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**Olympians**

# Waterpolo netminder is saving it for Seoul

By JAMES HOGGETT

**R**ub-a-dub-dub three men in a tub, a butcher, a baker and candlestick maker.

While no one on the Canadian National water polo team is either a butcher or a candlestick maker, they do have a baker on the team.

When Yeoman assistant-coach Brian Robertson, the goal tender for the Canadian water polo team is not in the pool training, he is working full-time as an apprentice baker at *Dr. Cheese and the Cake Lady* (located near Harbord and Spadina).

How and why did Robertson end up as a baker? "I took a trade course at George Brown College, because baking interested me immensely as my grandfather was also a baker in Austria," explained Robertson. "The placement for this particular course was incredibly high, around 90%. I chose to be placed here as it is very close to where I train at the University of Toronto."



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**Coach and athlete: National coach George Gross Jr. feels that Robertson's performance in goal is key**

Robertson grew up in North York and attended high school at Newtonbrook Secondary School. "When I was growing up, playing water polo was the furthest thing from my mind," Robertson explained. "Soccer was my end-all. I was on my way to becoming a member of the national team but

because of an injury my career was cut short."

Robertson's doctor advised him to start swimming for therapeutic reasons. "One thing led to another," Robertson explained, "and I ended up on the swim team and in high school if you were on the swim team, you naturally progressed to the water polo team."

Following high school, Robertson came to York and played two years with the Yeomen. He started his major at York in Biology. However, after a year he switched his major to Physical Education. After taking physiotherapy for a year he was chosen for the national water polo team, which resulted in a move to Ottawa where he continued his education.

As the assistant coach of the Yeomen, Robertson help out head-coach Kevin Jones to prepare the Yeomen for OUA competition. Jones left on a sabbatical back in 1985 and asked for Robertson to coach the team for a year. Jones returned the following year and Robertson has remained assistant coach ever since.

"I owe Kevin (Jones) an awful lot for giving me the opportunity to coach the Yeomen," Robertson explains, "he allowed me to look at the team from a different perspective other than the one I had in net. Coaching gave me a chance to tear apart the offence and shape my views toward the players. I could offer the players my view of where to shoot from a goalie's vantage point and it also gave me a chance to look at myself in net. So in two ways I've developed as a player and a coach; both thanks to Kevin."

As a member of the national water polo team, Robertson is subject to a very grueling and intense training schedule. The team usually trains twice a day, once in the morning and once at night. But, because Robertson works in the day he does not attend morning practice. "For now it's OK by me," Robertson explains, "because I've been training for three years so I feel I don't have to train in the mornings. It's more of a mental preparation now."

That leaves Robertson training with the team on Monday evenings, Tuesday is a day off, then he practices Wednesday, Thursday and Friday night.



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**Baker's Dozen . . . and then some: Brian Robertson, a goaltender for the national water polo team, is also an apprentice baker at Dr. Cheese and Cake Lady. As a member of the national team, Robertson is subjected to a very grueling and intense training schedule. He is also an assistant coach for the water polo Yeomen.**

Saturday the team either has one or two workouts and Sunday is another day off. Along with his team training schedule Robertson is also involved in a weight programme three days a week.

Spare time is pretty rare for Robertson. The team's club season runs from September till April. During the summer months the team tours Europe, leaving Robertson very little time for himself. "When I do have time off," says Robertson, "I try to take advantage of it and go fishing or camping. Anything to get away and release some of my tension."

Since first joining the national team in 1984, Robertson has competed in a number of international competitions. First there was the Student Games in Japan in 1985, then in '86, the World Championships in Madrid and then the '87 Student Games in Yugoslavia, plus a number of other smaller competitions around Europe.

"I love competing internationally," says Robertson enthusiastically, "I can't get enough of it."

In water polo Canada is currently ranked 13th in the world. "So for us to play teams that are ranked first to eighth in the world means we have nothing to lose and everything to gain," explains Robertson. "And that gives us a chance to perform what plays we need or want to experiment with."

"I'm always competing with myself and the other goalie," says Robertson. "When I play a game, I play to beat the other goalie."

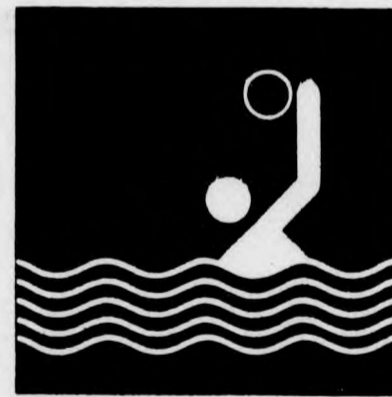
Recently, the team started filming their games. "What I've been doing," says Robertson, "is making copies of game films for myself. So when a competition does come up, I can look at that team and look at their key shooters and that way we can set our defence to cater to those specific shooters," he explains.

Brian is one of the most outstanding goalies in the world today," boasts George Gross Jr., head coach of Canada's national team. "He is an extremely hard worker, and physically he has outstanding tools; he's tall, has long arms and legs, and has good reach and reflexes. There is no question he is our starting goalie. When he's hot, nobody is better."

"If I do have a poor game, which isn't too often," explains Robertson, "I take it upon myself to at least tell the coach that I'm not feeling good in warm-up. I have to start relaying my feelings to the coach about how I feel. I can't be brave at any point in time because we're talking Olympic qualifications here."

"The team's performance depends greatly on how well Brian plays," says Rezo Gallo, former coach of the national team last October. "The team never performs well unless Brian is playing in excellent form."

If there is one fault Robertson has it's that he's too hard on himself. "They say not to worry about it, but I con-



sider myself to be directly responsible for a game loss, be it a crossable pass, which is basically impossible to block, or not. I feel there's always a way to block a shot. I don't care what kind of a shooter a team has, there's always a way to block a shot."

Robertson, who is 26-years old, is expected to remain playing goal for Canada up until 1992. The average age of an athlete in water polo is a lot higher than most people imagine. Swimmers are often finished their careers by the time they reach 19 or 20. "You don't see too many swimmers being world class that are over 20," says Robertson.

"For water polo, it seems to take that much longer to develop the all-around motor skill and then there's the strategy of the game. So a lot of teams are adopting older players to do the strategy, and the younger players for the endurance."

Canada, however, still must qualify in order to go to Seoul. The team will travel to Australia in May to compete

in a qualifying tournament. Canada has to finish fifth in a field of 13 in order to earn a berth in the Olympics. "We just received our draw for that tournament and I don't think we could have asked for a better draw," Robertson explains.

Canada will be competing against Greece and Japan. Both of which Canada has beaten in the past. "If we beat France and Japan, we will then play a cross-over in the other category and that will either be against China or France," says Robertson. "We've beaten France before but have never competed against China at a national level, only at the Student Games. So our chances of qualifying are very good."

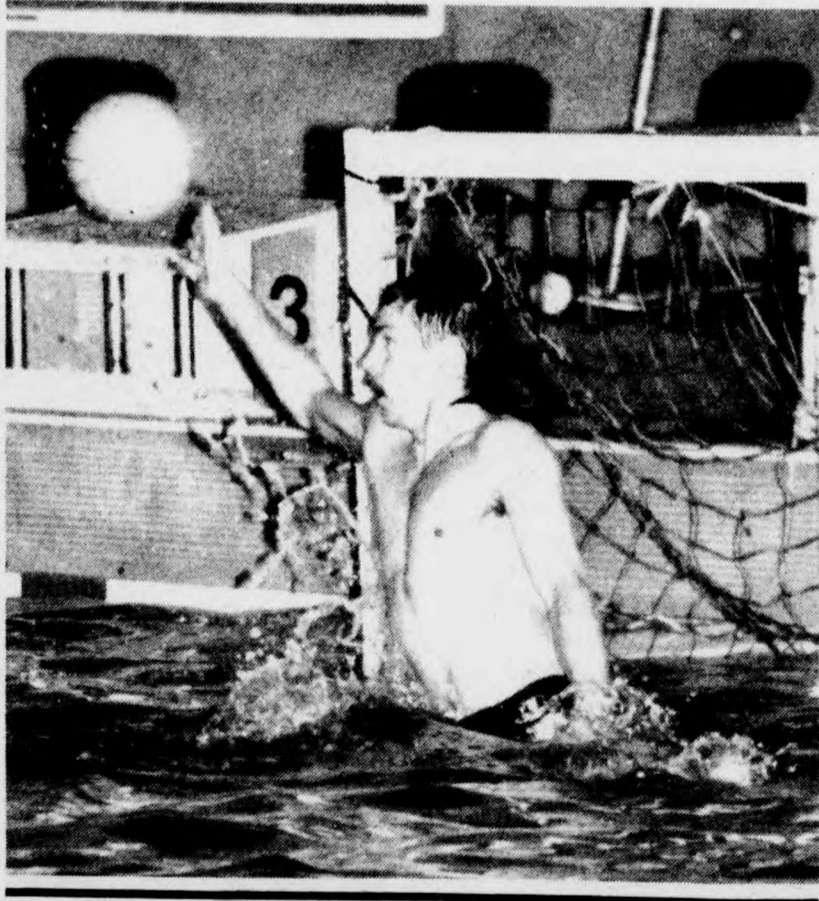
Robertson and his teammates hope to finish no less than sixth at the Olympics. "It's kind of difficult to foresee because of the new style we have and because we brought back a lot of the older players," says Robertson. "We've never really had a chance to see how the team performs as a whole internationally."

Currently the team is in Hungary for a tournament which will be the first time they've had an opportunity to see how this new formation works.

Although concerned about the current political situation in Seoul, Robertson knows he can't let it bother him too much. "It's always in the back of my mind when I read the papers," Robertson comments. "You see these student demonstrations and smoke bomb attacks and the warfare tactics against people."

"I can remember last year reading about a bombing by guerillas, telling how they don't want athletes to go to Seoul. But you have to put that behind you because you can't have that nervous thought in your mind when your competing, because that would take away from your concentration."

And what does the future hold in store? Robertson hopes to take some time off after the Seoul Olympics and open his own bakery. "I need time for parts of me to heal, both mentally and physically. I also intend on finishing my apprenticeship here at *Dr. Cheese*. And soon in time I intend on getting enough capital to open up my own small bake shop; possibly in Hamilton."



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**Making The Save: Robertson, one of the most outstanding goalies in the world, is confident that Canada will qualify for the Seoul Games. Robertson and his teammates hope to finish no less than sixth at the Games.**