

Curtain falls on 'best ever' Winter Olympics

Life is slowly getting back to normal in Alberta following the biggest, longest — and 'best ever' — Winter Olympics, during which host-city Calgary welcomed a record 1840 athletes from 57 countries.

This was the most important winter sports competition to be held in Canada, and Albertans were determined to make it a success. No effort or expense was spared to construct the very best facilities, such as the Olympic Saddledome, the Olympic Oval, the Nakiska Alpine Skiing Centre and Olympic Park. The latter includes a bobsleigh and luge track, whose innovative refrigeration-technology was tested to the utmost.

The organisers were also anxious that the games should be a friendly and enjoyable occasion right from the start. The opening ceremony included a parade of Indian horsemen, a dressage display by the Mounties, a four-horse open-wagon stampede, and a colourful dancing display.

Finally, the Olympic torch was carried into the stadium by past-Olympic-medal-winners Ken Read and Cathy Priestner. It was then handed to 12-year-old Olympic aspirant Robyn Perry, who ran up the steps to light the flame to the strains of the Olympic Anthem, and to signal the start of the competition.

Canadians win five medals

While the Soviet Union and East Germany finished ahead in the medals' table, there were impressive performances by participants from other countries, including Canada.

On the ski slopes, Canada's most successful performer was Karen Percy who won bronze medals in both the women's downhill and the women's super giant slalom; while on the skating

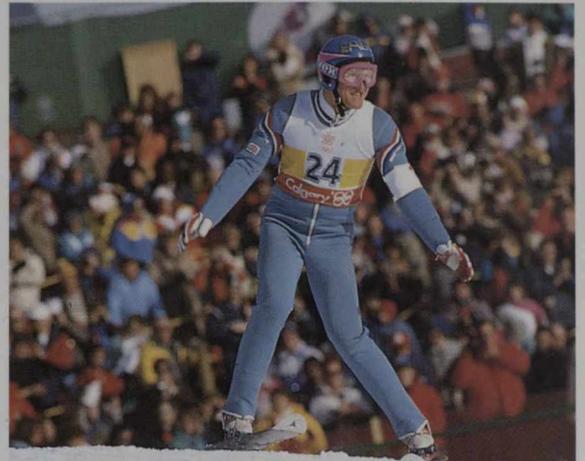


Photo: Allsport / David Yarrow

rink, Robert McCall and Tracy Wilson held on to their number three international ranking in the ice dance.

The men's figure skating proved to be a dual between the two Brians — Canada's Brian Orser and the US's Brian Boitano (whose coach, incidentally, is a Canadian). Last year, Orser took the American's world title, but in Calgary Boitano won gold, and Orser had to settle for silver.

The most memorable competition of the games is generally reckoned to have been the women's figure skating in which Canada's Elizabeth Manley and America's Debi Thomas were presented as strong challengers to world champion Katarina Witt from East Germany. Witt won the gold medal, but Elizabeth Manley from Canada took the silver with a dazzling free-style performance, for which she received a standing ovation.

In all, there were 8 new world records established during the games.

The legacy of the games

On the last evening of the games, the giant McMahon Stadium was converted into a huge ice rink for a skating extravaganza with 300 performers, including past-champions Robin Cousins from Britain and American Dorothy Hamill. Finally, as the show concluded, there was a dazzling burst of fireworks.

Canada's involvement with international sport, however, looks set to continue. Following the example of Montreal (Summer Olympics, 1976), the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton in 1978, and now Calgary, two other Canadian cities are keen to host major sporting events. Victoria, BC, is vying with Cardiff and New Delhi to stage the 1994 Commonwealth Games, while Toronto has put in a bid to host the Summer Olympics in 1996.

The games are over, but their legacy lives on. The province of Alberta has gained £200 million worth of world-class sports and recreational facilities, which will now be open to both amateur and professional alike. In addition, the Olympics have done much to enhance Canada's reputation for hosting international events.

In the words of International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch, they were, quite simply, 'the best Olympic Games ever'. 

Ski jumper Eddie 'Eagle' Edwards captured the spirit of the Games, and many admirers too!



Photo: Allsport / Dan Smith