



Tom Gayford -- '68 gold medalist

by Eleanor Copeland

During an interview with Tom Gayford at his farm, I was told that for 15 years he has not had a holiday without a horse show. This kind of dedication on his part and that of three other Canadian equestrians finally culminated in top honours for Canada's jumping team — the only gold medal Canada captured in the '68 Olympic Games in Mexico.

It is an achievement to be proud of, not only because the equestrian events have traditionally been dominated by European teams, but also because according to Gayford financial support for the Canadian team doesn't come anywhere close to that of other countries. Germany and France have long been recognized as two of the biggest threats in these events and the privately financed American team is always a good one.

Gayford and Jim Elder have been competing in top shows for a long time. Both are in their mid-thirties. Gayford is in the brokerage business and Elder is in the refrigeration business. Jim Day and Torchy Millar are the younger members, and can afford more time away from business, but all four have family responsibilities which demand as much time as do their businesses and riding. Gayford says that unless he gets a very good horse he will likely attend the Olympics as a non-competitor. He hasn't as much time anymore.

Gayford says this dual role as businessmen and competitors that Canadian athletes are forced to play is a key obstacle to the continued success of the equestrians

and those in other fields as well. In other nations the Olympic calibre athletes do nothing but practice and compete full-time. Our teams practice wherever they can find facilities and when they can find time.

To a great extent Canadian participation in the equestrian events, and indeed in the entire Olympics is an independent achievement. The equestrian team depends mainly on the contributions of interested people. Horses are loaned to a specific rider and if that combination makes it in pre-Olympic qualifying events, they go. At home the team members pay for the keep of their horses and their expenses during competitions. The team operates on a shoestring. Their clothes and equipment are passable Gayford says, but nothing to compare with those of other countries.

Gayford says the concept of amateur athletics has to be overhauled and until it is straightened out Canada can't compete. An amateur is someone who works and competes on the side. Canadians certainly fit this definition, but they're coming up against competitors who are full-time athletes. The Italian and Mexican equestrian teams are military and are in effect professionals.

There are other difficulties. Our competitors just aren't exposed to the pressures of Olympic-level competition before they get there, and accordingly face the possibility of getting completely psyched out and thus not giving best performances. The only competitions of this calibre the equestrian team participates in are those in Harrisburg, New York and Toronto. Our only competition is the American team who have the budget to travel to Europe for the bigger, more important shows, thus gaining experience for the Olympics. We do not.

Facilities for competitors in all sports in Canada need to be improved. Right now they just aren't geared for higher competition. Winnipeg has full facilities but Mexico City built 4 or 5 sports arenas and competitors can train indoors or out all year.

What is the reaction of Canadian competitors to the kind of support they see other athletes getting? Gayford says they are envious of the facilities but can appreciate the Olympic Committee's lack of resources. Gayford doubts the '76 Olympics will be held in Canada. All the people organizing our effort are amateurs and so can only give so much time. They too have family and business concerns.

There were 12 equestrian representatives at the Games, four members of the jumping team, four for the three day endurance

event, three for dressage, and one manager. The air fare to Mexico, and the board for the competitors in the Olympic Village, was obtained through sponsors, though there were a few tense moments when the team wasn't even sure of getting a plane due to government red tape. The extent of government and Olympic Committee aid is extremely limited. The Committee is gradually improving. The Task Force has been a help and is tapping resources but money is still hard to raise. It stems a lot from the fact that Canadians just aren't as sports-minded as some others.

The Canadian gold medal was a well deserved triumph. It takes a lot of time, training, and skill to bring a horse and rider to their peak for the Olympic events. Special qualities of competitiveness, courage, obedience, calmness and physical soundness are mandatory for the horses, and riders must have steady nerves and must be able to work under the pressure of competition as 100,000 people look on.

The horses must pass a veterinary inspection before the cross country and jumping events. After the summer and fall competitions the horses are turned out for a rest before they resume training in mid-March.

Horses such as the ones the Olympic team uses cost a lot of money. To insure them is moderately expensive Gayford says, but difficulties arise because only if the horse dies can insurance be collected. The coverage does not include a horse that recovers but can no longer compete.

Gayford would like to see three categories of competitors — amateurs that compete for fun, competitors subsidized in some way and those making their complete livelihood by it. Three-quarters of the competitors can't be classed as amateurs the way things stand now.

Gayford is in favour of sponsorship. Rothman's put up prize money and help with shows and Canadian Breweries has assisted financially. Sponsoring teams and competitors is a big thing. Young athletes coming up are working for the future Gayford says, and the people making decisions are set up and so forget the problems involved. You can't afford to be an amateur today he says. It's too expensive and the days of rich people competing are gone. So it's an uphill battle to make it in top Canadian sport.

To qualify for the Olympic jumping team the competitors attended five shows — four in Canada and one in Cleveland. The riders with the most number of points go to the Olympics. From

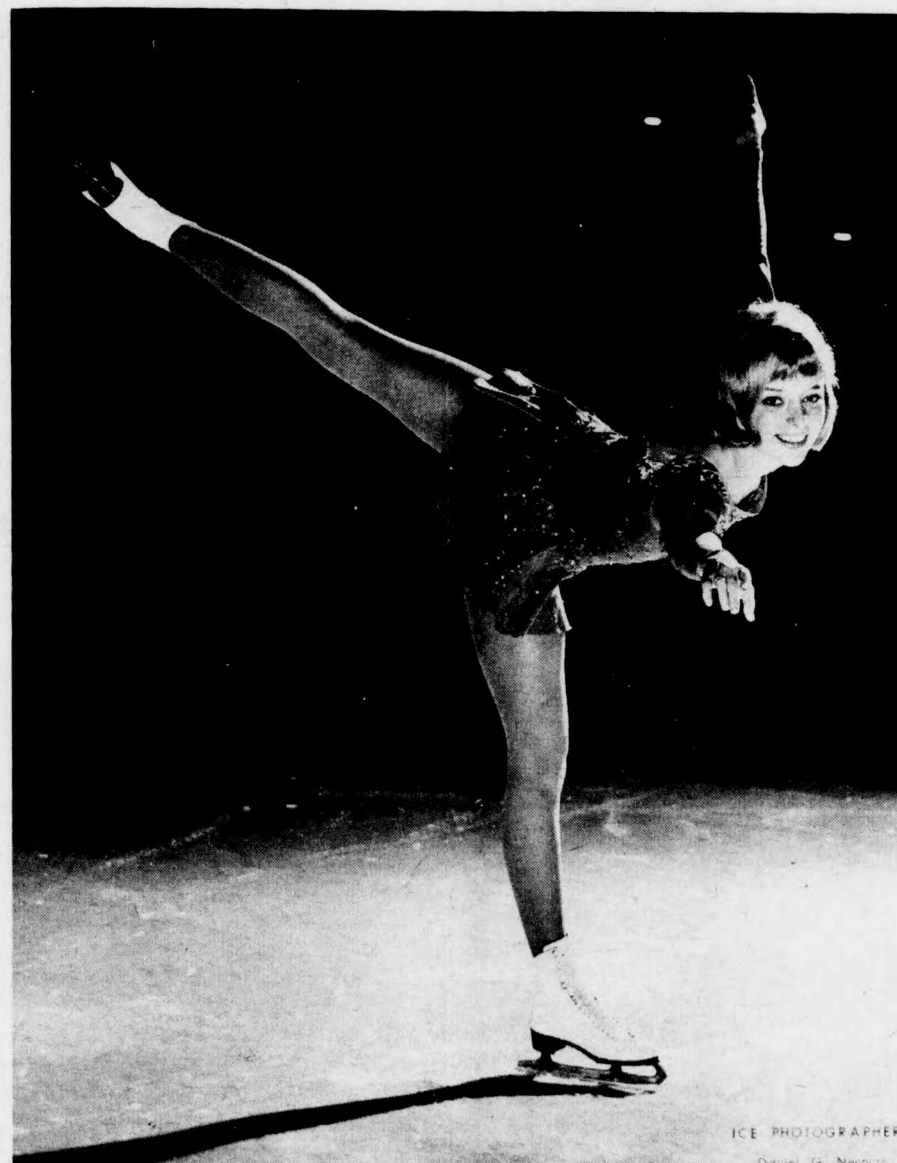
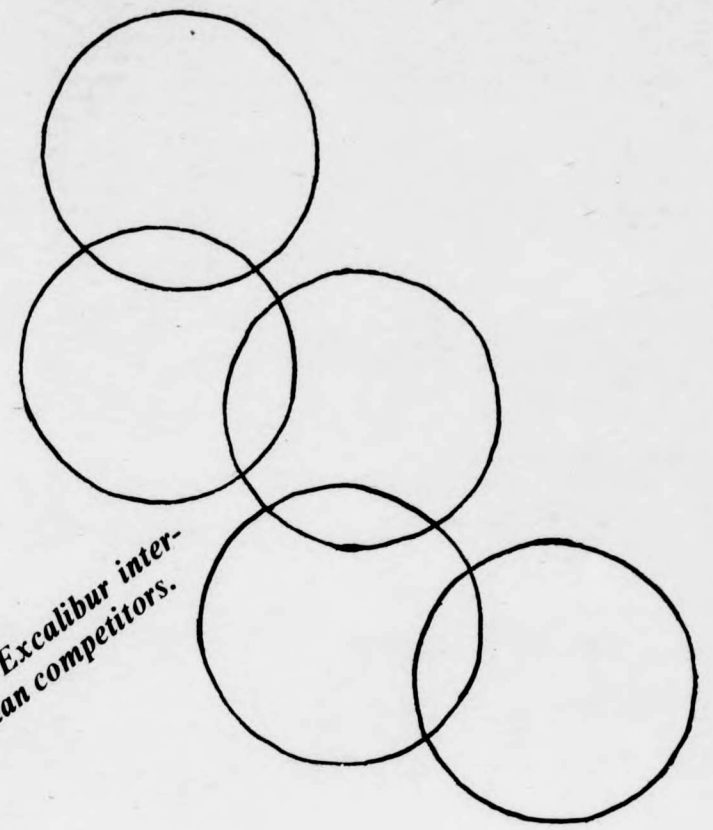
mid-August organized training sessions are set up according to Olympic standards. Many training shows are held as well.

Gayford contends that to compete successfully in the equestrian sport doesn't take much more money than figure skating. Both being expensive fields of sport though, it seems logical that those who continue in them will have to be in a position to withstand the division of their resources without requiring much outside aid.

Until the Olympic Committee gets more financial aid or the government makes some contribution to the national teams Canadian gold medals will still be something of a rarity.

OLYMPICS

Support for our Olympic teams has always been a problem. Excalibur interviewed two former winners to discover the plight of the Canadian competitors.



Debbie Wilkes -- York's silver medalist

by Andrea Young

Debbie Wilkes, a fourth year honours psych student here, is also the 1964 silver medal winner in Olympic pairs figure skating.

She began skating at the age of six, and is now retired, because "Amateur figureskating is a short-lived career, and if you have the talent, you should make it to the top as soon as possible."

How did Debbie go about doing this? Every year until her retirement, she and her partner, Guy Revell, trained for ten months of the year. They took June and July off. In 1959 they were Canadian Junior Champions. In 1964 they won a silver medal at Innsbruck, Austria, and a second place at the World's Competition a month later.

How does Debbie feel about Canada's chances for producing more Olympic winners? She says, "Canada has teachers of the quality and competence to produce good international competitors — But becoming a champion takes more than training." She feels that children should begin training younger, but now "there are too many talented children held back

by lack of money and sponsorship". Also, with club sizes increasing, it is becoming more difficult to get instruction and ice time for achieving a competitive level of skill.

Is there much financial support available for such skill? During Debbie's training, weekly expenses ran up to and over \$120.00, discounting travelling expenses, as well as living expenses away from home. Canada paid only transportation expenses to and from Innsbruck, and living expenses while there. It paid nothing else, not even for other national or international competitions.

In contrast, Russia and some other European countries practically pay their skaters, by taking charge of living and training expenses during time spent preparing for competition. The bursary fund of the CFSA is relatively small, in contrast to expenses incurred, and sponsorship is available only to the very top few.

Debbie was asked if the attitude to competition has changed since she retired? "I am somewhat detached from it now, but it seems to be more calculating with more

pressure to be first and be the champion. For me it was more a question of doing the best I could whether it was first or fifth. The skating centres in Canada seemed to be Toronto and Vancouver with almost half the number of clubs in Toronto alone. As a result this is where the best pros are. However, a professional rating scale has been established for rating trainees according to their ability. Still, if a skater is interested and good enough, he will go to one or another of the major areas."

When asked how she feels Canada stands up against other countries in regards to national support for the team, Debbie responded, "In Germany and Russia, athletic champions are regarded almost as national heroes. There are national days for them and the sports stadiums are filled with enthusiastic supporters. In North America the "average guy" is proud of his athletic champions but there is not the same country-wide fervour. This is the result of several factors — the size of the country, the communications breakdown, insufficient coverage of events.

Apathy is our way of life. North America seems to have so many other things to be interested in. Athletes here have to be satisfied with praise and admiration of their fellow athletes. You cannot force the public or you lose something of our freedom. There is definitely a problem but I can see no solution."

Should Canada revise its stand on what it defines as standards? "Yes. In skating there should be some kind of semi-professional condition that would allow opportunities to skate in as many situations as possible. This would have made a difference to my skating. Canada does not do enough for its amateurs. It should get out of international competition until either we change our stand and pack it up or they change theirs."

At a time when the pressures to perform in a professional manner and still remain an amateur are becoming increasingly great, the Canadian people must consider whether the support of the Canadian government is sufficient to merit Canadian amateurs continuing to compete in international competitions.