



BRITISH COLUMBIA AMATEUR HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

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BC Best Ever Program Represented Well At The 2002 Olympic Winter Games

By Johnny Misley

Team Leader, 2002 Team Canada Men's Olympic Hockey Team

"Pay attention to detail but let the spirit prevail" was written on the backs of t-shirts for Team Canada and worn under their playing equipment during the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Games.

This motto, originating from the legendary and late Father David Bauer, served as the guiding force for the team acting as a subtle reminder to the players by coaching and management staff that success at the Olympics hinged heavily on not only the attention that must be given to game plans and preparation but also on not forgetting the history of past teams that went to battle for Canada in prior Olympic Games. With history comes pressure however wearing the maple leaf becomes the self motivation to represent our nation with both pride and passion.

As a member of Team Canada in Salt Lake City I was privileged to have witnessed the spirit of Father Bauer through his ideologies that hockey can be a sport played with great strength, skill and pride. Father Bauer believed that it was important for Canadians to be good ambassadors for the game world wide. As the players of Team Canada truly represented Father Bauer's values well, it was also important to remember what other influences contributed to the success of our team in Salt Lake City.

"Great teams win championships, not great players". As is the case with all short term competitions and the Olympics is no different, teams with players who "check their egos at the door" will be successful knowing that the "team first" approach is critical. Through the influential leadership of Wayne Gretzky, Executive Director for Team Canada, Head Coach Pat Quinn and Captain Mario Lemieux, our team was able to face adversity early in the tournament and pull some players up when performance was down. Through this "team first" approach we grew as a team and more importantly as a family as the tournament progressed leading us to Canada's first gold medal in 50 years to the day on February 24th, 2002.

Team Canada players go through years of preparation to compete in the Olympics, the most competitive hockey event in the world. One must realize that the transition of play for Canadians from North American style hockey to International hockey is a difficult one. For European NHL players who have grown up on the "big ice" in their native homelands, the transition is easier. Speed and skill outplays strength and intimidation. The no center red line opens the game up on an already bigger ice surface. There is little opportunity to count on individual play and instead a lot rests on team play, composure and self-control. So where do the Canadian players and coaches learn these "skills for success" for international hockey? The answer is simple; CHA's Program of Excellence (POE).

Started in 1982, the CHA established a regional and national team development program for the purpose of identifying and training both players and coaches for international competition. On the male side this consists of a Regional Under 17 program, National Under 18 program followed by both the National Under

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20 (Junior) Program and finally the Olympic Team program. Talent identification and training is started through the cooperation of the 13 Provincial Hockey Associations (CHA Branches) through their Under 16 and Under 17 programs. In British Columbia this program is called the BC Best Ever.

Since the POE inception in 1982 Canada has won 57 medals (37 Gold, 12 Silver and 8 Bronze) at the World Junior and Senior Championships. This formula has obviously proven as a successful one.

Looking at the 2002 Men's Olympic team roster it is important to note that every single player (23) from Team Canada had experienced and trained for international hockey through the CHA's Program of Excellence. As for players from Team Canada who were born and raised in British Columbia, four players have developed through the BC Best Ever Program.

Joe Sakic of Burnaby, BC (Colorado Avalanche), Olympic MVP experienced the BC Best Ever Program in 1985 and whose very name is etched on the BC Cup trophy. Eric Brewer of Kamloops, BC (Edmonton Oilers) played in the program in 1995. Paul Kariya of North Vancouver (Anaheim Mighty Ducks) dominated the program in 1990 and was BC's captain and flag bearer at the 1991 Canada Winter Games. Last but not least is Scott Niedermayer of Cranbrook, BC (New Jersey Devils) who also was a stand out on defence for Team Kootenay in 1989. Honorable mention goes to BC native Steve Yzerman (Detroit Red Wings) who honed his playing skills in the Cranbrook Minor Hockey Association before the days of the BC Best Ever Program. Ken Hitchcock, Associate Coach of Team Canada while coaching in the 1980's with the Kamloops Blazers devoted many summers teaching at the BC Under 17 Provincial Camp. Brad Pascall of Port Coquitlam, BC (CHA), Team Canada Director of Communications anchored Team Lower Mainland and Team Pacific's defence in 1986. Bob Nicholson of Penticton, BC (CHA President) served as BCAHA Project Coordinator and Development Coordinator from 1980 to 1988 who along with the BCAHA Executive designed and rolled out the BC Best Ever Program in the early 1980's.

CHA's Program of Excellence and the BC Best Ever Program should share in the success and glory of Team Canada's gold medal performance in Salt Lake City.

And if you think minor hockey memories are short as players get older, think again. While celebrating in the Team Canada dressing room following our gold medal win against Team USA, I could not resist the opportunity to gather together the "BC Boys" for a photo opportunity. During the posing (and this was unplanned) the players shouted out "BC Best Ever, BC Best Ever!"

To the players and coaches competing at this year's 2002 CCM BC Cup, you are now in the talent identification system in Canada. So be careful about dreaming of one day playing for your country as a member of Team Canada. It just might happen!

Good luck to all participants, BCAHA staff and event volunteers.

Follow your dreams and don't forget to let the spirit prevail!

Johnny Misley is currently the Director of Hockey Development for the Canadian Hockey Association and served in Salt Lake City as Team Leader for the Canadian Men's Olympic Hockey Team. A

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native of Vancouver, BC, Misley also served from 1991-1998 as Project Coordinator where he managed and coordinated the BC Best Ever Program for the BCAHA.

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