

UNB Skiers Win Bronze at Winter Games

When the ski team from New Brunswick arrived in Saskatoon for the second Canada Winter Games they were not expected to tear up the field; however, they went away with three bronze medals and an excellent overall standing. They succeeded in proving that skiing in this province was not a second rate sport and certainly surprised all the other teams!

The races were held at Mt. Blackstrap a 300 foot high garbage dump built at the cost of \$400,000 by the city of Saskatoon primarily for the games. The hill is about 25

miles from the city. It was started on the bank of Blackstrap Lake (commonly called Lake Diefenbaker) and built up to a sharp peak. It looks strangely out of place in the prairie plains - similar to a miniature Matterhorn.

It was affectionably called Mt. Jockstrap by the skiers since its short length would not normally prove much of a challenge to them. However, in order to make it interesting the organizers had decided on a relatively new type of race - the dual slalom used only by Professional ski circuits in the

US.

Each team selected its 3 best skiers and they raced the 3 corresponding skiers from each of the other provinces in their group. The start consisted of a 2 locked gates which released both skiers at the same time.

An average course ran about 40 gates and took the top skiers about 35 seconds to run. Two identical slalom courses were placed parallel about 30 feet apart and skiers from opposing teams raced each day in a sort of Round Robin arrangement.

After the first win the 2 opposing skiers would switch courses and run again. Points were given each day for a win in each run plus the best aggregate for the 2 runs. Thus the maximum a 3 man team could win each day would be 9.

The team members did not post the best times through the week but with steady runs and fewer falls they held their own to the finish. Most of the other competitors from major ski provinces such as Ontario, Quebec, B.C. and Alberta thought the NB team wouldn't be able to ski down the hill much less make it through a slalom course. Even Nancy Greene-Raine, the CBC sportscaster for the week had us down as next to last (after PEI). However, after the first day the story changed. The men finished 4th place in the 2 run standard slalom and the women placed 5th. This first day of racing established the 2 brackets for the rest of the week - The first five teams in mens and womens formed the A group and the rest of the teams were in the B group. New Brunswick and Newfoundland were the big surprise in the men's A bracket. The Nfld. skiers were all from Labrador City, where

they held the Canadian Nationals last year and were coached by an ex-National ski team coach René Beauchamps from France. They had come up a long way in the standings as well. The NB women were somewhat outclassed in their group by Ontario, Quebec, B.C. and Alberta but skied well all week and closed the gap considerably by the final few days. However in the men's races Ontario and Alberta had failed to show well the first day and they were relegated to the B and this opened up the chances for the NB men.

The men's team was composed of 3 UNB ski team members - Bob Staniforth, Blair Vessie, and George Hamilton - another UNB skier Geordi Hodgson acted as a spare. On the first day the NB men upset the top seeded B.C. team and took 7 out of 9 points. However, the Nova Scotia race produced only 3 points for them as they lost some close runs by hundredths of seconds. On the Sunday it came down to the last race for the bronze and George Hamilton pulled through at the finish with an aggregate time win of six - one-hundredths of a second for a bronze.

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