

Down Memory Lane - 1928 Olympic Gold

by Stan Shillington

They were short of cash, but long on determination.

To claim the pot of gold, the New Westminster Salmonbellies chased the rainbow across a continent and an ocean, literally working their way to the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics.

It did not matter that field lacrosse was classed as only a demonstration sport -- the Bellies were the Canadian representative team, this was the Olympics, and gold medals and a world title were the coveted prizes.

Undoubtedly the toughest obstacle facing the 'Bellies was raising the money required to take the team to Europe because, unlike the American entry, the Fishmen received very little help from the strapped Canadian Olympic brass.

U.S. Olympic Committee president, Major General Douglas MacArthur, arranged a six-team elimination tournament that raised \$19,000 in gate receipts that were used to offset the expenses of the representative John Hopkins University team.

From the moment that the Salmonbellies captured the 1927 Mann Cup and was declared the Canadian Olympic rep, a series of fundraising games and functions were arranged.

The Royal City team members had been given "walking-out" jackets and slacks but had to rely on Universal Knitting of Vancouver for new playing jerseys, white with red "Canada" across the front. Dominion Rubber provided new playing shoes and Joe Lalley of Cornwall donated 16 new lacrosse sticks.

However, when the team boarded a special car attached to the Canadian National Confederation train on July 10, club general manager Dan McKenzie reported there was still a shortfall of \$13,000.

Not to worry -- a series of exhibition matches were arranged as the Fishmen travelled eastward; an 8-1 win in Edmonton July 12, a 5-2 victory over Winnipeg July 14, a 7-4 loss to Toronto All-Stars July 16, and a 10-0 drubbing over Montreal AAA July 17. Urgent business matters back home forced coach Grumpy Spring to leave the team in Montreal, turning the coaching chores over to Bill Patchell.

Finally, on July 18 -- four games in eight days while crossing the continent by train -- the Salmonbellies left Quebec aboard the Empress of Scotland.

When the Olympic Games officially commenced July 28, the Salmonbellies were working out the travelling stiffness with more exhibition matches in Holland.

Then, on August 5, came the first test. The completion of the marathon race and the women's high jump competition delayed the game for two hours, but 40,000 spectators remained in the Olympic Stadium to witness the U.S. beat Canada 6-3, Jack Wood scoring all three Canadian goals.

The American victory celebration, however, was shortlived for, less than 24 hours later, England pulled a major 7-6 upset victory over John Hopkins.

On August 7, with Jack Wood scoring another hatrick, Canada defeated England 9-5. Other scorers were

John Vernon with two and captain Leo Gregory, Red Fraser, Doughie Burnett and Bob Mackie with one apiece.

The result was a three-way, one win-one loss tie with each of the three competing teams having scored 12 goals. The U.S. suggested a three-way playoff to decide a single victor; Canada agreed but England refused. The Olympic committee then declared all three teams gold medal winners.

Before sailing home, the 'Bellies played two more exhibition games in England -- 11-7 and 13-6 triumphs - and then tagged on another pair of victories -- 17-6 in Montreal and 5-2 in Ottawa -- before finally arriving back in New Westminster September 4 with a two-month roadtrip record of 11 wins and 2 losses.

Oh, yes -- and Olympic gold!

Members of the team were captain Leo Gregory, John Stoddart, Bill "Red" Fraser, Carl Grauer, Ab Brown, Bob Bourne, Jack Wood, Nels Atkinson, John Vwernon, Bob Mackie, Walter "Hop" Wilkie, Cyril "Flick" Doyle, Bud Farrow and Doughie Burnett. Dal Grauer, on scholarship at Oxford University in England, was added to the roster when the team arrived in Europe.

In addition, George Feeney, Haddie Stoddart and Bill and Willis Patchell accompanied the team, playing in the exhibition matches but, because they had played professional lacrosse earlier in their careers, were ruled ineligible for the Olympic matches.

Fraser, Brown, Gregory, Wood, Vernon, Feeney, Haddie Stoddart, Willis Patchell, Dan McKenzie and Grumpy Spring were all subsequently inducted into the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame.

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