

2nd Masters' International Speed Skating SPRINT GAMES Milwaukee/USA – February 5th – 6th 2010

I like to see new places and, as a skater, new ovals of course. After spending a year in Belgium in 2007-08, I was spoiled by the ovals close by in the Netherlands and Germany and took EVERY opportunity and holiday to travel with my family to places that have an oval. It was a wonderful year and I did not train as much as I used to but instead travelled and skated in Geleen, Eindhoven, Horn, Biddinghuizen, Erfurt, Inzell, and Heerenveen. Because I had been spoiled in Europe, it was hard to skate again on the cold outdoor oval in Quebec City! This year in North America, we had several meets to pick from. It started in the east with the Canadian Masters International Open, then went west to Utah and finally Milwaukee for the Sprint Meet. Some friend skaters were lucky to go to all of them but for me, one out-of-town meet was enough for me. So Milwaukee was my pick this year! It was told that the ice was perfect, the town very nice and the people friendly and I was not disappointed!

I arrived in Milwaukee Wednesday evening after a very long wait at the Toronto Airport. My friends and skaters Ann and Ross Hanham very kindly offered to pick me up at the airport and drove me to the Hilton Hotel located downtown.

The next morning, Thursday, it was time to try the ice. Wow! Nice, smooth and fast! I had a few hours to get used to this new speed. It was nice to meet again skaters from other countries that I



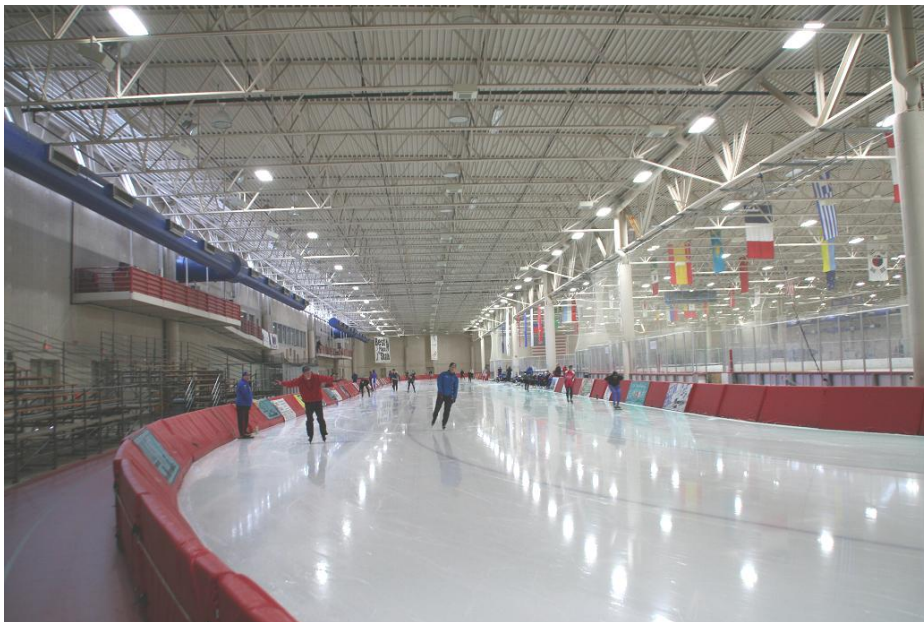
met overseas at previous meets. I had the chance also to watch Shani Davis during his training. Very good looking, impressive and friendly skater!

Friday was the last training day before the races. Most masters had arrived and there was more traffic and action! Everybody was getting ready for the races! For lunch, we discovered this nice café called Alterra located in a former water plant and transformed in an earthy eco friendly place. We all had very good lunches and coffees. In the afternoon, we visited the Museum of Arts

located in a beautiful white and artistic building designed by the architect Calavatra, who also designed the train station in Liege that I saw being built while I was living there. Just to see the building was worth the detour.



Saturday and Sunday, we had to get up really early because warm-up was at 7 o'clock and the races started at 8 o'clock. The restaurant in the hotel was not even open when we left for the oval. Thank God, Starbucks had at least coffee, porridge and nuts! The races began just after the US National Anthem was beautifully played by Olusegun Sijuwade-Olu, talented saxophonist and skater. With tail wind from the ventilation in the oval and an excellent ice, fast times were



recorded throughout the weekend and many PBs and masters world records were broken.

For Saturday dinner, we were invited to a potluck Dinner at Olu's. We had a good time. His house is a very interesting one, architecturally but also how it is filled by paintings, colours and skaters in every corner, training areas, posters of Shani Davis. We

finished the evening (early!) by watching videos of world cups!!! Very inspiring! Next morning, rumours about the dinner were already circulating. My husband, who was watching the races from the top room looking down on the oval overheard the referees saying Sunday morning: “The skaters are slower today then yesterday. I heard that they all went to Olu’s last night and probably stayed up very late!”

To conclude the event, a banquet and victory ceremony was held Sunday evening in the beautiful ballroom in the Hilton Hotel where a fine dinner was served accompanied by beautiful music



played by Olu. Many thanks to the organizing committee and race officials for this well organised event that we all enjoyed!

Recently, I tried to remember how speed skating started for me. I think that when I was young, speed skating probably caught my eye in one Olympics. I tried it for the first time when I was 15 years old but quit because of a sprained ankle. I tried again later at 18 years old, with friends with whom I used to race in cycling and quit again. Finally, the third time was the right one when my youngest son was born and I decided that I needed to get out of the house and be fit again. The oval was only a 5 minutes drive from home and I skated casually for a few years until I did the World Games in Québec City in 2001. I had very bad skates, no klapp and a limited technique. I don't remember my times but they were very slow and I even forgot to change lanes in one race... But, I loved the experience. To see all these masters competing and having fun, I decided that I wanted to skate more, and better! I am glad that these events are open to skaters of all abilities, because it gave me a chance to try it when I was still a beginner. Otherwise, I don't know if I would compete in speedskating today and tell you my story...

Anika Bédard/Québec/CANADA