

## THE FIRST CANADA GAMES: QUEBEC CITY, 1967

Canada's Centennial celebrations were held in 1967 as the country celebrated one-hundred years as a nation. One of the first events in the year-long birthday party was the inaugural Canada Winter Games, held in Quebec City, February 11-19. The Canada Games idea was not a new one—it had been talked about for years. The notion of a nation-wide athletic competition was credited to Norton Crowe, honorary secretary of the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada, in his retirement speech in 1924. Crowe noted Canada had not won a medal in track and field in the Olympics since 1904 and perhaps it was time to improve by setting up an all-British Empire Games. He also touched on another idea.

Said Crowe, "Another event I would like to see in the future would be what might be styled Canadian Olympic Games at some central point when all seasonable sport could be conducted in the same week. The assistance of federal funds would make this possible."

Crowe passed away just months before the British Empire Games made their debut in 1930. His second notion of a Canada Games didn't come for the next 40 years. The Great Depression and World War II set the commitment back until the 1960's. Crowe knew the importance of preparing young athletes to represent our country for future Olympic competition. That idea would transform into a biannual set of games held since 1967. In September, 1966 Canada's sport directors met to lay the groundwork for the first Canadian Winter Games. That group included Prince Edward Island's Dr. David Boswell. The Canada Games—Jeux du Canada was born.

The health and physical activity among Canadians was being discussed by the late 1950's and then Prime Minister John Diefenbaker recommended \$5 million of federal funding be put into Canadian fitness and amateur sport which translated into Bill C-131 which would provide money for national teams and Canadian athletes at both the national and international level. In January, 1962 the Sports Advisory Council moved ahead with plans for a Canada Games to be held in both winter and summer. The Council later changed its name to the Canadian Amateur Sports Federation. Andre Marceau, a member of the national body, spearheaded a group that would make Quebec City the first host. A host society board was formed and went across the country speaking to the premier of each, PEI's Premier the Honorable Alex Campbell was supportive of the venture. Not all premiers came on board but through some hard work and negotiation the Canada Games were a go just a few years later.

Another hurdle had to be crossed before the Games of 1967. The Fitness and Amateur Sport Act of 1960 put down some ground rules on spending federal money. It was to "encourage, promote and develop fitness and amateur sport" but the Act did not clearly

state how that could be done. The interpretation was that the funds could be used for operating expenses for municipal and regional events but not for capital expenditures such as constructing new arenas and other venues. For Quebec City, that meant no major construction projects before the Games and sport officials quickly realized it would mean limiting the Canada Games of the future to large centres like Toronto or Montreal. That would mean smaller places could never host the Games and the interpretation of the Act had to be changed so all Canadian cities and towns could have a chance to stage the events. What this would leave behind would be a rich legacy of sports facilities and programs that would benefit every province.

### *Let The Games Begin.....Quebec City, February, 1967*

And so, on cold Saturday evening February 11, 1967 the first Canada Winter Games began with the opening ceremonies in -33 degrees weather in front of the Quebec Legislature. PEI's first Canada Games athletes marched in the entourage. Prime Minister Lester Pearson, Quebec Premier Daniel Johnson, Cardinal Leger and other dignitaries from across the country were seated on a wooden platform. Georges Labrecque, president of the Games Corporation welcomed the athletes and coaches from across the nation. The Games motto was "Unity Through Sport". Labrecque had gone across the country to drum up support for the Games.

Over 1,800 athletes would compete in 15 sports. Admission to most events was only \$1.00 for adults and 25 cents for children. Some events were even free of charge. Athletes were housed according to their sport so they could meet others from across the country who were involved in the same sport.

The only hitch other than the biting cold was the fact no Games torch was available and the hosts had to create one just hours before the opening. Quebec synchronized swimmer, Marilyn Malenfant, lit the flame. The first Canada Games were set to begin.

### *How PEI Fared.....No Medals But A Great Beginning*

Canada's smallest province did not win a medal in Quebec City but proved very competitive in many events particularly in hockey and curling. PEI sent a contingent of 156 participants to the Games headed by Dr. David Boswell, the first Chef-de-Mission. The hockey teams were primarily made up of university players. The Island was represented by the St. Dunstan's Saints who had a formidable team in the AUAA conference. Injuries played a key role for PEI in the opening games of the competition. Joe Cheverie and Wayne MacDougall were both hurt as Quebec beat PEI, 6-4. Cheverie was put out with a neck injury while MacDougall went down with a shoulder injury as he chased the puck on an icing call. Manitoba got by the Island squad, 6-4 with

Mike Kelly scoring twice for the Saints with singles to Vince Mulligan and Paul MacWilliams. PEI did blank the Yukon, 8-0.

PEI's mixed curling team was skipped by Dr. Wen MacDonald and included his wife, Elizabeth. The Islanders with a 3-0 record, finally falling to New Brunswick for their first loss. Then a 10-6 setback to B.C. Later in the week, PEI fell to a 4-4 mark. Manitoba took the lead with a 7-1 record but lost to Alberta, 7-5, in the gold medal match. Nova Scotia won the bronze.

PEI's basketball teams struggled against the larger provinces. Premier Alex Campbell of PEI officially opened the basketball segment of the Games. Saskatchewan overwhelmed the Island men's team, 115-51 while the women's squad dropped an 82-17 decision to Saskatchewan. PEI dropped to the consolation round with a 112-57 loss to Quebec in the men's and 120-21 defeat in the women's. On the men's side, PEI lost 103-43 to B.C. while the women's team, made up of Prince of Wales College graduates, did defeat the Yukon, 38-28 but also dropped a 79-38 decision to Quebec. One of the off-court highlights was a severe winter storm that lashed through the province and left 76 cm of snow on the fourth day. The hotel where most of the basketball players were staying in Ste-Foy had no staff on hand because of the storm. 67 basketball players including those from PEI got up and made breakfast for the guests. Most of the competition continued with athletes billeted close to their venue. The blizzard did strand 350 skiers, wrestlers and volleyball players in Montreal as flights were cancelled.

Another calamity affected the women's volleyball portion of the Games. A total of 19 players from PEI, Manitoba and Alberta came down with a suspected case of food poisoning later blamed on ham sandwiches that had been passed out. The viral respiratory infection resulted in three athletes being sent to hospital. Most of the others continued to play. PEI went 0-14 in men's volleyball and 2-14 in women's play.

PEI badminton players managed to beat the Northwest Territories, 3-2 in one of their matches.

The closing ceremonies were held at the Quebec Legislature Buildings and attracted a crowd of 2,000.

Ontario won the first Canada Games with 129 points while PEI had 28. Ontario athletes had 21 gold, 18 silver and 11 bronze medals. Only Prince Edward Island and the Territories failed to take home a medal. PEI was tenth overall in the standings. Each athlete received a certificate of participation at the conclusion of the Games.

Individually, 13-year old Terese MacDonald of Ontario was the star of the Games with 4 gold and a silver in gymnastics. Doreen MacCannell, a phys. ed. student at the University of Manitoba won all four gold medals in speedskating. On the men's side,

Steve Mitruk of Ontario won 3 gold and 2 silver in gymnastics. Paul Enoch of Alberta took home 3 gold medals in figure skating.

Dr. David Boswell told Bill Ledwell, a sports columnist for the Charlottetown Guardian and part of the Mission Staff, "We are most gratified with the results and efforts put forth by our teams in face of very strong opposition and with the overall behaviour during our stay here, during and both outside the competition".

The first Canada Games proved to be a giant success despite problems with the weather. All provinces decided to hold their own set of games. The initial Canada Games were not conceived as part of what would be a continuous program but rather a Centennial event but their success led to the 1969 Summer Games in Halifax-Dartmouth and started a legacy that continues to today.