

the
Olympians

Cinderella team shoots for Olympic medal

By JAMES HOGGETT

"We have a toe-hold and we have to keep climbing and striving. This whole notion of pursuing excellence is something that trips off the lips as it were, and yet it does not reflect the tremendous effort that has to be put in. Therefore, we are going into the Olympics as one of the underdogs."

Marina Van der Merve—coach of the Women's national field hockey team.

York University's Athletic department has produced many fine athletes throughout the University's 27-year history, and in the process has also attracted many world class coaches.

A perfect example of this is the Yeomen field hockey squad. The team sports three athletes (Sandra Levy, Sharon Creelman and Sharon Bayes) and two coaches, (Marina Van der Merve and Kathy Broderick), who will be travelling to Seoul this summer to represent Canada at the '88 Olympics.

Marina Van der Merve has been



coaching at York since 1970. Prior to coming to York, Van der Merve coached for nine years at the University of Toronto, and has been coaching the national team since 1976.

Born and raised in South Africa, Van der Merve attended school in Europe and England, where she obtained a Bachelor of Science degree, a Master of Arts, and a PhD in Health Sciences. Van der Merve then immigrated to Canada in 1961.

Van der Merve became very involved with field hockey at UoT, when it was first introduced to keep girls from playing touch football. From

there she got involved in the provincial programme, coaching the Ontario team. In 1976, Sport Canada adopted women's field hockey as an Olympic sport and Van der Merve was invited to apply for the position of coach of the National team. Since then she has remained coach of the national team.

"I think it is critical to be aware that this sport is housed very much in the university system," said Van der Merve. "Our athletes are drawn from the university system and it is probably the only sport where this does occur. I'm particularly proud of this and our excellent programme, and I am proud to be at York where I have received a lot of support."

Kathy Broderick has assisted Van der Merve on the national team since 1979. Following the World Championships in Vancouver in 1979, Broderick accompanied Van der Merve back to York where she has been assistant coach since 1980.

Broderick, a native of Winnipeg, also holds a degree in Physical Education from the University of Manitoba and a Masters degree from the University of Alberta. "I've been involved with field hockey for 20 years," says Broderick, "it's been a big part of my life."

Currently the 25-member national team is in Sydney Australia, finishing up a four-and-a-half week training camp in order to get themselves ready for a pre-Olympic simulation tournament in which only 16 players will be selected to participate. These 16 athletes will also be the ones who will be travelling to Seoul. Although the tournament is not until May, the trip "down under" is seen as a very important exercise since it will allow the team to size up the competition they'll be facing at the Olympics.

What are Sandra Levy, Sharon Bayes and Sharon Creelman's chances of making the final 16 cut? "Both Creelman and Bayes are considered veterans," Van der Merve explained. "They've been on the international circuit for quite a long time, so they know what the problems are. They know



Guarding the Goal: Sharon Bayes, another veteran on the national squad, has been playing on the senior team since the last Olympics in '84. The third-year Physical Education major is also a fourth-year veteran goalie for the Yeowomen. Bayes has enjoyed working with coaches Kathy Broderick and Marina Van der Merve.

how they have to address their training, their studies and their general lifestyle. I would have to say, they are very well prepared."

"Sandra Levy on the other hand is fairly new to playing at this level," says Van der Merve. "However I'm very optimistic for her, because she has tremendous speed, desire and is very dedicated; all of which are characteristics that we really look for in an athlete."

Levy, a native of Scarborough, attended school at L'Amoreaux Collegiate Institute; a high school with a strong field hockey programme. The third-year Mass Communications and English major is in her fourth year with the Yeowomen.

This will be Levy's first Olympics. "The Olympics are something that I've always been dreaming and hoping for ever since I watched the 1976 Olympics on television," explained Levy. "It's one of the greatest feelings, representing our country."

"This past summer the team competed in the Pan-Am Games. That was a big thrill for me, just the opening ceremonies alone," she said. "I'm really looking forward to going to Seoul, being in the Olympics will be a life-long dream come true."

A typical day for Levy starts off with a 7:00 am practice, which lasts around two hours. "On a running day, we will run following practice," explained Levy, "then I'll have lunch and come back for another two-hour practice. After dinner sometimes we have a game in the evening. Basically, when we're training at home we practice four times a week. When we're on the road though, we practice approximately five to six days a week."

Unlike Levy, Sharon Creelman has been at the Olympics before. As a seasoned eight-year veteran of the international circuit, the training

get more out of me than any other coach could. She does a fantastic job."

"Mind you, I mainly deal with Kathy. I think between the two of them there is a happy medium as Marina can be awfully serious at times and Kathy breaks it up by adding a little humour."

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Canada is currently ranked sixth in the world, going into the Seoul Olympics. Women's field hockey became an Olympic event for the first time in 1980. However, because of the Canadian boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, the team's first performance was at the '84 Olympics in Los Angeles, in which Canada tied for a bronze medal.

ada will do) said Creelman, "I think you have to wait and see what the other teams are going to be like at this pre-Olympic tournament coming up. We haven't seen some of these teams for up to a year now and everyone has made some improvements."

"Being ranked sixth, I think hurts a little," Creelman said, "because I don't think we finished in the bottom three in the last four years."

"I think there's a bit of politics involved here," said Bayes, "as there is in everything. It's not something I really concern myself with. I know what our potential is and I think we can place in the top three."

With all the student riots, demonstrations, and the threat by North Korea to try and disrupt the Olympics, one has to wonder how much of a factor this plays in an athletes' preparation for the Games?

"You can't let it bother you," said Bayes, "if you do, it could affect your play. I think when anybody holds an international sporting event, that country does its best to provide security for you. All an athlete should be concerned with is competing. It is the host country's job to provide an environment in which all athletes can compete to their potential, and that's what I think South Korea will do."

Bayes' teammate, Creelman, agreed. "We have to be concerned about playing and hope that everything will be taken care of," she said. "I think when you hear stuff like that on the news, you don't even think of yourself as being a part of that because your sitting in your comfortable house. I don't believe that any type of Olympics would be run if there was any threat of danger to the athletes."

Coach Van der Merve sums up Canada's chances at Seoul like this: "Life at the top is pretty hectic. When you look at our stats, we truly are the Cinderella team."

Since 1985 Canada has met competitors at the Olympic level a total of 17 times and has earned a record of 2-12-3.

"Now that is not an incredible record so your next question is probably how did you get there and what keeps you there," Van der Merve said. "Obviously we've been winning the correct games and we are able to hold our own. All we can do is try our best and perform to our potential."



Off To Seoul: (left to right) Kathy Broderick, Sharon Creelman, Sharon Bayes, Sandra Levy, and Marina Van der Merve have just returned from Australia where they participated in four-and-a-half week training camp in order to prepare for a pre-Olympic simulation tournament in May.