



QUEBEC 1950 – 1975 (THEME #7) (10/05/2021)

For a long time handball has been known as an outdoor sport. The desire of many to play all year long required the construction of new indoor facilities. Let's take a closer look at the development of these new installations and their impact on the rise of handball in the Province of Quebec.

I MONTREAL

It was during the 1950-1975 period that the YMCAs made handball history with new interior 4-wall courts. The main sites of activity were the Central YMCA, Drummond Street (1912, a court with dimensions of 40'x20'x36'), the NDG YMCA, Hampton Avenue in Notre-Dame-De-Grace (1940, two courts with regulatory dimensions *), the Snowdon YMHA, Westbury Street (1910, two courts with regulatory dimensions * with new facilities in 1950), the MAAA (cf. B), Peel Avenue (1905, only one court with dimensions of 60'x30' as in Ireland. After 1960, another court with regulatory dimensions * will be added) and the Palestre nationale (cf. A), Cherrier Street (1919, a court with dimensions of 36'x20'x36'). Yes at the Palestre there were 36 feet high ceiling shots!

** Court of regular dimensions are 40 feet long x 20 feet wide x 20 feet high.*

A local league, organized by Normand Prescott, hosted the majority of the best players of the time. John Saddler was its first director and Robert Robitaille took over later. This league allowed athletes from different clubs to compete against each other on a regular basis. Sandy Rassenti, Lucien Soucy, Marcel Ponton, Yves Dubé, Gordie Pearce, Gilles Lambin, John Saddler, Lew Fishman, Harry Biskin, Morris Hoffman, France Moquin competed in this league and a few years later, Eddie Khalil, Julio Maione, Bob Dillon, Alex Kowaluk, Ben Joffe, Barrie Gemmel and Felix Tylender joined them.

The majority of French-speaking players played at the legendary Palestre Nationale and at the YMCA on Drummond Street. At the Palestre, even if the players were practicing on a non-regulatory court, great talents were born: Gérard Caya, Réjean Viens, Michel "King" Lévesque, André Lortie, Jacques Corneau, the brothers Gilles and André Lambin, Maurice Hinton, Robert "Bob" Robitaille, as well as brothers Yvon and Serge Fortin.

From the Central YMCA, the good competitors were Alphonse Brisindi, Georges Robillard as well as Richard Vandal and Guy Vigneault, doubles team, provincial champion on several occasions.

The new facilities of the period attracted players from very different social backgrounds. Thus, a doctor, a firefighter, a journalist, a worker, a wrestler or a student could compete on the field and socialize after a match. The players have been aiming first for victory, regardless of social class, and this, respecting the rules as much as possible. The courts were occupied almost 100% of the time in the 1950s and 1960s.

A) LA PALESTRE NATIONALE:

At the turn of the 20th century, the idea that sport can contribute to the strength of a nation gained ground in Canada. Faced with Anglophones, Francophones demand their own sports facilities, and this is how the Palestre Nationale project was born.

"In 1918, we wanted to develop a French-Canadian ideal, a new man, a new woman," explains historian Jean-François Nadeau of the newspaper Le Devoir. Louis-Adolphe Caron is piloting the Palestre Nationale project. After the purchase of a land on Cherrier Street in Montreal, at a cost of \$ 75,000 (the equivalent of approximately one million Dollars today), the center was opened to the public on January 18, 1919. It was equipped with a gymnasium, a swimming pool, billiard rooms, bowling alleys and one handball court. Access to the facilities is opened for all, but the practice of sport is recreational for women and competitive for men. La Palestre would later become the Paul Sauvé Center.

Marcel Ponton mentions that "in 1946, it cost me \$ 8.00 per year for a membership card, which gave me the right to participate in all the sports that were practiced there, some of which were under the direction of high-quality instructors."

B) THE MAAA CLUB:

Originally, the Montreal Association of Amateur Athletes brought together English-speaking athletes practicing many disciplines. Several Olympic champions were members of this club. We even note that the MAAA amateur hockey team won the 1st Stanley Cup in hockey history in 1893 and the Grey Cup in football in 1931. In addition to Ray Lafrance, Jim Barrière, Tony Fagnoli, Adrien Berthiaume and David Pickrell, the MAAA brought together professional football players like Sam Etcheverry, Brian Marcil, Skip Eaman, Gino Beretta, Peter Dalla Riva and Ed Brennan. Needless to say, they occupied a lot of room on the court. The committee led by the legendary Sam Etcheverry made a huge success of the 1987 Canadian Championship at Club Dorval with more than 400 participants. The banquets for the last Canadian Championships were also held at the MAAA.

C) THE COMPETITOR - TRAVELER

There were few players competing away from home in those years but we are fortunate to have some memories from Marcel Ponton. In 1964, he played in St. Louis, Missouri for the 1st time in the 4-Walls US Open Championships (USHA). He was 32 years old at the time. In doubles, Dr. Gabriel "Gab" Coallier was his partner. Mickey Unroth of Toronto also participated in this tournament. All three were eliminated in the 1st rounds and Jimmy Jacobs won the title. In 1965, another attempt was made at the US Open held at the Austin University (Texas). Marcel then lost in the third round. In doubles, with a partner suggested by Stuffy Singer, they won two rounds before losing to the eventual tournament winners Marty Decatur and Jimmy Jacobs. A few years later, with Harold McClean of Toronto as a partner, he won a tournament held in Niagara Falls (U.S.A.).

Marcel has also played in Open Canadian Championships held in Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver. Since 2009, he has been a member of the Hall Of Fame of the Canadian Handball Association and his track record is indicative of the athlete he has been: 12 times Quebec champion in Open Singles, 10 times Quebec champion in Doubles Open with André Lortie as his partner and Canadian champion in the Masters Open Singles bracket in 1979 against Dinty Moor.

II QUEBEC CITY

In Quebec, several players including Henri Roberge, Roch Drouin and Denis Cormier started their careers at the YMCA (1946 on René-Lévesque Boulevard, formerly Saint-Cyrille Boulevard). Only one non-regulatory court, on a theater stage, was available (the right wall, made of wood, was removable to make room for shows).

The Académie de Québec was founded in 1862 under the name of Quebec Commercial Academy. In 1960, it has been moved from Quebec City to settle on a new campus which became the Cegep de Sainte-Foy (1967). Four non-regulatory courts are occupied by students and also by players from outside the Cegep. Note that the handball was part of the Cegep's physical education program and that teachers André Arsenault, Roger Deslauriers and Jean Rioux were behind a breeding ground for new players. Small formats and low ceilings have greatly influenced the style of the Quebec players: "serve and kill" was the strategy to survive in these courts.

Then in 1971 came the PEPS of Laval University with its 4 regulatory fields, one of which was to be equipped a few years later with a glass wall on the right side. The PEPS was recognized at the time as one of the largest sports complexes in Canada. Paul W. Desruisseaux, Jean "Jos" Vaillancourt, Jean Rioux, Pierre Morin, Jean Pesenti, Marc Lalande, Gerry Arbour, Jean Santerre, Raymond Morin, Denis Laberge, Gilbert and Gaston Labbé, and Laurent Aubin were the kings of the court.

It was at the PEPS that the Canadian Handball Championships were presented in 1973 for the first time in Quebec City. The presentation of this tournament aroused the interest of many newcomers and motivated many players to participate in Provincial, Canadian and American competitions. The winner was Fred Lewis over Toronto's Don Warnholtz who himself defeated Barry Leech for the Canada Closed Final.

Michel Fillion, Denis Cogger, Robert Lalande, Robert Crispo, Pierre Bélanger, Gilbert Barbeau, Gervais Soucy, Gilles Pelletier, Guy Laverdière, Thomas Carrier, Michel Saillant, Jean-François Duchaine, Jacques Mercier and others joined the elite group already in place.

This motivation has also led players to get involved in promoting their sport, even investing in new facilities. The Du Vallon Club founded in 1977 (Paul Villeneuve, Conrad Gagné, Raymond Morin, Raymond Roy, André Gravel, Denys Larose, Gilbert and Gaston Labbé were shareholders), the Neufchatel club in 1979 with Donald Côté and Alain Pélissier; the Lebourgneuf Club (1979) with the collaboration of Marcel Jamet as manager helped to develop a third wave of young wolves who would mark the local, national and international scene, as much for men than for women.

The period 1950-1975 thus saw handball gain in popularity and with, at the same time, the rise of the paddle ball sport which became racquetball, caused the construction of multiple private clubs equipped with modern facilities. On the spectator side, the glass courts also helped attract more attendance at matches.

The cavemen of yesterday could finally be able to demonstrate their talent in the open light. We will see the impacts in a subsequent capsule covering the golden years of handball in the province.

ADD-ONS TO THEMES #4 et #6

To put an end to the great rivalry between Paul Haber and Jimmy Jacobs, read this Sports Illustrated article dated July 31, 1967:

[Showdown on 92nd Street - Sports Illustrated Vault | SI.com](#)

Handball was part of the astronaut training program. An interesting Irish Times article to read on this topic (thanks to the USHA):

[Shooting for the stars: the Nasa astronauts with handball in their orbit \(irishtimes.com\)](#)



Quebec City Seminary 1899

In an article in Le Soleil dated January 21, 1988 we can read that "the leaders of Laval University, members of the Catholic clergy, do not have the same conception of sport as the Anglo-Canadians of the McGill University: sport is at the most a diversion, a distraction, it is not then considered as a means of education and training by the French-Canadian university and school leaders who are Catholics".

Thanks to: Kathleen Bédard, Denis Laberge, Brian Goto, Mike Wilson, Rob Rachoche, Skip Smiley, Marie-Michèle Trudel, USHA, Jean-François Nadeau (Le Devoir), André Bélanger (Université Laval) and to the special collaboration of Marcel Ponton and Maxime Pélissier.

Next theme: The Quebec-Open Tournament

We will see in this theme how Marcel Ponton, at 43 years old, performed in 1975 at the first presentation of the Quebec Open tournament in which high-caliber players have participated.

VIDEO AND PHOTOS SECTION



Sandy Rassenti, Lucien Soucy,
Marcel Ponton, John Saddler



Marcel Ponton and Alphonse Brisindi, 1975

image/421001524

The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec, Canada)

Handball Prelims In Y.M.H.A. Meet

Favorite France Moquin pulled a leg muscle in one of the preliminary matches of the Province of Quebec Doubles Handball Tournament last night and dampened his chances of entering into the Thursday's finals at Snowdon YMHA.

The injury did not stop him from combining with Bernard Dubost to defeat A. Nedelman and Ian Borenstein 31-13.

In other matches, Frank and Jack Engleberg defeated George Brown and Lou Nason 31-13; James Asimakopulus and Jack Bradley beat Lou Segal and Jack Miller 31-10; Jean Duchesne and Paul Desormiers defeated Lou Fishman and Harry Briskin 31-23, and Marcel Magnan and Normand Quintel beat C. McLeod and Jack Dudley 31-23.

Lakeshore Larks Meeting Tonight

while br provided outbreak

Early Birds

Lucky ed the ge to make For from day foren ideal, br vailing fo the temp average. fortune of self who day morn some new range of past twent Alexis de

Ray Bonne

A chap v indeed and and wildli ever he go known cha country. H man and making his most rece He is we people in

rs.com. All Rights Reserved.

image/421040243

The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec, Canada)

DOLBEAU, Que — (P) —

Verdun Maple Leafs, champions of the Metropolitan Junior Hockey League, defeated Dolbeau Beavers 5-1 Sunday to even their best-of-five provincial junior hockey semi-

Ponton, Pearce Meet In Finals

Marcel Ponton of Palestre Nationale and Gord Pearce of Central "Y" won their semi-final matches in the Provincial handball championships during the weekend and will meet tonight, seven o'clock, in the finals at NDG "Y".

Ponton defeated John Saddler of NDG "Y", 21-7, 21-11, and Pearce downed Alex Kowaluk of YMHA, 21-9, 20-21, 21-12.

fin

Va

of th

a 3

per

V

ly

Con

Lar

Ren

chi

Bru

with

per

M

klin

Lea

shot

D

Sag

glot

5-2

Q

for

s.com. All Rights Reserved.

The Gazette, May 25th 1960

The Gazette, March 20th 1967

At the time, we didn't have the technology, the WPH or USHA specialists to film the events. We therefore thank the amateurs who provide us with these unique visual memories. Let's have a look to the Ben Joffe vs Felix Tylander match, Côte-de-Liesse Club, circa 1970 (no color, no sound, but good weekly handball).

<https://youtu.be/BNPSbjqFOJl>