

Sydney an unforgettable experience

Five athletes from Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville represented Canada at the Summer Olympic Games in Sydney. They're all back home after taking post-games vacations and ready to talk about what was, for most, an extraordinary experience.

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Sports Editor

Markham's Mathieu Turgeon says his surprise bronze medal finish in the Olympic trampoline event "is just starting to sink in now."

The 21-year-old, second-year York University student said the jubilation of being an Olympic medal winner, one of a select few earned by Canadian athletes, hasn't completely set in yet.

"My parents are showing me all of the newspaper clippings that mentioned what I did," said Turgeon. "There's a lot of paper work. It's awesome."

Ranked 11th in the world prior to the Olympics and making his debut at these games, Turgeon was confident he would improve on his status. Just how much remained to be seen.

"I didn't want to go out mentally where I made the finals and that was it. I wanted to get in the finals and work well to get into the rankings like fifth or sixth."

"I didn't want to come home and say that I could have done better. I had to put everything into the routine and this time, I didn't watch the other competitors perform," recalled Turgeon, who credited Cockburn and his coach, Dave Ross, into giving him some extra advice prior to his performance.

During his final routine, Turgeon recalled that everything seemed to fall into place.

"I felt smooth and I had great rhythm. Everything went according to plan at the right time."

After recording a score of 39.10 and being one of the early competitors, Turgeon then had to play the waiting game to see where he would finish. Fortunately for Turgeon, no one overtook him for the bronze medal.

Reflecting on the games, Turgeon experienced no problems and was impressed with how well they were organized.

"The food court in the Athletes Village was huge and open 24 hours a day. You could get whatever you wanted to eat. And the transportation was great."

While winning a medal is something the St. Robert Catholic High School graduate will cherish, he noted the games opening and closing ceremonies were also memorable.

"Taking the first few steps into



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Markham's Mathieu Turgeon gets a big welcome back hug from dad Andre and mom Muguette after arriving back from the Sydney Olympics with his bronze medal in trampoline.

the stadium for the opening ceremonies you catch glimpses of the crowd, all of the cheering and cameras flashing. That's when it hit me that this thing (the Olympics) is a big deal.

"And in the closing ceremonies, the costumes that people wore were great and spectacular. It was cool to see all of the different singers and the energy involved along with the overall attitude and behavior of the people."

"Everyone was relaxing and having a good time. All of the competitors mingled and people were even trading things like pins, hats, jackets and even shoes. My coach (Dave Ross) traded his shoes," he noted.

Since his Olympic performance, Turgeon revealed his lifestyle has not been altered. However, he hopes the corporate sector might begin to take note of his feat.

"Maybe in the next few weeks something might happen. Right now though, we're trying to get some sponsorship deals. I haven't been approached yet. But I would definitely welcome it."

Just as important, the Skyriders Trampoline Club member hopes Canadians will become more aware of his sport.

Turgeon would like to be a part of the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece. However, he conceded a lot can happen before then.

"Four years is a long time and I can't predict if I'll be there. But I will still be in the sport to compete."

Set to resume his studies at York University, Turgeon travels to Germany in December to compete in the World Cup final synchronized event with his Skyriders Club partner Ben Snape.

Turgeon won't compete in the individual category because he did not accumulate enough points during the World Cup season.

For now though, Turgeon is glad to be back home.

"You get a bit homesick. So it's good to get acquainted with my parents again and to tell them of my experiences."

Thorburn-Smith doesn't have happy memories

For Colleen Thorburn-Smith the Sydney Olympic Games were something she will always remember.

But it won't be a happy memory. What will stay with the veteran catcher with the Canadian women's softball team is the time she spent sitting on the bench.

That did not go over well with the 28-year-old Unionville resident, who became the club's starting catcher after the 1996 Atlanta games (where Canada finished fifth).

Canada's 1-7 record left it a disappointing eighth, and Thorburn-Smith caught just two games and played one inning in the outfield during the club's final outing.

In explaining her situation, Thorburn-Smith speculated there was a lack of communication between her and the pitching staff.

She cited the pitchers who believed they could get by on sheer ability to throw a ball as fast as they could past a hitter. Being a veteran performer in international games, Thorburn-Smith thought otherwise.



COLLEEN THORBURN-SMITH: Unionville resident saw limited action in softball competition.

"At this level you can't blow a fastball by a hitter. It has to have movement," she explained.

Thorburn-Smith had an inkling the Olympics weren't going to be fun when the team held a training camp just prior to the games. During camp, she detected a rift

among the players.

"I knew something was going on with the stuff I was overhearing. There was even talk among the players of bickering and knit-picking."

"You had a group who were a team and others who weren't in that group. We didn't do things together."

It was during the second-last day before the opening ceremonies took place that Thorburn-Smith received word she wouldn't be the starting catcher.

The sad part about the whole ordeal was that with the exception of two outings, Canada lost its games by one run. Thorburn-Smith thought if the problems at training camp didn't exist, the team's fortunes might have been reversed.

However, she acknowledged the overall calibre of pitching in Sydney was far superior than in the inaugural medal event in 1996.

There were stronger teams at these games and because of that there were stronger pitchers.

Thorburn-Smith believes the club's maturity level must improve if Canada hopes to have a better showing at the next Olympics.

"We had a very young team. Everybody was looking forward to playing, but some people's minds weren't on softball; they got caught up in the surroundings. That was the big thing."

When asked if she would consider taking part in a third Olympics, Thorburn-Smith asked for time to think about it.

"These Olympics have left a bad taste in my mouth. I haven't really decided yet what I'll do."

Sutton-Brown impressed by atmosphere in Sydney

Although the Canadian women's basketball team finished in 10th place in Sydney, 22-year-old Markham resident (and starting centre) Tammy Sutton-Brown said the experience was overwhelming.

"It was very exciting," the 6-foot-4 Sutton-Brown said upon returning to Rutgers University campus in Piscataway, New Jersey, where she is in her senior year. "It's something you dream about because it's one of the top competitions in the world."

As for the atmosphere, "Everything was so new...to see the whole Olympic athletes village and the opening ceremonies and the first game we played, it was incredible."

If Sutton-Brown could replay any of the events, it would definitely be her team's performance.

See TEAM, page 4

Are You at risk for eye disease?.....

You can help protect your vision! With early detection and timely treatment, vision loss can often be prevented.

Seek Regular, Thorough Eye Care. Vision changes and eye diseases can occur without symptoms. Don't lose sight of Glaucoma, Diabetic Eye Disease, Age-related Macular Degeneration, Cataracts and others.

Eat Right. Choose Vitamin-rich foods. Multi-vitamins can supplement diet.

Wear Proper Sunglasses. To guard against macular degeneration and cataracts.

Watch your medications. Drugs can affect your eyesight, causing permanent adverse effects. Keep your eye doctor informed of all your medications.

Practice Eye Safety Habits. Use safety glasses as needed for sports, work, and home renovating. Follow contact lens instructions for wearing and caring as required.

Attend to your eye symptoms promptly. Be alert for blurred or distorted vision, pain in your eyes, flashes, floaters, headaches, eye pressure, double vision or anything else that is unusual. Seek eye care without delay.

Dr. H.H. Walji (Hons. BSc, MSc, OD, FIOS) Optometrist 471-EYES (3937), 6633 Highway #7, Markham

Website: www.DrWalji.com Email: DrWalji@DrWalji.com

