

Forging Commonwealth Unity through Sport

For nearly 60 years, sport has enriched and enlivened the countries that form the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Games are, in effect, one of the most important and most visible manifestations of this most important institution. For 10 days every four years, when the Games unfold, the Commonwealth takes on special meaning for millions of people in every corner of the globe.

Unfortunately, the institution itself has fallen under heavy financial and political pressures to the point where the survival and prosperity of the Games are in doubt.

In recent times, concern that the Commonwealth Games are in jeopardy has heightened. So last year, Canada prepared a series of proposals to strengthen the Commonwealth Games and increase sporting contacts between member states. The Canadian proposal suggested that the problems affecting the Games — including those with a political dimension — be addressed immediately. It stated that action must also be taken to assist developing countries in raising their sport performance levels and in coming forward with bids to host the Games.

Critical Juncture

To many observers, the Commonwealth Games appear to be at a critical juncture. Sport is one of the few areas of Commonwealth co-operation that receives no Commonwealth funding. In addition, no programs are in place to ensure that the bonds of friendship and co-operation which are forged during the

Games endure beyond the closing ceremonies. The Games and their organizers are faced with unprecedented political and financial difficulties. Some countries feel integrated into the Games while others feel increasingly apart. Clearly, not all member countries benefit from the Games: only a few have the resources to host the event and many find it difficult to even cover transportation costs, not to mention the costs of developing and equipping a Commonwealth Games team. Political issues — such as sporting contacts with South Africa — have also had an adverse effect on the Games, leading some countries to decide against participating. Put bluntly, the Commonwealth Games are in danger of losing their status as an important international sporting event.

Although the Commonwealth has changed dramatically over the years, the structure,

location and management of the Commonwealth Games have remained biased towards the early Commonwealth members. With one exception, the Commonwealth Games have always been held in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. The main reason for this has been the cost of hosting. But developing countries also find it difficult, if not impossible, to match the developed Commonwealth in the training and equipping of athletes and officials. In short, the playing field is not level and this is reflected in the location of the Games, the nature of the competition and even in the medal standings. It is primarily this imbalance — the feeling among many developing countries that they are not full and equal partners in the Games — that prompted Canada to make its proposals.

The Canadian Connection

Canada has a special connection with the Commonwealth Games. In fact, the first Games ever were held in Canada — in Hamilton, Ontario — in 1930. And it was a Canadian, Bobby Robinson, who brought them into being. Almost half a century later, in 1978, Canada welcomed a greatly changed and more mature Commonwealth to Games held in Edmonton, Alberta. And in 1994, Canada will proudly host the Games once again, this time in the west coast city of Victoria.

The ideal of bringing people together across vast distances, which is embodied in the Games, is one that Canadians cherish. Canada recognizes the importance of sport as part of the growth and enrichment of the Commonwealth. It also understands sport's value in nation building, human resource development and in enhancing international co-operation.

From London to Kuala Lumpur

In September 1989, Canada convened a meeting in London of representatives of about 30 Commonwealth countries, the Commonwealth Games Federation and the Commonwealth Secretariat



Athlete Information Bureau

Canadian heptathlete Linda Spensat long jumping at the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, Scotland.