

Developing Champions...and Keeping Tabs

There is no denying we are hooked. As a country, when the Olympics take place, new stars, medallists and champions rise to the occasion and become household names in living rooms and around water-coolers across the country. At the Canada Games, we are as drawn-in as everyone else to the great stories, but it is also an opportunity to follow those that we have already met along the way.

Each and every World Juniors, FIFA World Cup, other major national and international events and, most prominently, the Olympics, we look forward to the day the team roster is announced. Quickly our database is checked and percentages calculated to determine who have been able to use the Canada Games property as the platform it can be. The 2010 Olympic Winter Games were no exception. Percentages of alumni were calculated with a new anticipation as it was a home based-Games and because these Games came at a time when the success of Canadian athletes is better linked to improved development programs as well as increased funding.

In sports on the Canada Games program, close to half of the athletes competing at the 2010 Olympic Games had competed at Canada's multi-sport event indicating how important the Canada Games are in the development of Canada's next generation of national, international and Olympic champions. It also means that we watched the event unfold with special interest.

Canada Games Alumni achieved great success in Vancouver. Canada Games alumni contributed to 16 of the 26 medals won, representing 61% of medals won in Vancouver. 43% of the Canada Games alumni representing Team Canada stood on the podium at the Vancouver Olympics. In total, 34 of the 79 Canada Games Alumni returned from the Vancouver Olympics with one or more medals around their necks.

"The Canada Games are proud of Canada's Olympic team and their results in Vancouver," says Tom Quinn, Chairman of the Canada Games Council. "We watched every second of these home-based Olympic Games and cheered every athlete on, but we are especially proud of our alumni who graduated from the Canada Games and went on to such great success."

As the Vancouver Games end with the most medals ever won by Team Canada, 26 in total (14 gold), it is remarkable to reflect on the Canada Games alumni who achieved success.

The only Canadian multiple medalists of the Games were Canada Games alumni. Two-time 2010 medalist Kristina Groves, was a team Ontario athlete at the 1995 Canada Games. Charles Hamelin (2003) won the men's short-track 500-metre final and then the 5,000m relay along with teammates, brother François and fellow alumni Olivier Jean (2003) & François-Louis Tremblay (1999). François-Louis Tremblay captured his fourth and fifth career medals at the 2010 Games. Hamelin's girlfriend, Marianne St-Gelais, who competed at the 2007 Canada Games in Whitehorse for team Quebec, won a silver in the Ladies 500m and the 3000m relay.

Shelley Ann Brown (1991), who competed at the Canada Games in athletics, won silver in bobsleigh and became the first black Canadian woman ever to win a medal at a Winter Olympic Games. Canada-1 brakeman in women's bobsleigh, PEI native Heather Moyse (1997, 2001), won Canada's first-ever gold in the event. Moyse, this past summer, acted as a key-note speaker to the Opening Ceremony's crowd at the 2009 Canada Summer Games in PEI.

81% of the gold-medal winning women's hockey team members, including captain Hayley Wickenheiser (1991), were Canada Games alumni including two members who recently competed at the Whitehorse Games. Celebrated Olympian Sidney Crosby, who scored the over-time goal to clinch the gold, competed for Team Nova Scotia at the 2003 Canada Games in Bathurst-Campbellton.

"We are thrilled that the Canada Games have played a part in the development of these now household names," says Sue Hylland, President and CEO of the Canada Games Council. "As we continue to build champions at the upcoming 2011 Winter Games in Halifax Nova Scotia and the 2013 Summer Games in Sherbrooke Quebec, we look forward to tracking future international and Olympic success as well."

While the athletes, deservedly so are the face of our alumni, volunteers, board members and the coaches and officials are also watched with interest. Canada Games staff and volunteers participated in the official torch relay and travelled to Vancouver to carry on their commendable spirit of volunteerism and support.

Board member Joanne Thomson, Executive Director for Biathlon Canada, carried the 2010 Olympic Torch through Lindsay Ontario, Champion Figure Skating Coach and Board member Michelle Leigh carried the torch in Cookstown Ontario, Board member Guylaine Bernier, International Rowing Judge and former Olympian lit the Olympic Cauldron for the Montréal Olympic Torch Relay, and 2011 Canada Games Host Society members Jean-Paul Deveau, Chris Morrissey and Andrea Bowie participated in Nova Scotia. Board Member Catriona Le May Doan was also selected, along with Simon Whitfield, to be one of the first two to carry the Olympic torch upon the flames' arrival in Canada. Members of the Canada Games Council Board of Directors also travelled to Vancouver to lend their expertise during the Games included Bernier, John Pickett, a principal of sport marketing and event management firm JP INTERNATIONAL as well as 1988 Olympic Games and Olympic Movement builder, and World and Olympic Champion Le May Doan, who participated in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies and as a broadcaster.

Many of the Team Canada members who make up the Canadian delegation at the Vancouver Olympics are representing as coaches, managers, technical personnel, mission staff, and organizing committee staff and many can attribute their roots to the Canada Games. Many Olympic team coaches first came to the Canada Games for multi-sport experience and attained increased levels of certification to participate. Some of the coaches who have gone on from the Canada Games to the 2010 Olympics include: Derrick Campbell (Speed Skating), Geret Coyne (Biathlon), Elaine Dagg-Jackson (Curling), Mel Davidson (Hockey F), Michel Dorion (Free Style Skiing), Eric de Nys (Cross Country Skiing), Robert Kober (Free Style Skiing), Tim Milne (Snowboard), Jean Paquet (Biathlon), Manon Perron (Figure Skating), David Wood (Cross Country Skiing).

As our one-year-out mark for the 2011 Canada Winter Games in Halifax quickly came and went during the 2010 Olympics, February 11-27 2011 will afford us the new opportunities to identify Olympic hopefuls and to add to our database of accomplished Canadian athletes. Sure there is a little Olympic withdrawal right now, but if you close your eyes and listen, you can already hear the roar of the crowd in London England, our national anthem, and our frantic pushing of buttons on a calculator.