

Canada now a training ground for champions

Canada's Ben Johnson is the fastest man in the world. In September 1987 he won the 100 metres in Rome with a time of 9.83 seconds.

But Johnson is not the only Canadian sportsman to come to prominence in recent years. There are swimmers Alex Baumann and Victor Davis, high jumper Milt Ottey, skiers Steve Podborski and Nancy Green, and figure skater Brian Orser, to mention but a few. Furthermore, at the 1988 Olympics the country looks set to exceed its performance in Los Angeles, when Canadians had top-six placings in 26 of the 31 sports.

This is a far cry from Canada's poor showing in the 1960 Olympics, when it took home only one medal. Since then, Canadian sporting performance has improved beyond recognition.

But this has not happened purely by chance. It is due in no small measure to federal government support for high performance training centres which bring together top-quality facilities, coaches and support services.

Sport Canada and the promotion of excellence

Government encouragement began in 1961 with the establishment of a Fitness and Amateur Sport Directorate. In 1969, the *Task Force Report on Sport for Canadians* recommended more government assistance for both sport and physical recreation in Canada. This led to the formation of Fitness Canada, which encourages Canadians to be more sports-minded, and Sport Canada, which is responsible for improving competitive ability at the national and international levels.

Sport Canada has a brief to co-ordinate, promote and develop high performance sport in Canada in conjunction with national sport organisations, and to assist in the development of domestic sport in those areas requiring co-ordination at national level. It also provides technical leadership, policy direction and consultative services to assist national sport organisations in the pursuit of excellence, in addition to developing federal government sport policies.

Canada has become much more sports conscious

in recent years, and part of the impetus has come from the hosting of international sports events, beginning in 1976 with the Summer Olympics. These were followed by the Commonwealth Games in 1978, the World University Games in 1983 and now, in 1988, the Winter Olympics in Calgary and we hope the 1994 Commonwealth Games.

High performance training centres are key to success Canada produces its own coaches, such as Al Taylor, coach to the national volleyball team, Andrzej Kulesza, who has achieved considerable success with Canada's weightlifters, and Reszo Gallov, who is developing the performance of the national water polo team. But a crucial factor in Canada's sporting renaissance is the network of specialist sports centres.

The start-up funds for an approved centre are provided by the federal government, which monitors the facilities on a regular basis to ensure they are making a clear contribution to the development of high performance athletes. Many centres also have a regional development component which attracts aid from provincial governments.

A national sports organisation is involved in the centre's programme administration and operation, while the sport organisations at provincial level actually manage the centre and provide coaches as well as scientific and administrative support.

Each sport decides whether to centralise its activities or develop regional centres of excellence.

The first full-time centre to be established was for the national men's volleyball team in 1971 on the campus of the University of Calgary. Its annual operating costs are around £50 000 with Sport Canada providing 60% of the funding. It has a full-time coach, an assistant coach, a full-time co-ordinator and athletic therapist. During the summer, it accommodates up to 34 athletes, and about half that number in the winter.

Since the establishment of the centre, Canada's national volleyball team has chalked up some notable successes. Canada won a silver medal in the World University Games and finished fourth in the

1. The Olympic Torch being carried by one of the 6214 torch bearers on its 11250 mile journey around Canada which will end in Calgary, Alberta. In remote areas the torch is being transported using airplanes, boats, snowmobiles, cross-country skis, snowshoes and dog sleds.



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