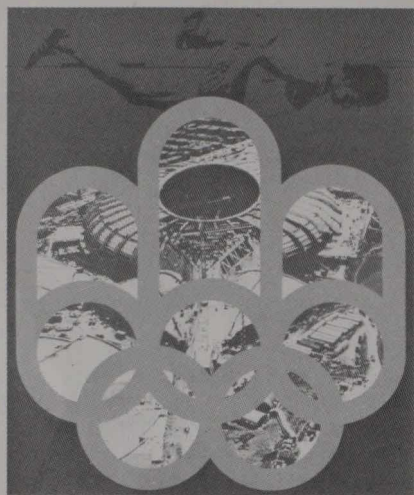


Cover: Focus on Montreal, venue of the 1976 Olympic Games. For an assessment of Canadian medal hopes, see this page.

Canada Today



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But seriously — what are Canadian chances?

By Jack Sullivan

Call it what you wish, home country or home grounds advantage, but Canadian athletes may be the beneficiaries of a psychological lift in the Summer Olympics this year. They'll be competing before predominantly Canadian crowds and within the friendly confines of their own country.

But before people start totting up the gold medals, it may be wise to take a look at the record. Things generally have not been bright for Canadian athletes in the gold medal-winning category in the last 40-45 years.

They have won only a total of eight golds since 1932 — and that takes in nine Summer Games. In that span the most that Canadians have won in any single Games has been two — in 1932 and again in 1956. And they've been shut out three times, in 1972, 1960 and 1948.

Optimistic souls may figure that performing before home crowds might be worth a gold or two, but the competition in just about any of the 21 sports you care to mention is overwhelming.

The next item to ponder is this: Okay, will Canada win a few golds and, if so, who is likely to get them?

Two or three medals?

Canada has a chance of winning two or three in such sports as track and field, shooting and swimming. And there may be one or two other athletes — or group of athletes in the team sports — sitting in the bushes who can come up with the big one and get the band playing O Canada, a tune that hasn't been heard at the Summer Games since the equestrians won the Grand Prix jumping in 1968.

Talk to Canadian track and field people about medal chances and suddenly they are struck speechless, which is something of a rarity.

Apparently these chaps have an un-written understanding that no Canadian track coach or team manager will go out on a limb about medal-winning chances. Maybe it's just as well because these guys have been looking at the world through rose-coloured spectacles Olympics after Olympics in the past and they've ended with egg on their faces after some wild, over-ambitious predictions.

Looking at things realistically, the two or three Canadians with a fair-to-good chance of picking off a gold medal in the Games merry-go-round are:

Marathoner Jerome Drayton and trapshooters John Primrose of Edmonton and Susan Natrass of Hamilton, Ontario.

Of course, the swimmers have 14-year-old Nancy Garapick of Halifax and Steve Pickell of Vancouver, a couple of kids who can look the world in the eye and who just might come up with the big one before the home crowd. You can't pass up the equestrians and Canada's basketball team has beaten every contender in the top 10 in the world, except the United States.

The Soviet Union defeated the US for the 1972 basketball gold medal and there's a feeling among some basketball experts that, just possibly, the Canadian national team could pull a major upset this time.

Team experience

John Restivo, executive director of the Canadian Amateur Basketball Association, pointed out in April that "in the last three games with the Americans, we've lost by fewer than 10 points."

"There's no question we can play with the best teams in the world." The team has played together for nearly six years, and that is a big plus.

Let's take a look at German-born Drayton who changed his name from Peter Buniak because of anti-Ukrainian slurs directed his way. In 1975 he was second behind Will Rogers of the United States in the world rankings and first in Commonwealth rankings with a personal best of 2:10.08.

Injury problems

Not bad for a guy who didn't even start out as a runner. At high school he took up high jumping, managed to get up to four feet 11 inches, a most undistinguishable height, and started into foot-racing when his school's track star challenged him to a one-mile race.

Drayton won. He later moved up to two and three miles and finally in 1968 he tackled the 26-mile 385-yard marathon for the first time. He came up a winner at Detroit, Michigan, in 2:23.57 and he was hooked on the long distances.

All in all, he hasn't had a distinguished record in international competition due in part to a discouraging seven-year record of injuries. Even when right, he's had some

* Jack Sullivan, CBC broadcaster and former sports editor of The Canadian Press, is one of Canada's top Olympics writers.