

# Funding help is debatable

by Carol Phillips  
The Charlater

Canada has never been a winter Olympic power, and amateur sport officials warn five years of extended funding won't produce Olympic champions from almost nothing.

Those words can't be too heartening for a federal government that has just invested \$25 million over the last five years to boost Canada's image to the sporting public.

For the government's Best Ever '88 amateur sport funding program, "best ever" can range from a bucket of medals for the ripened figure skating team to the small victory of even fielding a team in the nordic combined (alpine skiing and jumping) competition.

The program, begun in 1982, was designed to help Canada field high-quality teams for the 1988 Olympics. But many sports organizers fear the public has expected too much of them, and their teams will lose the money if they don't produce medals over the next two weeks.

In the Ministry of Fitness and Amateur Sport's media guide for this five-year program, figure skating fills a substantial two glossy pages with 22 top-8 Olympic finishes to date. Compare that to some other winter sports — biathlon, luge, nordic combined and ski jumping — which can only offer a few short sentences on how the program has helped them, among other things, hire a full-time staff for a new national office in Ottawa.

Against these modest gains, are the high expectations of the ever-demanding public. And thanks to the media hype, those expectations tend to grow as the Olympics draw near. But expectations are seldom based on reality.



Figure skating is one of Canada's heavily funded winter sports.

The realities of Canadian Winter Olympic prowess have prompted the minister, Otto Jelinek (himself mentioned as a fourth-place finisher along with sister Maria in pairs ice skating), to write to all the national sport organizations assuring them regardless of the final medal count.

Lane MacAdam, executive assistant to the minister, says he won't

guess how much the federal cabinet will finally give the ministry after the Olympics, but he doesn't "expect it to be lower than what it now receives."

According to Pat Reid, manager of Best Ever's winter program, "there's no question we need this type of money to maintain these systems (of training and organization for each sport)." In fact, says Reid, it will take more money.

The development of "these systems" is what Reid has had to help

co-ordinate since 1982 when the minister first proposed the program. In some cases, the program had to be built from the bottom up. Nordic combined and the biathlon didn't even have a national office. The national ski jumping office was in Thunder Bay along with Canada's only ski jumps and, despite winning a bobsleigh gold medal in 1964, Canada has no bobsleigh or luge track.

To date, Canada's best overall Olympic finish is 11th in both the 1976 and 1984 winter games. In ten official winter games, Canada has won 13 gold medals.

The Soviet Union won 25 gold medals alone in 1984.

"I wouldn't say we were bad off," says Reid. "I'd say we were underdeveloped."

The Best Ever program has doubled government funding for amateur sport since that time, taking it from \$4 million a year in 1982 to \$8 million in 1988.

The objective of the program back in 1982 was to develop Canada's "best ever" winter Olympic team when the games came to Calgary. A similar "Game Plan 76" had been implemented for the Montreal Olympics of 1976 with little success. But Reid, who was with Sport Canada back then, says the money came too late for the teams to do anything.

"This time round, we've made sure that we got the money out on time for the sports to prepare," says Reid.

The money has been directed to three areas, according to Reid. Developing high performance athletes was the primary concern. Since 1983, the number of carded winter athletes (elites receiving financial assistance) has risen from 73 to 156.

In sports with well-developed programs, such as figure skating and alpine skiing, most of the extra money went to their elites.

"What really has happened is we've put in additional training and ice time necessary for our elites to get more practice," says Karen

Mackarous, the Canadian Figure Skating Association's national team co-ordinator. She estimates the CISA, which boasts four top-5 rankings in international competition, receives about \$300,000 directly from the program.

The second and third areas targeted for Best Ever money are in the development of national sports training and management programs.

Before the funding, the nordic combined program didn't even have a provincial association, according to Reid.

**"For any sport, turning three medals out shouldn't be the standards for the future." — Robert Belanger.**

The problem was a lack of human resources. There were very, very few volunteer coaches and no professional coaches. With only one or two clubs in the whole country, they didn't have the raw materials to even develop a system.

Jon Servold is the one-man team who Reid says was "hot-housed" (trained at an accelerated rate) and nearly finished in the top-30. Servold was sent to Norway to receive most of his instruction.

A victory for the nordic combined program is that they now boast a 400 per cent increase in national participation.

On the other end of the scale sits the national speed skating team.

Coming off their most successful Olympic results to date, thanks to Gaetan Bouchier's two gold, one-bronze medal splurge in 1984, the speed-skaters didn't expect to give Canada its "best ever" medal count. But the director general, Robert

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