

# Bringing home the gold

By Doris J. MacKinnon

When the Canadian Men's Hockey team won the Gold Medal at the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City, they accomplished a feat that had not been accomplished in fifty years. The last victory for a Canadian men's Olympic hockey team was in 1952, in Oslo, Norway, by the team of men who were by day firemen, farmers, factory workers, and salesmen. Like 2002, the victory in 1952 was a matter of national pride. The Edmonton Waterloo Mercurys, so named because the sponsor owned a car dealership, toured throughout Europe promoting Canada and hockey.

Bob Watt remembers quite well his team's victory. He proudly dons the jersey he wore when he played right wing during the famed series. The Red Deer resident recalls the teamwork which enabled the Mercurys to bring home the gold in 1952. The team, many of whom had played together for seven years, toured Europe for three months before and after the Olympics, as ambassadors of Canada's sport. Many of the games were played on outdoor rinks, including one rink constructed over a swimming pool. At times, conditions were so poor that ice was worn down to the concrete underneath.

Bob recalls one game the team played at a rink sixty miles from the Arctic Circle, where over three thousand enthusiastic fans endured -40 degree temperatures. Other games were played in near blizzard conditions. The team's dedication to the task at hand was evident when their bus swerved off a bridge on its way to a game in Germany. The only thing that prevented them from careening down the hundred-foot drop was a large tree. Despite numerous injuries, the team played later that day.

Bob Watt's hockey career began, like so many of today's amateur athletes, in the small venues of rural Alberta. He turned down an offer to play for the Boston Bruins' farm team, in favour of an opportunity to play for Canada on the national stage in 1952. When the famed series was over, Bob returned to Red Deer, playing for the Rustlers, until his retirement from hockey.

However, Bob's retirement did not end his participation in sports. Indeed, he has enjoyed a lifelong commitment to sporting activities, ranging from skiing, golf, competitive trail riding, to fishing. Bob speaks fondly of all competitive sport, noting that his participation has enabled him to form lifelong friendships, and has helped keep him in good health.

It was Bob's involvement in amateur sport which led to his providing the venue for the competitive trail riding competition in the 1975 Alberta Summer Games. Riders began the competition on Bob's farm in the Balmoral district, following a trail described as one of the toughest cross country runs in Alberta.

This former Olympian maintains that today's athletes need funding and support, in the same way that his team did. The generous funding of Edmonton businessman, Jim Christiansen, provided the Mercurys the opportunity to train together as a team. The squad amassed an impressive record of 42 wins, 7 losses, and 2 ties, during their exhibition series in Europe. Pride in community, demonstrated by the players' commitment, and by Christiansen's insistence on drills to ensure that players would show proper respect during the playing of the national anthem, combined to provide the competitive edge necessary to bring home the gold in 1952. That same pride in community and commitment by players helps today's amateur athletes as they strive for the gold.



Bob Watt at home with memories of 1952