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Speech by the  
Right Honourable Joe Clark,  
Secretary of State for  
External Affairs

INTERNATIONAL SPORTS RELATIONS

OTTAWA

October 28, 1987.

This luncheon is to mark the deliberate decision to ask Canada's athletes to help make our country better known and more effective in the world. We have two motives. One is that Canada's athletes are usually better known than Canada's diplomats. But the other is that sport genuinely reflects the nature of this country - diverse, democratic, competitive, proud.

Those of you here today are the pros behind the scenes in national sport organizations, and you work with and for some of the best athletes in the world. You know the gruelling hours every one of them has spent in order to be good enough to compete internationally.

And you will also know that the athlete who practises to excellence has her counterpart in thousands of other Canadians who have a different talent, but the same tradition of bringing out their best. Free societies urge everyone to excel, and millions of Canadians follow that urge. Their ambition is what creates Canada's jobs, and builds our schools, and gives us the reputation of a hardworking innovative people. The best teachers, the best business people, the best in other fields, can often be examples, but they rarely become symbols. Our best athletes become symbols, and speak to the world of what Canada is and can become.

And it's time for us, in Canada, to let the world know who we are - and to let ourselves know. We used to be a colony of Britain, and of France. We used to be afraid that the United States would overwhelm us. We used to think that if you were a kid from Williams Lake, B.C. and you lost the use of your legs, your life would be over. We used to think that Canadians couldn't excel in track and field, women's field hockey or soccer.

That is not this Canada. We are the Canada which pioneers in outer space, and has the world's best architects, and is home to Antonine Maillet, the Acadian whose writing won the Prix Goncourt. This is the Canada of Gaetan Boucher and Lori Fung and Brian Orser and Anna Fraser and Ben Johnson and scores of other world-class competitors.

Canada does not draw together easily. But some moments show our nature. Eleven First Ministers sitting eighteen hours to complete our constitution was one sign of this proud country coming together. So was the fervour with which we all watched those final games between Canada and the Soviet Union. Sport unites us more regularly than politics - so let us recognize that reality in this modern world, and have our athletes help the modern Canada become better known internationally, and better known at home.

Every time a Canadian athlete or team competes internationally, whatever the outcome, Canada shows the world its best face - the face of a vigorous young country, a proud and determined people. Everytime a Pierre Harvey, a Sylvie Bernier, a Carolyn Waldo, moves across a television screen, the world gets a message, the message is: "Nice guys can finish first." Canadians can compete and they can compete against the toughest customers the rest of the world has to offer.

Sports excellence is, by its very nature, democratic. Talent and guts are everything; where a person is born or to whom does not determine who wins.

When he was nine years old, Alex Baumann came to this country from Prague, and brought with him the talent and heart that made him a world champion. Our world champion skating dance team literally covers the country from sea to sea - Rob McCall from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and Tracy Wilson from Port Moody, B.C. Both Ben Johnson and Angella Issajenko came to Canada from Jamaica. The list is endless but the point is always the same: it's what you can do, not who you are or who you know, that counts in sports.

The money the Government spends to ensure that Canadian athletes are able to compete worldwide is a major benefit for particular persons or sport. But it also helps the country. We want Canada's best athletes to share their expertise with our world neighbours, and to contribute to international understanding through sports. We want Canadian competitors to add the considerable weight of their talent to international sports organizations.

Every time these or other sports stars offer technical assistance or coaching expertise to another country, Canada is sharing its finest resource: the best of its young people. Every time your organizations deal with like-minded groups from around the globe, you have an opportunity to help our country reach its foreign policy goals -- whether the result demonstrates the usefulness of mutual co-operation, or helps us expand trade or increase tourism.

Sport is a powerful magnet for getting people to want to come here and see us in our own country. That's why nine cities are competing vigorously for the 1994 Commonwealth Games and why Toronto is bidding hotly for the 1996 Olympic Summer Games. That's why we fought long and hard to bring the 1988 Olympic Winter Games to Calgary and that's why so much effort has gone into ensuring that they are the best Games ever held.

The Calgary Games will display the world's best winter sports facilities, Canadian-designed and Canadian-built. And I can assure you that we will be searching aggressively for export markets for that expertise and technology.

Canada's excellence in sports is linked to excellence in other fields and the confidence and assertiveness that go with competing successfully are evident across the board. Nineteen eighty-seven goes into the record books as the year Canada hosted two important international conferences, the Francophonie in September and the Commonwealth Conference earlier this month. Right now, we're looking forward to June, when the international economic summit meeting takes place in Toronto.

In the same way that your sports and their participants are a lesson to the rest of the world, you are an example to the people of this country. Champions tell Canadians something we need to know about ourselves -- especially at a time when the world looks like a decidedly dicey place in which to compete. We need to be reminded that Canadians seek excellence in themselves, and are unafraid of it in others. We can compete, in trade, as in skiing; in marketing, as in sprinting. Those who believe that we must cower behind trade walls don't understand this country.

We are the people who carved a nation out of the toughest land and most unforgiving climate on earth. We live, in mutual peace if not always in mutual understanding, with the most competitive and vigorous neighbours anywhere. In today's world, a free trade deal with the United States is a way of affirming Canada's historic reality: that Canadians can compete with Americans and win; that we can compete with Americans and remain proudly Canadian.

Exactly a century ago, a distinguished French-Canadian told the Canadian Club of New York, "Be Canadians and the future is yours". Everyone in this room knows how much sports have contributed to make that promise a reality -- just as everyone in this room can help to ensure that it remains true.

Thank you.