

## Games opening outstanding but athletes steal the show

Pageantry, pipers, majesty, thrilling aerobatics by Canadian Forces Snowbirds jet planes and dancing by hundreds of youngsters and ethnic groups, all marked the two-and-a-half-hour opening ceremonies of the XI Commonwealth Games in Edmonton, Alberta on August 3. Yet all paled in the wave of excitement that swept over the packed stadium when the athletes marched in. And that was only fitting: the athletes are what the Games are all about. No matter how elaborate the preceding displays, nor how impressive the pomp and splendour, the greatest moment came when the sports people made their entrance, each nation's team proudly following its flag-bearer.

In they strode – almost 2,000 of them including officials – led by New Zealand, the last host country, saluting the Queen



*The Canadian contingent acknowledges welcome of the crowd at opening of the Games.*

as they passed, then lining up, one after another alphabetically, in centre field. Among the most striking were the long printed gowns of Ghana, the orange turbans of India and the ceremonial dress of two men from Swaziland, nude to the waist, who carried a shield and spears.

Well over 42,000 spectators watched the colour-splashed scene, with Queen Elizabeth, Prince Philip, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, Sir Alexander Ross, Games Federation Chairman, and other dignitaries. Under a brilliant blue sky, Australians in yellow and blue, Bahamians in powder blue and white, English in brown and tan, Malaysians in white and black and Scots in highland tartans all contributed to the kaleidoscope.

As hosts, Canadians entered last, greeted by a thunderous roar from the crowd. Canada's largest ever Commonwealth Games contingent – 259 strong – swung by in their red and white garb, topped with cowboy hats, and led by champion weightlifter Russ Prior, the flag-bearer, who is a veteran of two previous Commonwealth Games and the Montreal Olympics. The swell of national pride in spectators and athletes alike was electrifying.

### Baton/Olympic torch similarity

With all teams lined up, the ceremonial baton, which had come over 8,000 kilo-

metres through 287 hands, was carried into the stadium by Canadian pentathlon champion Diane Jones-Konihowski. She ran with it on the last leg of its long journey from London, to where the Queen was waiting in the royal box.

The Narwhal tusk baton, sculpted by an Eskimo, had been run by relay team from London to Heathrow Airport and flown to Canada. After being taken to Ottawa, it was seen in Hamilton, Ontario and in Vancouver, sites of two previous Commonwealth Games, and then it was flown to Calgary. Another team had carried it the last 250 kilometres to Edmonton, where the name of the final runner had been kept secret until she entered the stadium.

On receiving the baton, Queen Elizabeth took from it the message to the athletes. It was the first time a reigning monarch had opened the Commonwealth Games, she said. Traditionally, Prince Philip opened the Games and she had officially closed them. This time their roles were reversed.

### The spirit's the thing

"As Queen of Canada I warmly welcome you and I know that all Canadians join me in wishing you good fortune during your visit," said Queen Elizabeth. "As head of the Commonwealth, I regard today as a highlight of our calendar. We



*Diane Jones-Konihowski, trots round the track carrying the baton, during opening ceremonies. She won a gold medal for Canada a few days later in the Games.*

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