Jeux de la Francophonie

Athlete Information Bureau

Casablanca may have been the start of a good, long friendship. For two weeks last July, the first Jeux de la Francophonie (Francophone Games) assembled 39 French-speaking countries, principalities and provinces in Morocco to compete in athletic and cultural competitions.

The Canadian delegation consisted of three separate components: Canada, Canada-Quebec and Canada-New Brunswick. This formula combined the uniqueness of Canada's participation as a French-speaking nation, while acknowledging the presence and the particular contributions of Quebec and New Brunswick.

Canada came second to France in the medal standings, bringing home 9 gold, 14 silver and 17 bronze medals. Canada-Quebec won two silvers and nine bronze, while Canada-New Brunswick's tally was one silver medal.

In the demonstration event for disabled athletes, Canada-Quebec's André Viger and Marc Quessy took the first two places in the 1 500-m wheelchair event, while Canada's Jeff Adams claimed the bronze. In the 100-m event, Canada's Dan Westley took the gold while Quessy and Viger placed second and third respectively. Organizers hope to incorporate a full-scale competition for disabled athletes in the 1993 Francophone Games.

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The Jeux de la Francophonie were announced at the Francophone Summit held in Quebec City in September 1987 and received the unanimous support of conference participants. The Games will be held every four years, alternating between the industrialized and industrializing countries of the Francophonie. The next Games will be held in 1993 in Paris, France.

Fighting Heredity

Last August, scientists at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, with the help of colleagues at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in the United States, announced an achievement of staggering complexity: they had identified the cystic fibrosis (CF) gene.

The Toronto team was composed of geneticists Lap-Chee Tsui, Jack Riordan and Manuel Buchwald, who had been studying CF for eight years. For decades, scientists have known that cystic fibrosis was caused by defective genes — one from each parent — but they did not know which genes. Then, in 1985, Dr. Tsui and Buchwald located the site of the CF gene on chromosome 7. This discovery led to a large-scale CF genetic research program at the Toronto Hospital for Sick Children where investigators set out to isolate the faulty "CF gene."

Cystic fibrosis is among the most common of all hereditary diseases. In fact, 1 in every 2 000 Canadian children is born with it and half of those afflicted die before they are 25. Few survive beyond their 30s.

CF is not only deadly — it is relentless. Thick, sticky mucus constantly clogs the small air passages in the lungs, the ducts of the liver and pancreas, and the intestines, making victims susceptible to lung infections and serious digestive disorders.

Indeed, the discovery has won the praise of excited researchers everywhere. Ronald Worton, chief geneticist at Sick Children's, called the finding "one of the most significant discoveries in the history of human genetics." University of Michigan researcher Francis Collins, who headed the collaborating team in Ann Arbor, said that the advance has provided "a real sense of hope" that science will be able to identify the genes implicated in about 4 000 other genetic diseases, including some forms of cancer.

Louis Siminovitch, research director at Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital Research Institute believes "we have made a pretty large step toward prevention." The next step, he added, will be for researchers to identify the cell protein associated with the renegade gene. When that is accomplished — perhaps in the next five years — "we can start looking at some way to counteract that protein and come up with a treatment for people who already have the disease."

The breakthrough has not only provided the scientific community with new hope: for thousands of parents and their CF-stricken children the world over, the news offers the possibility of escaping what has been, up until now, a depressingly predictable future.

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