

# No shortage of sports great

1948 RCAF Flyers voted top athletes of 20th century for their Olympic gold



PAT MACADAM

The Canadian Armed Forces honoured their own last night in a glittering Academy Awards-style sports evening and, when the last envelope was opened, they selected the 1948 Ottawa RCAF Flyers' Gold Medal hockey team as their greatest athletes of the 20th century. The countdown narrowing 50 teams and individuals down to one was highlighted by a 35-minute big-screen video presentation of rare archival newsreel film.

The audience of 350 at the Congress Centre saw film of the actual events — the 1943 and 1944 Boston Marathon, the 1948 Winter Olympics in St. Moritz, Switzerland, the "Tea Bowl" football game in London in 1944 between Canadian and United States servicemen, a 1951 English Channel swim, PanAm Games, Olympics, British Empire and Commonwealth Games and Bisley shoots.

The 1948 RCAF Flyers left Ottawa written off by sportswriters and hockey fans. Eighty days later they returned, written up, and they have continued to be written up as the greatest Cinderella team in Canadian sport.

In Europe they travelled 24,000 kilometres in 80 days, played before 250,000 fans.



Bobsled Driver Vic Emery is lifted on the shoulders of Peter Kirby, Michael Young and Officer Cadet Gerald Presley of Arnprior after they won the world championship in St. Moritz in 1965. A year later, Mr. Presley won the gold at the 1964 Olympics.



Sgt. Gérard Côté was four-time winner of the Boston Marathon. He also won the Lou Marsh Trophy as Canada's top athlete in 1940.



Ottawa RCAF Flyers, 1948. Front row: Murray Dowey, Ted Hibberd, Orval Gravelle, Ab Renaud, Roy Forbes, Pete Leitchnitz, Patsy Guzzo and Ross King. Back row, left to right, George McFaul (trainer), André Laperrière, Frank Dunster, Louis Lecompte, Reg Schroeder, Hubert Brooks, Andy Gilpin, manager A.G. Watson and coach Frank Boucher.

When it appeared Canada might score, when he won Olympic classic in 1943 and 1944.

played before 250,000 fans.

They played 42 games, won 31, lost five and tied six. At the Olympics they won seven games and tied the eighth to win gold. They scored 69 goals. Wally Halder scored 21 and George Mara 17. Ottawa natives, the late Patsy Guzzo, Ab Renaud and Reg Schroeder, combined for 21. Goaltender Murray Dowey had five shutouts and allowed only five goals in eight games.

Dr. "Sandy" Watson, then a Squadron Leader and now a retired Ottawa eye specialist, was the man who made it all happen.

When it appeared Canada might not enter a hockey team in the 1948 Olympics, without any mandate, approval or funds, he volunteered a team from the RCAF.

Dr. Watson managed the team and scrounged equipment and money. Dr. Watson was there last night along with coach Frank Boucher and players Ab Renaud of Ottawa and Andre Laperrière of Outremont, Que.

Maj. Gerry Ouelette of Windsor was the runner-up to the RCAF Flyers. Gerry Ouelette shot 600 bulls-eyes, a perfect

score, when he won Olympic gold at the 1956 Games in Melbourne, Australia. After the event, officials discovered the 50-metre range was 1.5 metres short and his record was disallowed, but his medal was allowed to stand. He also won one gold and two silver medals at the 1959 PanAm Games and silver at the 1967 PanAm Games. Canada Post honoured him with a stamp in 1996.

In No. 3 place was Sgt. Gérard Côté of St-Hyacinthe, Que., four-time winner of the Boston Marathon. He won the Boston

classic in 1943 and 1944, wearing a Canadian Army jersey. He also won the Lou Marsh Trophy as Canada's top athlete in 1940 and was inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame and the Order of Canada.

In fourth place was Capt. Gil Boa, another shooter. He won a gold medal in the 1954 World Rifle Shooting competition and was a world record holder at several championship events. He also won a bronze medal in the 1956 Summer Games.

Rounding out the top 5 was Gerry Presley of Arnprior who,

as an officer cadet, was a member of the four-man bobsled team that won the world championship in St. Moritz in 1965. Mr. Presley was a replacement member on the team Vic Emery piloted to a gold medal in the 1964 Olympics.

Two military teams won Grey Cups. The Hurricanes accomplished the feat in 1942, and they were voted No. 11. HMCS Donnacona, won the Grey Cup in 1944 and they were voted 12th.

Jake Gaudaur Jr., a member of the 1942 Hurricanes' club, was present at the evening and said even though he played in one more Grey Cup, operated a team in the Canadian Football League that went to the Grey Cup nine times, served as CFL commissioner "and ran the Grey Cup for 16 years, nothing to me was as great as that first Grey Cup. It was a tremendous feeling of elation. Just being in it was great."

Milt Schmidt, ~~the high-scoring~~ Boston Bruins' great, was also there last night representing the Bruins' Kraut Line of Woody Dumart, Bobby Bauer and himself. The Kraut Line played with the 1942 Ottawa RCAF team when they won the Quebec Senior League championship and the Allan Cup. The Kraut Line finished 21st on the list of all-time military sports greats.

Warrant Officer Willie Weiler, a gymnast, was eighth. He won eight medals, three of them gold, at the 1963 PanAm Games in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and he won the Canadian gymnastic title five times.

A husband and wife team, Warrant Officer Margaret Burdett and Master Warrant Officer Douglas Burdett, held sway over world skeet shooting from 1969 to 1972 and were inducted in the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 1972. In a world competition in San Antonio, Texas, they shot the highest score ever recorded by a husband-and-wife team. They were voted No. 7.

Winnie Roach-Leuszler was voted No. 14. In 1951, as a 25-year old army private, she became the first Canadian to swim the English Channel. She delighted the audience with her memories of that swim.

"I stood up and walked the three feet from the water's edge onto the beach at Dover. That, to me, was greater than the whole swim itself. Normally, all marathon swimmers crawled in to shore. The first person to greet me was a gentleman who asked: Are you that young lady

who left France and swam across the Channel? Are you that young lady that has landed here non-stop?"

"I proudly said I was and, then, he asked me: 'Have you anything to declare?'"

"It was Her Majesty's Customs. I couldn't believe my ears. There I was wearing a silk bathing suit and nothing else; and he's wondering if I have anything to declare."

Brig.-Gen. Denis Whitaker, war hero and one of Canada's youngest brigadiers who won a Distinguished Service Order with the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry at Dieppe and later starred with Hamilton Tigers of the CFL, was also present and regaled the audience with his account of "Tea Bowl" football game in London in 1944: "a great morale booster because the war was still raging on."

The Canadian Mustangs, basically a CFL All-Star team, played ~~the United States Pirates~~ who had a sprinkling of professional players. Half the game was played under U.S. rules and half under Canadian rules. The Canadian quarterback was Orville Burke, who quarterbacked the Ottawa Rough Riders from 1936 to 1941. Mr. Burke and Denis Whitaker were the stars of the game, according to a Canadian Press wire story.

Canada defeated the U.S. 16-6 before 40,000 fans, mostly soldiers, in White City Stadium.

"Denny" Whitaker recalled: "they wanted to make sure the Germans wouldn't come and drop a bomb on the place so they had Spitfires flying protection overhead."

"The Canadians had a great time. We were 15-1 underdogs and Canadian soldiers were getting fantastic odds betting on the game. They made a fortune off the Americans who were far better paid. After the game, half the Canadian army disappeared for a week."

The military soccer team that won the world's amateur soccer title in a 60-team tournament in Henglo, Netherlands, in 1998 finished 45th. Ottawa Rough Riders' running back Tony Golab, finished 47th.

The initial list of military superstars numbered 200 and was whittled down to 50.

Those who didn't make the final cuts to be included in the top 50 needn't feel bad. Neither did Tom Longboat, a First World War dispatch runner and Canada's greatest distance runner.