

The Largest Masters' Games

A Wonderful Speed Skating Happening for the International Masters in Calgary/Canada Feb 2007

As I received the application from the Olympic Oval Calgary for the 16th Masters' International Speed Skating Games 2007 at 21 Oct 2004 in the IMSSC office, I thought that there was big mistake in this application. I could read under "Number of participants that will be allowed to skate": **300**. I thought that this must be a mistake because we had the experience from all the Games before, that for the juries 200 skaters were the above limit for this competition in three days. But at the IMSSC Summer Session in Haarlem/NED 2006 Gregg Planert, Technical Director of the Olympic Oval in Calgary confirmed this number of 300 participants. In autumn 2006 the competition days were updated from 3 to 4 days, because the speed skaters of the World Cup Final, which was planned for the week after the Games, needed training time already at the Games weekend. But the number of 300 participants for the Games was not changed.

So the 16th Masters' Games in Calgary were the first Masters' Games which lasted 4 days. 328 Entries were received by the Olympic Oval and 288 Master skaters competed. The loss of about 12 % of the entered skaters is due to hurt or ill skaters or skaters hindered by other reasons, because the closing date of the entries is nearly three months before the competition. Every year this loss is nearly the same. To summarize the above-mentioned: 288 competitors in 4 competition days is a record for the Masters' Games. For the first time since many years all interested Masters' could participate in the Games. Many thanks to Gregg Planert, Karrie Kreutz and Jock Wilson and their large Organizing Committee and Competition Team of the Olympic Oval, which made these large and very successful Games possible!

With two German Master skaters from our Club Grefrather EC, Heinz-Jürgen Vignold from Essen and Ulrich Günther from Cologne, who have their training at the only 400 m artificial ice track of the federal state North-Rhine-Westfalia in Grefrath, and a coach, Frits Roothans from Weert/NED, my wife Elke and me started our travel Monday morning before the Games from Düsseldorf Airport with Lufthansa. We changed from Lufthansa to Air Canada in Frankfurt at 2 p.m., met there several Norwegian Master skaters, who already skated at the Master Cup in Berlin at the weekend, also flying with us to Calgary, and arrived "already" at 4 p.m. in Calgary, 1000 m above sea-level, at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. But the flight time was 9 hours because of the time difference of 7 hours between Düsseldorf and Calgary. We had a good flight at a wonderful weather over Greenland, Baffin Island and the North West Territories of Canada with their impressive glaciers and other interesting lonely ice-landscapes. At Calgary Airport we were attended already by coworkers of the organizing committee and got help to reach our hotels.

Our hotel, Quality Inn University, was a typical Canadian Motel with motel breakfast, the Europeans had to get used to paper plates and paper cups. The hotel had the advantage to be near to the Olympic Oval in the University of Calgary, which could be reached by a walk of about 25 minutes. It was astonishing for me, that the University of Calgary has such fantastic possibilities for different sports. I saw a wonderful 50 m swimming hall, several halls for different sports and above all the fantastic Olympic Oval, the large Speed Skating Hall of the Olympic Games 1988, with the famous fast ice. The University seems to be very well equipped and is situated in a large own district of Calgary with a lot of interesting and impressive buildings.

Already soon after our arrival our speed skating friends of Grefrath took their skates to try the famous fast ice of the Olympic Oval. Because of knee problems I could not take part in the Games, a pity. But I had to prepare my papers for the Sessions of the ISU Masters' Speed Skating Working Group (IMSSG) and the International Masters' Speed Skating Committee (IMSSC), which were held Tuesday and Wednesday. These sessions are important for the further development of the International Masters' Speed Skating. In the IMSSG there are 4 Members, 1 for Asia, 1 for North America and 2 for Europe. The IMSSG makes the connection between the IMSSC and the ISU Council. The IMSSC is the main body for the development of Masters' International Speed Skating. The IMSSC has Members from 17 Nations and takes decisions about the Competitions of the next season and about the further development of Masters' International Speed Skating.

From Thursday, the beginning of the Games, I was free of duties and could enjoy the Games Competitions. Because of the training of the World Cup Finalists and a training competition, which was organized for them, it was also possible for me to enjoy the famous professionals in speed skating from close up directly at the track.

288 participants (65 Ladies, 223 Men) from 14 Nations (AUT 1, CAN 92, FIN 5, GER 17, ITA 8, LAT 2, NED 68, NOR 50, ROM 1, RUS 5, SUI 12, UKR 1, USA 25) competed in the 16th Masters' International Speed Skating Games. Already at the first races could be seen that a lot of personal bests were broken in Calgary as well as a lot of IMSSC Records (International Masters' Records). Most of the known top Master skaters were competing in Calgary. The competition conditions were excellent, but above all the ice was perfect as well known from Calgary. At the end of the Games nearly all Masters' International Records (IMSSC Records) which could be broken at the Games, were indeed broken: 93 IMSSC Records. The competitors enjoyed skating in this nice and famous speed skating hall with perfect ice. The competitions were very well conducted by a large jury and competition team under the leadership of the Technical Director Gregg Planert. It must really have been a very hard job to be member of this jury and this team, 4 days full concentration at very long competition times. You find all results and all IMSSC Records of the Games in the list of Results following to this report.

As every year there were some unlucky skaters or even walking disasters. I don't know all, I will only mention three of them.

Markus Ulmer from Switzerland, Member of the IMSSC, came to Calgary well trained and in eager anticipation. He was missed in the IMSSC Session, he could not be seen at the training on the ice, he was not at the competition, because he caught a pneumonia. He had to stay in bed in Calgary also during the great closing banquet and he had to cure his pneumonia back at home in Switzerland.

And then Sven-Åge Svensson from Norway, also Member of the IMSSC. At the arrival in Calgary he did not get his baggage at the airport because it was disappeared. He could not make his training with his own skates before the beginning of the competitions. Every day he had to go to the airport to get back his skates and his baggage. Then, one day before the start of the competitions his skates came together with his baggage from a separate travel with British Airways around the world back to Calgary. Then at his first distance one of his skates did break, and he had to fight not only against his adversary, but also against his skate. He could finish with big difficulties. The second distance with a repaired skate was ok. But at the third distance he was disqualified, a disaster for such a good and experienced skater. An then he caught a hard cold and could not really enjoy the fine closing banquet. He had to fly back to Norway with his cold and to cure it at home in Norway.

And the third unlucky skater is our eldest skater Joe McDonald from USA, who was not only the first in his class M 85, but has broken all IMSSC Records of his class. He wanted to go back home in the morning after the closing ceremonies of the Games by a large van with his whole family. The van was packed and stood before the hotel, all was ready to start. But suddenly a robber came, took place on the guiders place, started the van and disappeared alone with the van and all of the baggage of Joe and his family. The police could catch the robber later with the help of a helicopter. Unfortunately I don't know the end of the story.

I wish to these three and all other unlucky skaters that they can attack again at the next Games in Erfurt/GER with their own skates in best health with success and that they don't lose anything of their baggage.

Besides the competitions there were organized very fine events by a team of the Olympic Oval under Karrie Kreutz in cooperation with Jock Wilson. The first event was the Welcome Drink in the nice banquet hall of the Ramada Hotel in Calgary centre with several speeches and not only drinks but also very fine finger food. All competing skaters were happy to meet again or for the first time and to be part of the large Games Family. The second event was the Stampede breakfast at the second of the competition days. There was a large tent outside the ice stadium where all could have a breakfast with grilled sausages, grilled meat, bread rolls, coffee, drinks, etc. All felt well despite that it was a little cold, but the sun was shining.

The third and top event was the victory ceremony with closing banquet in the large night club "Cowboys" in the city centre. The very nice organized victory ceremony was the first highlight of this evening. The winner cups from glass were a wonderful work of glass artists, presented to the first three winners of every class by Karrie Kreutz and Jock Wilson in goodlooking Western outfit. All successful skaters got a special medal, a nice western tie with a small sculpture of skaters which could be seen originally in large in the icehall. All successful skaters got also a protocol. The skaters were astonished and a little disappointed that it was only the protocol of their own age group. The second highlight was the western buffet with fine specialties of the region, which we enjoyed. And the third highlight were the Line Dances under the leadership of a Line Dance teacher. All of the participants in these Line Dances had a lot of fun, but also the spectators. It was a wonderful great Closing Evening.

Very satisfied about the days of the Games in Calgary we stayed a day more in Canada before we started for our return flight. We, that means the small group from North-Rhine-Westfalia, mentioned above. At wonderful weather we visited the famous ski resorts Banff and Lake Louise and were impressed by the wonderful Rocky Mountains with a lot of snow. Happy and with many new impressions we arrived again at airport Düsseldorf. We hope, that we can visit again a Masters' Competition in Calgary in one of the next years, perhaps at Masters' Games in Calgary 2011 or 2012?

Volker Serini/GER