

SPORTS

Portland race founder gets a look at Canada's new oval

Marco Smits



Portland Outdoors is not a regular speed skating club, by any stretch of the imagination. We don't practice short track skating in a hockey arena or long track skating on a smooth, refrigerated 400-metre oval.

For that matter, we don't even have coaches or regular practice hours, so when a long-time skating friend of mine suggested I should attend the 122nd Annual General Meeting and Symposium of Speed Skating Canada in Richmond, British Columbia this past weekend, it came as a surprise.

She said it would be a good opportunity to learn about SSC's new long term athlete development program, and of course a great way to see what people across the country think of events such as the one we have organized in Portland for the past six years.

From attending the 2005 Ontario Speed Skating Association's AGM I had personally experienced the enormous promotional opportunities at events such as this.

In Lakefield that year, I had managed to get our club on the agenda, and four years later people still come up to me and refer to the time I described how a pick up truck crossed the oval, pulling an ice fishing shack during the 50-kilometre race.

With the Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver in mind, SSC had gone all out and decided to fund a large part of the expenses for a member of each club in the country to come to Richmond, and indeed, this event turned out to be the biggest gathering of speed skating athletes, coaches, club presidents and staff ever held in Canada.

During the symposium, I got to meet Kristina Groves who once signed a Skate the Lake poster that is still on display in the Portland community centre. I got to thank Catriona LeMay Doan for sending motivational postcards to young participants in the Portland race.

A video we submitted in an annual online skating



Our own reporter Marco Smits travelled to Vancouver, BC on the weekend where he met with speed skating coaches, athletes and club presidents from all over Canada. This picture was taken at a gala dinner event with Ottawa's Kristina Groves who was named Canada's female skater of the 2008-2009 season.

challenge earlier this year was shown on a big screen in front of the entire crowd, and many people came up to me afterwards, sharing Skate the Lake stories, some that I hadn't heard before.

Of course many people wanted to talk about Rick Mercer filming the Mercer Report in town this year. By that time I had already learned that the first night it aired, 1.3 million people across the country watched it.

The main event of the weekend was the gala dinner Saturday evening.

The feeling in the room was at times overwhelming and when 'Man in Motion' Rick Hansen was finished speaking to the Olympic hopefuls in the crowd about how everything is possible as long as you believe in yourself, almost everyone in the room had tears in their

eyes. As I was recovering from the impact of the speech, a man sitting near me introduced himself.

He said he skated at almost every Portland event, except for last year when he was recovering from a severe shoulder injury. In fact, he was a member of the relay team that came dressed wearing hockey socks on their heads, giving us the idea to offer prizes for the best dressed team in 2009.

"You might not recognize me. I didn't used to have a goatee," he said. "It is covering a battle scar I got in Portland when my chin hit the ice after hitting a crack one year." He grinned from ear to ear when he spoke, and in a very unusual way, right then and there he made me proud of our event in Portland and everyone who helps make it happen.

Under 12 PFC Soccer Team Portland Football Club



Is hosting a
Neighbourhood
Garage Sale

Wednesday, July 1, 2009

Rain or Shine

at St. Edward School in Westport

10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

All proceeds will go to supporting the team for an August Tournament and new uniforms.

Your support would be greatly appreciated
One persons junk is anothers treasure.