

I nternational Sport Co-operation with Central and Eastern Europe

Sport diplomacy is adding a fresh and exciting dimension to Canadian foreign policy and trade promotion in Central and Eastern Europe. Global Teammates, the Canada-Soviet Polar Bridge Expedition and Fit Trek are examples of international sports relations projects launched over the past few years that are creating opportunities for co-operation in a variety of fields.

Global Teammates is a co-operative venture involving the Canadian Olympic Association, the Canadian Jaycees, and External Affairs and International Trade Canada. Its aim is to collect and redistribute abroad second-hand sports equipment. Many Canadians are able to afford a wide variety of top-quality sports equipment and clothing. Indeed, vast quantities of reusable sports equipment are regularly discarded in household and school spring and fall clean-ups. Now this equipment is being sorted and redistributed throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Through Global Teammates, thousands of young Canadians are now able to reach out to their counterparts in this region as well as to make a tangible contribution to the recycling of resources and to international sport development.

One project that captured the imagination of Canadians was the 1988 Canada-Soviet Polar Bridge Expedition — the 3200 km land crossing from the Soviet Union to Canada across the Arctic ice cap. The team covered terrain that is among the most remote, treacherous and unknown on earth and completed pioneering geomagnetic experiments and tests to assess environmental changes in the Arctic and



Webber

evaluate their possible implications. The expedition epitomized cultural co-operation and good-will between Canada and the U.S.S.R. and provided an opportunity for Canadian corporate sponsors to promote their products and services in the Soviet Union. The greatest triumph of the 13-member expedition was undoubtedly the enduring friendship and trust that developed among its participants. Although lacking a common culture or language, the team came together to succeed in a heroic endeavour against great odds. The expedition inspired numerous awards, including the prestigious UNESCO International Fair Play Award.

In 1992, the Canadian and Soviet co-leaders of the Polar Bridge Expedition, Richard Webber and Mikhail Malakov, will head a second Arctic expedition — the Polar Challenge. This will involve skiing some 2200 km from Ward Hunt Island to the North Pole and back. It will be the first round trip to the North Pole without benefit of airplanes, resupplies or electronic navigation. Again scientific, medical and environmental experiments will help

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chart the impact of pollution, climatic changes, stress and extreme cold on life in the far north.

Another highlight in Soviet-Canadian relations over the past few years has been Fit Trek — a unique grassroots program designed to increase fitness participation levels in the U.S.S.R. and Canada through city-to-city fitness challenges. In each of the past three winters, Canadian cities have been twinned with Soviet counterparts in friendly but spirited competition to determine which cities are the most physically active. For every 20 minutes of individual physical activity recorded during the challenge, Canadian and Soviet participants move their cities one kilometre in an imaginary race into space.

Since the first Fit Trek in 1989, more than five million Canadians from 12 cities have covered more than 23 million Fit Trek

kilometres. Fit Trek has also provided a basis for further co-operative ventures between the paired cities in the fields of education, amateur sport, recreation, language studies and business. It has also proven an effective and significant means of improving understanding between Soviet and Canadian communities and cultures.

Sport will continue to be a significant diplomatic asset in Canada's relations with Central and Eastern European countries for some time to come. Projects are under way involving the sharing of Canadian expertise in sport marketing and administration with local sport leaders, the establishment of mass fitness programs in the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, and the development of co-operative programs in distance education between Canadian and Eastern European physical education faculties. Through sport, doors are being opened and experiences shared, with both Canadians and Central and Eastern Europeans the beneficiaries. ♦