon or early evening newscasts and updates when children could be viewing.

6.4 Broadcasters shall employ discretion in the use of explicit or graphic language related to stories of destruction, accidents or sexual violence, which could disturb children and their families.

6.5 Broadcasters shall exercise particular judgment during live coverage of domestic terrorist events or civil disorders, to ensure news coverage does not become a factor in inciting additional violence.

6.6 While broadcasters shall not exaggerate or exploit situations of aggression, conflict or confrontation, equal care shall be taken not to sanitize the reality of the human condition.

6.7 Broadcasters shall refer to *The Code of Ethics* of the Radio-Television News Directors Association of Canada (RTNDA) for guidance regarding broadcast journalism in general.

### *RTNDA Code of (Journalistic) Ethics, Article 4 – Privacy*

Broadcast journalists will respect the dignity, privacy and well-being of everyone with whom they deal, and will make every effort to ensure that news gathering and reporting does not unreasonably infringe privacy except when necessary in the public interest. [...]

The Panel Adjudicators read all of the correspondence and viewed the challenged broadcasts. The Panel concludes that CTV did not violate any of the aforementioned codified standards.

### **A Preliminary Point: The Use of the Video Clip at all**

The Panel wishes to point out preliminarily that it does not agree with one of the complainants that the report ought to have been broadcast without the video clip. He had asked rhetorically, “why does CTVglobemedia need to rely on the image to ‘tell the story’ when journalism can work with both images and words”? In the view of the Panel, television is a medium that does, and is entitled to, tell stories with images. In so doing, it needs to reflect the above-cited standards (which are discussed and explained below), but, if it does so, there will be no problem in the use of images, rather than words alone, to tell a news story.

### **Obligations relating to this Breaking News Story**

The *CAB Violence Code* lays the issues out neatly for broadcasters and viewers. Not easily but neatly. On the one hand, according to the standards, “appropriate” editorial judgment should be used in the pictorial representation of news stories relating to violence, aggression or destruction. A later sub-section of Article 6 includes accidents and sexual violence in the list of incidents that require care of treatment by broadcasters. The Panel has no difficulty in assimilating accidents of the type encountered in this sad Olympic event to the need for appropriate editorial judgment. The standards also require the exercise of caution in the selection *and repetition* of video clips depicting such disturbing events.

On the other hand, the standards recognize that “equal care shall be taken not to sanitize the reality of the human condition.” After all, one of the purposes of news dissemination is to advise the public of events of importance, and it is clear that some of these will be good news and some will be tragic. Needless to say, some will not fall into either category. It is the right, if not the duty, of broadcasters for whom journalism is a matter of priority, to bring all such matters to the attention of their viewers (or listeners). They are of course free to *choose* the stories they will tell, which they will do as a function of their view of any story’s relative importance, but there are, of course, stories that thrust themselves into the public eye and will not “be denied”.

One such story was that of the death of the Georgian luger. It would have been an important story wherever in the world the Olympics were being held. In the

circumstances of the Canadian Olympic Games, it was, if anything, more important. The question for this Panel is then the *nature* of the CTV coverage.

On this front, the Panel cannot but recognize the horror of the footage showing Nodar Kumaritashvili careening down the track and over the wall. That said, it also realizes that there were no tight shots reflecting the Georgian athlete's condition after impact. There was, in other words, no effort to sensationalize or exaggerate the terrible event. The Panel considers that the shots were fair, sufficiently distant and not in any way an attempt to exaggerate the awful circumstances of the collision with the post. Moreover, each of the news reports, even before the outcome of Kumaritashvili's injuries was known, was introduced by careful language advising viewers of the video report that was to follow. The examples were: "this video is very tough to watch"; "it is very graphic and we really do want to warn you that, uh, what's about to come is not pleasant"; "we should warn you, the images of the crash are disturbing"; "Once again, a warning that the video we're about to show you is difficult to watch. And the outcome is just devastating."; and "Our coverage contains video that is disturbing, but necessary to tell this story."

In previous CBSC decisions, where warnings to viewers were given, the Panels have considered that there has been no breach of Article 6.3. [See e.g. *CTV re Canada AM (Airborne Hazing)* (CBSC Decision 94/95-0159, March 12, 1996) and *CTV Newsnet re a News Item (Hostage Murder in Riyadh)* (CBSC Decision 03/04-1817, December 15, 2004).] In another case, *CTV re News Report (Police Shooting)* (CBSC Decision 94/95-0213, March 26, 1996), the warning was given nine seconds into the story itself, and just seven seconds before the shooting of a driver by police, in a news item that was only 22 seconds long. The Ontario Regional Panel found a breach; it was

concerned by the proximity of the warning to the video portion for which the alert was given. Not only was the advisory not placed at the *beginning* of the news story, it was almost halfway through the segment and only 7 seconds before the actual shooting. There was scarcely time for a viewer to respond to the warning before the shot was fired.

In the matter at hand, the Panel finds that each airing of the disturbing video was preceded by an explicit and personally-crafted warning that provided sufficient information to viewers to avoid watching the news item if they wished.

As to the repetition of the story, the Panel finds nothing excessive. It was not played and replayed, first at full speed and then in slow motion, as was the case in certain programs that Panels have found in breach of Article 6.2 in the past. [See e.g. *CITY-TV re an episode of Hard Copy* (CBSC Decision 96/97-0055, May 8, 1997), where the offending video clip was replayed nine times in a three-minute story; *CICT-TV re a news report on the Tour de France* (CBSC Decision 00/01-0982, January 14, 2002), where the Prairie Panel noted that the third replay in the news report was excessive, but that the clip itself was insufficiently problematic to constitute a violation; *CICT-TV re a news*

*update during Touched by an Angel* (CBSC Decision 00/01-0985, January 14, 2002), where the same Panel ruled differently regarding the repetition of the same clip in a different program context; *Talentvision re a News Report (Mainland China Murders)* (CBSC Decision 01/02-0416+, May 3, 2002), where clips of the blood-soaked apartment were shown four times in the news story; and *Global Television re a segment on an episode of Entertainment Tonight* (CBSC Decision 05/06-1525, January 8, 2007), where the offending clip was shown repeatedly.]

In conclusion, the National Conventional Television Panel finds no breach of any of the above-cited provisions of Article 6 of the *CAB Violence Code*.

### **A Further Thought re the Use of Advisories**

In their deliberations, the Adjudicators suggested that broadcasters might usefully consider the use of *video* advisories in some form in such instances in future. Whether as a crawl along the bottom of the screen or in some other format, the Adjudicators pointed out that there are occasionally circumstances in which television audio may be inaudible or may not be turned on at all. In such cases, a video alert could be of assistance in informing viewers of potentially problematic video footage soon to follow. While the Panel is unaware of broadcasters having employed a journalistic video advisory accompanying the required audio one more than on rare occasions, it thought it potentially useful to make such a suggestion. The Panel hastens to add that there is no codified requirement to do so. Nor is the Panel recommending that one be introduced. It merely raises the point, as broadcasters *frequently* look for additional ways of being helpful to their audiences.

### **Any Offence to the Dignity of the Deceased?**

The CBSC has only twice considered the issue of respect for the dignity of a dying individual. In one of these instances, namely, *CTV re a News Report on Charles Ng's Sentencing* (CBSC Decision 98/99-1120, March 22, 2000), the Ontario Regional Panel considered a complaint concerning a news report on the sentencing of Charles Ng, the notorious serial killer who, four months earlier, had been found guilty of the 1984 and 1985 murders of 11 individuals. The item, broadcast during the 11:00 pm National News, included a video clip of about seven seconds in length which showed either Ng or his accomplice beginning to cut the blouse of one of the female victims who was at that moment tied helplessly to a chair. The Panel found that the inclusion of the video segment, while not an invasion of privacy, constituted "a significant affront to the dignity of the soon-to-be tortured, assaulted and murdered young woman" and thus was in breach of Article 4 of the RTNDA Code. In the other instance, namely, *CHAN-TV*

(*BCTV re Newscast (Toronto Subway Death)*) (CBSC Decision 97/98-0383, May 20, 1998), the B.C. Regional Panel dealt with a news item on a Toronto subway murder which aired on the station's 6:00 pm newscast. The report had included "a close view of the dying but still partly conscious woman's bloodstained face". The Panel found that the inclusion of a close-up of the lacerated and bloody face of the victim in the last moments of her life failed to respect the dignity of the victim, as required by the RTNDA Code. It concluded

that the inclusion of a close-up of the lacerated and bloody face of the victim in the last moments of her life in the report failed to respect the dignity of the victim. In the Council's view, there is a distinction to be made with respect to showing other less readily identifiable parts of a person's body, such as arms, legs, torso, etc. and showing the victim's face. It is not so much an issue of the identification of the individual (especially in this case where the victim had been named) as it is an issue of identification of pain, agony, distress, even distortion of the individual, in short, an affront to the dignity, if not the privacy, of the victim and her family and friends.

In the matter at hand, the Panel considers that the video clip (from the moment the luger was thrown off the track) included none of the personalized elements central to the foregoing two decisions. While everyone *knew* who it was, it was a long shot that did not in any way reveal the face of the deceased. It was far more detached and impersonally presented, raising none of the concerns of those two previous decisions. The Panel finds no affront to the deceased athlete. The Panel does recognize that there was a difference in the decision to broadcast the video of the accident prior to the news that Nodar Kumaritashvili had died as opposed to after that awareness, but that decision was the broadcaster's to take. The Panel finds no breach of Article 4 of the RTNDA Code on account of that choice.

### **Broadcaster Responsiveness**

In all CBSC decisions, the Council's Panels assess the broadcaster's responsiveness to the complainant. In the present instance, the Panel finds that the responses of the broadcaster's Vice President, Regulatory Affairs, focussed directly on the issue that concerned the complainants. Indeed, he reviewed the broadcasts and the weighing of the issues considered by CTV before airing the video clip. While the complainants clearly did not share the broadcaster's perspective, that is their right and the reason for which any complaint file is ultimately referred to a CBSC Panel for adjudication. In the end, it is the thoughtfulness of the response that determines whether the broadcaster has met the CBSC membership responsibility of responsiveness, and the Panel considers that CTV has fully met that membership obligation in this instance.



*This decision is a public document upon its release by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council. It may be reported, announced or read by the station against which the complaint had originally been made; however, in the case of a favourable decision, the station is under no obligation to announce the result.*

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## APPENDIX A

### **CBSC Decision 09/10-0895+ CTV re coverage of the fatal luge accident at the 2010 Winter Olympic Games**

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Each of the three complainants saw the luge accident footage at different times and on different CTV stations, all on February 12, 2010. Descriptions and transcriptions of each of those broadcasts are below.

#### 11:23 am, CIVT-TV (CTV British Columbia)

CTV British Columbia news anchors Mike Killeen and Coleen Christie were sitting at a desk outside to cover the Torch Relay. There was a crowd of spectators behind them. The caption at the bottom of the screen read "Breaking News: Luge Accident in Whistler" and a box in the upper-left corner indicated that this coverage was "Live".

Killeen: And welcome back to the Olympic city of Vancouver and our special Torch Relay coverage. I'm Mike Killeen along with Coleen Christie.

Christie: We are going now live to Whistler and our reporter Sarah Galashan with some breaking news. Sarah?

Galashan: Well, Coleen, uh, even as the Village here, uh, is preparing for, uh, a party, we know all of the athletes who are in town are starting their training and they're well into it. And up at the sliding centre, we've just heard of, uh, a very sad and disturbing, uh, incident. Um, during the training, uh, a Georgian athlete has, uh, experienced a crash in the sport of luge. We are going to show you some video here, but first, uh, uh, we have to warn our viewers, we do not know the condition of this athlete and this video is very tough to watch.

The video aired from 11:23:55 to 11:24:35. It showed Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili going down the track at a very fast speed. Presumably multiple cameras were placed along the track since the viewer saw his run from different points and different angles. After one particular turn, the luger flew off the sled and hit a post at the side of the track. The viewer heard a clang noise, which was likely the athlete's helmet hitting the post. The luger's limp body was partially obscured by other posts in front of the camera, but the viewer saw a number of people, including people with medic jackets, running towards the man.

Galashan's voice-over during broadcast of footage: So, this athlete, as we say, again, very tough to watch. This corner that this happened on is corner sixteen. Uh, the corner is called Thunderbird. All of the corners, uh, have a certain level of danger. And, and having been up there over the last two years, I, I've certainly watched and, and been a little terrified watching some of the bobsleighs crash. But I have never, uh, seen an incident involving a luge athlete. Again, we do not know the condition of this athlete. I, I just need to stress that. And certainly, uh, medics are attending to him right now. Um, this track is the fastest and most dangerous in the world. Uh, that's been well-documented over the last two years. Having talked to the Canadian luge team just days ago, they had said they felt that the ice was pretty stable and they were pretty good with

the corners. Um, the Canadians know this track very well. They've had the most time training on it. And, and we've never heard of, uh, an incident of this, uh, magnitude. Once again, this a Georgian athlete, uh, a Georgian luge athlete. We don't know the condition and we'll be waiting for an update on that. Coleen and Mike?

Killeen: Is this, Sarah, this happened during a training run. Have they suspended training on the sliding centre?

Galashan: I, I don't know that, uh, right now. But, uh, in the past whenever we've seen a crash involving any of the athletes, either bobsleighs, skeleton or luge up at the track, everything does stop. They have to get the athlete off of the ice and something like this, you would think that they are, are obviously looking at that turn and trying to assess what happened right now before letting others go down.

Christie: Any comment from, uh, the Georgian team?

Galashan: No, we have not heard from them. This has really just happened. And, and, I, you know, knowing that the Canadian luge team like I do, I'm sure that team is very tight as well. And they're probably all, uh, right now, just worried and trying to find out, uh, how their teammate is doing. We, we haven't heard anything from them at this point.

Christie: Sarah, just give us an idea of this sport. Um, I noticed the time: a hundred and forty-three kilometres an hour around that. Do they have any protection other than a helmet?

Galashan: Uh, no. Uh, not that, uh, not that I've really ever, ever seen. I mean, they're of course wearing their aerodynamic suits and the sled is as aerodynamic so that they can go as fast as possible. Uh, the, the Thunderbird turn, this, this corner sixteen that we're talking about, this is where they reach their top speed. Um, this is where we have, as I say, seen bobsleighs crash. And, and that's always usually, um, "spectacular" is the wrong word, but it's usually the most violent-looking crash. But there are many other corners up on that track where athletes have had trouble over the last two years. There are, there are corners where, they call the fifty-fifty. And it was dubbed the fifty-fifty because athletes stood, uh, a fifty per cent chance of actually getting through that corner. Uh, all the way up on, uh, turn seven, uh, that's, uh, where Pierre Lueders, uh, Canada's possibly best-known bobsleigh athlete, uh, he was the first to go down the track and that's where he flipped. And they, they call that turn Lueders' Loop. So athletes coming off of their sleds of any kind is, is, has happened in the past, but, um, and, likely to happen again, but nothing so violent as this that we've seen so far.

Killeen: All right, Sarah. Well, thanks very much. CTV's, uh, Whistler Bureau Chief Sarah Galashan reporting to us live from Whistler. Of course, uh, she'll be trying to track down the very latest information on this, uh, very disturbing accident on the sliding centre and we'll bring that information to you as soon as possible. We'll be right back after this break.

11:58 am, CIVT-TV (CTV British Columbia)

A super on screen read "Breaking News". Anchors Killeen and Christie were again shown at their outdoor desk.

Christie: Good afternoon. I'm Coleen Christie along with Mike Killeen and we have some more news on that breaking story on that serious accident on the luge training in Whistler where a Georgian athlete has been seriously injured.

Killeen: And we do want to warn you, uh, that we do have video of this accident. Uh, it is very graphic and we really do want to warn you that, uh, what's about to come is not pleasant. But, uh, it was an accident at the Sliding Centre. Take a look at what happened.

The exact same video of the accident was then shown from 11:58:41 to 11:59:18. Following the broadcast of the video, Christie threw to another CTV reporter who was at Whistler.

Christie: We are joined by Whistler Sliding Centre reporter Farhan Lalji and Chris Wightman who is a luge analyst for the Olympic consortium.

Lalji: Coleen, the pictures speak for themselves. Just a tragic situation. All we can tell you officially at this point is that Kumaritashvili is suffering from life-threatening injuries. You saw him come around, uh, the turn, uh, in turn sixteen. He was traveling at a speed estimated at 144.3 kilometres an hour. It's the fastest part of the course. He then hit a pole and was flown off the track. After that, track workers administered CPR and about twenty minutes later he was taken away in ambulance. Again, he's got life-threatening injuries. That's all we can report at this point. And, as I bring in Chris: Chris, have you ever seen an accident like that before?

Wightman: No, I've never seen anyone fly off the track. We've seen sleds flying out of the track every once in a while, but, uh, nothing like that. And just talking to my, my colleagues, uh, former sliders and coaches, uh, we're collec-, jogging our collective memories and, and can't think of it ever, ever happening before. So, it's, uh, it doesn't, it certainly doesn't, it's not happened, uh, often.

Lalji: There's been so much talk about the speed of this track and whether this is safe. After an incident like that – and there were other crashes last night – how are the drivers feeling right now about their own safety going into these Games?

Wightman: Well, I think, I mean this track is, it's a fast track, it's a technical track and, and the people with the experience and the skills to drive that are, are fine. Uh, the, the sliders who are inexperienced – and unfortunately this Georgian slider is a, a fairly young and inexperienced slider – things are coming at them so fast and, and the reaction that's needed and the skills needed to get through and out of those kinds of problems are, are, are really, uh, something that takes a while to develop. So, the, the in-, the experienced sliders I, I think will be fine. They'll be obviously rattled a little bit, but I think the, the sliders that have gone through and, and have had those kinds of situations and those kinds of problems themselves, those, those are the ones that it's going to be weighing a lot on more on them mentally.

Lalji: They're in a captains' meeting right now about, talking about what to do next. And really, what can be done between now and when competition is supposed to begin tomorrow about improving the safety on the track?

Wightman: Well, that, the, the part of the track where that happened, it's, what's happening is they're going up very, very high on the curve and they're coming down. They're hitting the inside part of the curve and popping out. We saw American Megan Sweeney do a very, very similar, uh, crash like that last evening in training runs. She, she was going le-, less fast and so she didn't get the same height as he did. And she got, and there's, there's a build-up of, the wall's been built up there for exactly that reason. What they can do, they can add another couple feet. Uh, you know, I'd suggest maybe even three or four to, uh, to, uh, really retain them. If they do hit that, they'll hit the, the extra boards up high. And they've done that at other tracks. That's not an unusual thing to do as the speeds get higher. And if there's, uh, you know, certain problems that are happening, they can build the walls up with, with the plexiglass or hockey, uh, hockey board type material. And, uh, it, and that makes it a lot more safe.

Lalji: Thanks, Chris. And, as we mentioned, they're in a captains' meeting right now. The second training run was not complete. Training for the day has been suspended. It's hard to imagine that they would postpone competition tomorrow, but anything is possible at this stage. Coleen?

Christie: All right. Farhan Lalji and Chris Wightman in, near the Sliding Centre to give us more on that tragic accident.

Killeen: Yes, uh, a dangerous sport. Uh, these things can happen. Obviously they're going to be keeping a close eye on, uh, Kumaritashvili's, uh, condition. Obviously very seriously injured in that accident at the Sliding Centre in Whistler. And we will keep you updated on this situation, uh, throughout the day. Obviously we, uh, Farhan is up there and our, uh, news crews as well will be, uh, bringing us the latest information from Whistler.

Christie: And we continue our live coverage of the Olympic Torch Relay. Stay with us.

2:58 pm, CTV News Winter Games Edition, CIVT-TV (CTV British Columbia)

The broadcast of *CTV News Winter Games Edition* began at 2:58 pm Pacific Time with CIVT-TV anchors Bill Good & Pamela Martin at an outdoor desk on Robson Street, Vancouver.

Martin: Good afternoon. You're watching *CTV News Winter Games* edition. And we begin with a tragic story in Whistler.

Good: The International Olympic Committee has confirmed that an Olympic athlete has been killed after a crash at the Whistler Sliding Centre. Our Whistler Bureau Chief Sarah Galashan is following this story and we should warn you, the images of the crash are disturbing. Sarah?

The caption at the bottom of the screen read "Fatal Luge Accident".

Galashan: Bill, down here in the Village, the celebration has started. But up at the Sliding Centre it's a very different story. The track was built to be difficult. It is technically challenging and with a vertical drop like the one we see there, we're getting record times recorded. We are also seeing crashes. But never anything like we've seen today. Once again, a warning that the video we're about to show you is difficult to watch. And the outcome is just devastating.

There was footage of Kumaritashvili putting the visor down on his helmet and beginning his run. The caption at the bottom of the screen changed to “Olympic Tragedy”. The clip showed the first part of his run, as Galashan provided the following voice-over narration.

Galashan: It's the world's fastest and most dangerous track. And now Whistler's Olympic Sliding Centre can also be described as deadly.

The video footage then switched to the press conference held by Olympic officials.

Jacques Rogge, IOC President: This is a very sad day. The IOC's in deep mourning. Here you have a young athlete who lost his life in pursuing his passion. He had a dream to participate in the Olympic Games. He trained hard and he had this fatal accident. I have no words.

A photo of Kumaritashvili appeared on screen, followed by footage of an ambulance driving down the street with its siren going.

Galashan: That was Nodar Kumaritashvili, taken from the track by ambulance.

John Furlong, VANOC CEO [at press conference]: We are heart-broken beyond words to be sitting here. I am so sorry to be in this position, to be reporting this, uh, to you. It's not something that I had prepared for, ever thought I would need to be prepared for. Um, my team, uh, has been devastated by this. Uh, our thoughts and our prayers, uh, are now of course, uh, with Nodar's family, uh, his friends, the athletes from Georgia and we turn now to do everything we can, uh, to assist them, to support them, to help them in the most Canadian, uh, way that we can.

The footage of Kumaritashvili's fatal run resumed from 15:00:14 to 15:00:22, including the part where he crashed.

Galashan: A luge athlete from Georgia, ranked 44<sup>th</sup> on the World Cup circuit who lost control on a training run coming out of corner sixteen.

A map of the luge track then appeared on screen.

Galashan: Nicknamed the Thunderbird, it's a 270 degree turn where speeds hit a hundred and forty kilometres per hour.

Interview with a spectator: It was in a really freakish spot. Yeah, just, it, it's at the end of a corner and, and at the finish, going up the finish straight.

There was then a scene of three luge participants standing around.

Galashan: Something his teammates and all other athletes about to compete must now come to terms with.

Interview with Kelly Vanderbeek, Alpine Skiing Analyst: It's, it's tough. I mean, it just elevates the fear factor. And so that fear factor that's always there is just amped up that extra notch.

Galashan: Tough too for spectators to see, some of whom had looked forward to Saturday's luge competition.

Interview with Darlene Gage, Olympic Volunteer: I'm just wondering how safe the track is for the rest of the athletes. I wouldn't want it, to have it repeated.

Interview with David Bromley, Olympic spectator: It's terrible, absolutely terrible. Anyway, it's kind of a bad way to start the, uh, the ceremonies for tonight.

Good: Well, Sarah, what happens now with the training and competition?

Galashan: Well, right now training has been postponed and an investigation is underway. What's important to note about that, that crash that we showed you is just how high the athlete was coming out of corner sixteen. The higher they are, the farther down they have to come. And at speeds like that all athletes know that it's possible that the sled will flip. And as devastating as this death is, it is not the first time that this has happened leading up to the Games. In particular, in 1964 a British luge athlete was killed when his sled, when he lost control. Um, that was incidentally the first, in '64, the first time luge was included as an Olympic competition. Before that, luge was considered too dangerous a sport. Bill?

Good: Thank you, Sarah. CTV Whistler Bureau Chief Sarah Galashan in Whistler this afternoon.

Martin: Since the first trip down the Whistler track, athletes have been saying it is the fastest in the world. But does that mean it's also the most dangerous? CTV's John Woodward has that part of the story.

Woodward's report talked about the design and speed of the track and noted other, non-fatal accidents that had occurred on it. The segment showed the beginning of Kumaritashvili's run, but not the part where he crashed. It also showed footage of other athletes' runs where they lost control of their sleds to varying degrees, but no scenes of severe injury.

Good: We will continue to follow this story throughout the afternoon and evening. And tonight at eleven o'clock after the Opening Ceremony for the very latest on *CTV News*. You're watching *CTV News Winter Games Edition*.

#### 11:24 pm, CTV National News, CFQC-TV (CTV Saskatoon)

Tom Clark was filling in for usual anchorman Lloyd Robertson. Clark introduced the top story about the luge accident.

Clark: Good evening from Vancouver. On this night of Olympic celebration at this highly anticipated moment of the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Winter Games, the world has paused in shock and sadness. At midday today, in a final training run on the luge track, the dreams and the life of a young Olympian from Georgia came to an end. Tonight, amid the spectacular Opening Ceremonies, the bravery of the athlete and the tragedy of his death were marked for the entire world to see. Our coverage contains video that is disturbing, but necessary to tell this story. We start with CTV's Todd Battis in Whistler tonight. Todd?

Battis: Tom, before the Games officially began a cloud was cast over this place. Now the Olympic community is mourning the death of an athlete.

The video footage of Kumaritashvili's luge run and accident was then shown from 23:25:51 to 23:26:29. The footage was the same as that described above, with some additional seconds at the end showing medical personnel crowded around the area where Kumaritashvili landed by the post, an ambulance backing up and then speeding down a road with its sirens on.

Battis [voice-over during footage]: Nodar Kumaritashvili launched into his last training run intent on clocking the fastest time in this, his first Olympics. The slider from Georgia sped around the course. Out of the sixteenth and final turn at 144 kilometres an hour, he loses control, his sled hitting the railing above the track. The 21-year old is thrown, his body sideways as it hits a pole. Immediately medical personnel are there performing CPR. An ambulance takes the athlete from the circuit. Soon after, Nodar Kumaritashvili is pronounced dead. A shaken president of the IOC offered this.

The visuals then showed IOC president Jacques Rogge and VANOC CEO John Furlong at the press conference from earlier in the day.

Rogge: This is a very sad day. Uh, the IOC is in deep mourning. Here you have a young athlete who lost his life in pursuing his passion. He had a dream to participate in the Olympic Games. He trained hard and he had this fatal accident. I have no words to say what we feel.

Furlong: It's not something that I had prepared for, ever thought I would need to be prepared for. Um, my team, uh, has been devastated by this.

There were then scenes of Olympic athletes and coaches milling about.

Battis: So too the entire Olympic community, including this woman who had just befriended Nodar.

Interview with Tatia Gvelesiani, Friend: He was very happy. He was enthusiastic. He was proud to be a Georgian.

There was an aerial view of part of the luge track.

Battis: Never has a luge athlete been killed in competition. CTV analyst and former slider Chris Wightman saw it happen.

Interview with Wightman, CTV Luge Analyst: I've never seen anything like this before. Sleds, you know, sleds sometimes come out of the track, but people, uh, don't.

There was then footage of another luger's run during which he fell off his sled and slid down the track without it, but presumably did not suffer any serious injury.

Battis: In the past few days, however, there have been other incidents. The track has been criticized for being too fast, too challenging.

Interview with Albert Demchenko, Russian Slider: I say every time for this track it's very fast and, uh, little bit, little bit danger [sic]. It's, uh, I say every time.



An aerial view of the Whistler Sliding Centre.

Battis: The Sliding Centre, now closed as an investigation takes place. The status of Saturday's races in doubt. But Team Georgia will stay on.

There was a scene of a woman placing flowers and a photo of Kumaritashvili at a makeshift memorial, followed by footage of Georgian Minister of Culture, Nikoloz Vacheishvili, at the press conference.

Vacheishvili: They will compete and dedicate their performance to their fallen comrade.

Battis: So now the BC Coroner's office and the RCMP conv-, uh, conducting that investigation. The International Olympic Committee and lugin's, uh, governing body both holding a news conference tomorrow morning, a joint news conference. We should get some details from them at that time. Tom?

Clark: Okay, thanks, Todd. CTV's Todd Battis at Whistler tonight.

At the end of the shortened newscast (at 23:36:10), a photograph of Kumaritashvili wearing his helmet was displayed on screen with the words "In Memory of Nodar Kumaritashvili, 1988-2010" and the Georgian flag. Clark said:

Well, from Vancouver, on this momentous day, that has been our look at this Friday, February 12<sup>th</sup>. I'm Tom Clark and for Lloyd Robertson and everyone at the CTV National newsroom, thanks very much for being with us. And as we leave you tonight, please take a moment to think about Nodar Kumaritashvili, the 21-year-old Olympian from the country of Georgia who died so tragically in practice today.

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## APPENDIX B

### CBSC Decision 09/10-0895+ CTV re coverage of the fatal luge accident at the 2010 Winter Olympic Games

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#### Complaints

##### File 09/10-0895

The following complaint was submitted via the CBSC's webform on February 12, 2010:

station: CTV Canada  
program: Vancouver Olympic Coverage  
date: February 12th, 2010  
time: 11:20 am and again at 12:00 pm

concern: To preface my complaint, the footage that CTV aired is probably one of the most disturbing, tragic moments I have ever witnessed on TV or otherwise. I completely believe in freedom of the press and disagree with censorship, but my concern transcends these beliefs.

A member of the Georgian Luge team has just died from a fatal luge accident while practicing in Whistler. CTV aired the footage of this accident directly after it happened around 11:20 am and my partner and I sat stunned at the horrifying moment. We both presumed that this person had died immediately from the crash simply because of how it looked on television (it looks extremely fatal). I don't think CTV should have aired the footage based on the explicit nature of it. It is tragic footage that only seeks to render horror and sadness in the viewer. To my surprise, they replayed the footage at 12:00 pm while providing an update about the fatal crash.

To reiterate, CTV is basically showing the moment of death of an Olympian every time it re-airs this broadcast.

I think CTV should issue an apology for this lapse in judgement. It has seriously disturbed me and, from doing a simple Google search, it has obviously disturbed others who saw it on TV or can access the broadcast online.

##### File 09/10-0962

The following complaint was submitted via the CBSC's webform on February 13:

station: CTV  
program: News immediately following the opening ceremonies  
date: Feb 12th

time: 11:30 pm

concern: It is absolutely inappropriate to show the death of an Olympic athlete on national TV. Whoever decided that should be fired and CTV should be fined. It did not add anything to the news story but in fact tarnished the nice respect for the Georgian athlete the opening ceremonies had. CTV should be ashamed of themselves. It was absolutely disgusting.

The complainant also sent a letter to the CRTC on February 13, which was forwarded to the CBSC in due course:

Good Evening,

I would like to make a formal complaint about CTV news and their broadcast immediately following the Olympic opening ceremonies. It was a very poor programming choice to broadcast the horrific accident and death of an Olympic athlete on national television for everyone to see. Everyone that was watching with us gasped, as we never thought it would be shown. It was truly a horrible decision on CTV's part and ruined the whole respect and recognition that they had during the ceremonies themselves.

File 09/10-1139

The following complaint was submitted via the CBSC's webform on February 21:

station: CTV

program: CTV News, sports section of the show

date: 11<sup>th</sup> [sic, 12<sup>th</sup>] February 2010

time: 2:00 pm and again around 7:00 pm

concern: During the news broadcast, the footage of the Georgian athlete who died at the Whistler Sliding Centre was shown in full, including the athlete's death. Not only was this shown in the daytime but it was shown again in the evening. The broadcaster, whose name escapes me, stated on both occasions it was necessary to show the footage in order to convey the severity of the situation, but frankly this was purely gratuitous.

It was absolutely NOT necessary to show this young man's death on TV, twice; it was purely for shock value and absolutely disrespectful to the family of the deceased athlete. I happened to be in a restaurant showing the Olympic coverage at the 2:00 pm news broadcast, and everybody in the restaurant gasped aloud in shock at what they had seen.

CTV may have paid a lot of money for the Olympic broadcast rights, but that doesn't mean they can cross all boundaries of decency and respect in order to capitalise on their investment.

I would like this matter to be investigated, and I would be very surprised if I were the only person to have complained about this incident.

## Broadcaster Response

CTV responded to the first two complainants with the following letter dated April 14 (the CBSC gave the network an extension on the 21-day time frame for responding to complaints due to the large number):

Dear [Complainant],

The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council has forwarded your correspondence concerning the broadcast on CTV of images of the tragic death of Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili during a practice run just before the opening of the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver.

We appreciate your concern over the use of this footage and we certainly understand that the visual images used in our reporting were upsetting as was the event itself. However, we at CTV believe these visuals were integral to the story and to informing Canadians about this unfortunate tragedy at this year's Olympic Games.

Too often, events covered by news organizations are tragic and shocking. Our news policy is to treat graphic or disturbing images with care and restraint. After much consideration, we decided to make available the images of the Georgian luger run in connection with news reports about this tragedy.

We at CTV are members of both the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC) and the Radio Television News Directors Association of Canada and we adhere to the industry codes administered by the CBSC. Clause 5 of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' (CAB) *Code of Ethics* specifically recognizes that "the fundamental purpose of news dissemination in a democracy is to enable people to know what is happening, and to understand events so that they may form their own conclusions."

Moreover, although broadcasters are not expected to "exaggerate or exploit situations of aggression, conflict or confrontation", it is specifically recognized in the *Voluntary Code regarding Violence in Television Programming* (the "Violence Code") that "equal care shall be taken not to sanitize the reality of the human condition".

We believe appropriate editorial judgment was exercised at CTV in the reporting of and the pictorial representation of this tragic death at the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games in accordance with our obligations under Clause 6 of the *Violence Code*. The images shown were not gratuitous or exploitive. In addition, we did our best to strongly warn audiences that they may find the video disturbing. Our reports on the tragic event were preceded by an appropriate caution as required by Section 6.3 of the *Violence Code*.

Sports today such as alpine skiing and the sliding sports contain a tremendous amount of risk, constantly putting athletes at the edge of disaster. Kumaritashvili's accident and the circumstances that led to his death are central to understanding what happened and very much a matter in the public interest.

We are sorry you were offended by these images, but we believe they were vital to the proper reporting of the story and in accordance with our obligations under the various Codes administered by the CBSC. CTV is a member in good standing of the CBSC and complies with its guidelines.

Thank you for taking the time to write with your concerns.

The third complainant received a shorter version of the letter, also dated April 14:

Dear [complainant],

Thank you for your letter, which we received through the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council on March 11, 2010.

I understand and appreciate your concerns regarding the luge footage that aired during our broadcast of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games on February 12.

Too often, events covered by news organizations and television networks are tragic and shocking. Our policy is to treat graphic or disturbing images with care and restraint. After much consideration, we decided to make available the images of the Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili's run. Understanding that the video was graphic, our anchors warned viewers in advance that they may find the footage disturbing.

Sports such as alpine skiing and the sliding sports contain a tremendous amount of risk, constantly putting athletes on the edge of disaster. Kumaritashvili's accident, and the circumstances that led to his death, are central to understanding what happened. Therefore, we believe that showing video of the crash was vital to the proper reporting of the story.

CTV is committed to maintaining the highest standards in our programming content. We did not intend to upset viewers by airing the luge footage and regret that you were distressed.

I hope this letter clarifies the situation and conveys how seriously we take our broadcast responsibilities. CTV is a member in good standing of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council and follows the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' codes and guidelines, which they administer.

## **Additional Correspondence**

### File 09/10-0895

The complainant sent the following letter on April 22:

Hope this email finds you well. Please see my attached response to CTVglobemedia's reply to my complaint.

At this time, I'm requesting that this complaint be elevated to a CBSC Committee as I feel strongly that CTVglobemedia has failed to address my complaint in a responsible and professional manner. Instead, they manage to deflect responsibility by blaming a democratic media-based system. However, I believe they made an editorial decision that is far more complex than how they articulate it in their reply.

Many thanks for your assistance.

His attached letter dated April 15 read as follows:

Please accept this as a response to the letter I received from CTVglobemedia on April 14th, 2010 that explained their decision to broadcast images of the tragic death of Georgian Luger Nodar Kumaritashvili during a practice run just before the opening of the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver.

I believe that CTVglobemedia underestimates the complexity behind showing the death of Mr. Kumaritashvili, which is clearly evident in their employment of a general defence of the broadcast in their letter instead of specifically addressing the issue of the traumatizing effects of watching a fatal accident on television. The footage was shown prematurely because the outcome of Mr. Kumaritashvili's accident was unknown. Consequently, it would have been more appropriate and responsible to mention the accident orally instead of showing the broadcast. And, when Mr. Kumaritashvili's death was confirmed, CTVglobemedia decided to show the footage again. Why was this necessary? People die in gruesome and various ways every day. Is this also "news?" Was the footage necessary to explain how the unfortunate accident occurred? Or was it necessary because of its association with one of the most watched events in television history that CTVglobemedia wanted to bank on? Finally, why was it necessary to show the images of Mr. Kumaritashvili's death in both instances? Is this not exploitative?

There are many questions that develop out of such a complex issue; however, the central question to consider is: why does CTVglobemedia think it is necessary to show explicit images of the very moment of a person's death? Was this footage vital to the story? Is CTVglobemedia unable to articulate such a tragic and explicit event in anything other than images? I think the answer to this question is that CTVglobemedia broadcasted these images for ratings because our society is drawn to this type of imagery. This type of rare imagery is not news; it is exploitative, raw and traumatic. [The Vice President of Regulatory Affairs] cites Clause 5 of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) *Code of Ethics* and Clause 6 of the *Violence Code* in an effort to implicitly argue that images such as these should be free of censorship on the part of the broadcaster in a democratic society – to effectively allow the public to "form their own conclusions" and to avoid the "sanitization" of the public. This argument is problematic considering that some members of the viewing public at this time of day – especially children – may not have the capacity to form conclusions from these traumatic images. Further, CTVglobemedia fails to take responsibility for the dissemination of this footage by making an attempt to link it to a theory focused on the "good of the public." However, I think these images, albeit in a horrible way, assisted CTVglobemedia in its ratings campaign during the Olympics, and this is the main reason why it continues to defend such an irresponsible decision in the wake of the many people it traumatized.

CTVglobemedia's response to my complaint is general and vague. The clauses [the Vice President of Regulatory Affairs] cites are not specifically related to the footage of a person's death yet he attempts to make sense of them through this. It is also expected that CTVglobemedia will defend their journalistic integrity given the fact that they have to support a delicate public relations campaign because of their competition with other national networks. [the Vice President of Regulatory Affairs] states that "Our news policy is to treat graphic or disturbing images with care and restraint. After much consideration, we decided to make available the images of the Georgian luger run in connection with news reports about this tragedy." There was no care or restraint with this footage as it was broadcasted repeatedly prefaced with a very short warning – hardly enough time for parents or adults, even, to turn away or turn off the television. Further, he states that "the images shown were not gratuitous or exploitive." This is an arguable statement considering that this footage exploits the death of the Luger in a way that renders him vulnerable, exposed and dying in front of a mass audience. In my opinion, the footage CTVglobemedia broadcasted was completely exploitive. Finally [the Vice President of Regulatory Affairs] states that "Kumaritashvili's accident and the circumstances that led

to his death are central to understanding what happened and very much a matter in the public interest." The central question here is why does CTVglobemedia need to rely on the image to "tell the story" when journalism can work with both images and words. Understandably, it's a television broadcast, but if there is traumatic footage in doubt, can CTVglobemedia not find other ways to disseminate its "news?"

I was not only offended by the footage of the Luger's death, but traumatized. As I stated in my original complaint, a brief Google search also yielded others who were traumatized by the footage. CTVglobemedia needs to take responsibility in its presentation of explicit events and it cannot simply rely on theories and ideologies of censorship and democracy. This footage complicates these theories and ideologies as it demands for a different editorial approach that would consider a mass audience open to influence.

I do sincerely hope that the CBSC's Committee will consider this complaint seriously and keep in mind that CTVglobemedia attempts to simplify the broadcast of this footage to protect their self-interest.

File 09/10-0962

This complainant submitted his Ruling Request via webform on April 14:

Hello,

I have received the response from CTV and don't think that it was satisfactory. In the response CTV claims that "these visuals were integral to the story". I disagree, as no one watching the news needed to see the poor man's death replayed over and over. He died during training, we understand that, and showing a few clips of his race before the accident would have been fine.

Their reference to "Clause 5" I think is also a bit far fetched. When I read that paragraph it sounded like it was meant for coverage of political rallies, wars, etc. I don't think an Olympic accident is democratic news. I think our country and its people will be fine if we did not see that video. (Whereas if our government was killing people at a protest, etc, Clause 5 would be appropriate and we would want to see for ourselves what "our" country leaders were doing).

I also strongly disagree with their defense using Clause 6. I think they did exploit those images. It was immediately following the opening ceremonies, one of the top-watched programs, and they wanted to keep viewers interested with "blood and gore". They also claim to strongly warn the audience. I don't think they fulfilled their duty in this regard either. I was in a room filled with educated adults, and none of us expected that we would be watching his death, even after their "warning". We all gasped when we saw it, and not one person in the room could believe it. Also note that I don't think it is appropriate to show that video even if a stronger warning was made, although at least if they made a proper warning I would have changed channels or something.

In CTV's paragraph discussing the risk associated with "Alpine skiing and sliding sports" they mention that "the circumstances that led to his death are central to understanding what happened and very much a matter of public interest". I completely agree. I am interested in the fact that this was the fastest Olympic luge track, and that he might not have been trained enough, or that the conditions weren't good, etc. However, these are fact-based reporting that can easily be reported without the video. I fail to understand how this in any way relates as a defence for showing the video clip.

I disagree completely with CTV and think that this video was not within the guidelines set out by CBSC, and furthermore not appropriate in any way whether or not they will get in trouble. It is because of CTV's attitude towards this video and event that creates the need for oversight. Obviously the staff at CTV can't make these important decisions themselves, so it is up to the CBSC to do it for them.

Thank you for your time in this matter.

File 09/10-1139

This complainant submitted a Ruling Request via webform on April 16:

I received a reply to my complaint on the 14th [of] April 2010 and I feel frankly the letter does nothing to address the concerns I raised in my complaint; rather, it reiterates the words used by the newscaster during the broadcast (that it was necessary to show the death), words which I've heard before and disagreed with. Is that really a way to explain the situation or the decisions made by CTV?

The fact remains it was not necessary to show the death of the athlete, and there are no circumstances I can think of where it would ever be acceptable to show such footage. The argument put forth by CTV that it was vital to the story does not hold water. If I am told a person died in an accident, I understand the person talked about ceased to be living. It's that simple. I do not need to see his death, twice, to believe that he is in fact dead. If it was felt, as it is stated in the letter, it was necessary to show dead bodies to really get the story across, why do CTV and others not show the dead bodies of the many hundreds of other people who die throughout the year and whose stories make it onto the news? It is not shown because it is disrespectful and in very poor taste, and the same is true of the decision to show the death of Nodar Kumaritashvili, twice.

Somebody within the CTV organization signed off on the decision to broadcast the accident and death of this young man, and that person needs to explain themselves [*sic*] to the public and the CBSC. Until such time as that happens, I will remain dissatisfied with the response I have received from CTV to date and I will seek to escalate the matter with the CBSC.