



## **QUEBEC OPEN TOURNAMENT (THEME 8)**

(2021/05/17)

Alain Pélissier and Donald Côté started playing handball in 1971 with the opening of the Pavilion of Physical Education and Sports at Laval University (PEPS). Learning the game was a challenge because there was no coaching structure around. On the other hand, new followers received tips from experienced and available players such as Jean Pesenti and Gilbert Labbé.

Taking the bull by the horns to advance in a sport they love, Pélissier and Côté therefore registered for as many tournaments as their jobs allow them to, even if the competitions were then offered only in the *Open* format. The losers were required to referee the following matches, so they became specialists in rules, technical aspects and various strategies used by experienced players.

Along with their travels, Pélissier and Côté decide to share their new knowledge with the Quebec players. Thus was born the Quebec Open Tournament which has had 10 editions divided into two periods: 1975-1979 and 1985-1990. The Quebec handballers jumped in the project and, thanks to the collaboration of volunteers, sponsors and the enthusiasm of the players, the tournament became a great success.

For the first edition (1975), the PEPS mainly received Canadian players. Marcel Ponton, 43 years old, won the final against Alphonse Brisindi then the Quebec provincial champion. Benefiting from the new glass court sponsored by the Quebec Handball Federation, numerous spectators were able to have a clear view of the talent of the competitors. The following years, the tournament was being held at the Du Vallon, Lebourgneuf and Sani-Sport clubs.

Already in 1976, the tournament really justifies the name *Open*. Joe DeBella, Ken Ayube, Charlie Kalil, Merv Deckert, John Sabo, John Bike and others will come afterwards from the United States and provinces of Canada to compete.

In 1977 a Masters Singles bracket was added and in 1979 Men "B" and "C" joined the group. In the 80s the Junior, Senior, Golden Masters, Men Doubles and Women Singles brackets have been added.

The quality of the Women Singles group is very high because, in addition to Kathleen Bédard, we see Nancy Molter, Anna Engele, Lisa Fraser, Diane Vallée, Lavonah Muloin, Lucie Marcoux and others offering matches of international caliber.

Pélissier and Côté's goal of improving the game for Quebecers was reached with these 2 achievements: Kathleen Bédard winning the Women Singles in 1985 and Danny Bell doing the same in the Men Singles in 1987.

By consulting the list of champions and finalists presented at the end of this document, we realize that the Quebec Open Tournament was very popular among top players coming from the East of the United States, the Maritimes, Ontario, Manitoba and Quebec: Merv Deckert left his mark with 6 finals (3 wins and 3 as finalist) and Kathleen Bédard has done the same with 4 wins. John Sabo Jr., John Bike Jr., Ken Ayube and Danny Bell would later participate on a regular basis in the Spalding-Gatorade Pro Tour.

Future stars have already performed among the juniors: Jeff Cottam, Chris Jennings, Grant Jennings, Rob Pearce, Donald Kearney. Four female players became world champions in addition to being inducted to the Canadian or American Halls of Fame (Lisa Fraser-Gilmore, Lavonah Muloin-Madden, Anna Engele and Kathleen Bédard).

The tournament confirmed the talent of some Quebec masters: Sandy Rassenti, Ben Joffe, Alec Shaffer, George Robillard, Lee Hardy, André Léveillé.

Various Canadians went through several rounds of the tournament and brought back home some trophies: Brian Goto, Rick Jackiw, Chris Jennings, John Philips, Jeff Cottam and John Friesen.

One of the finals that people are still talking about is the one won by Merv Deckert over John Sabo in 1978 at the Du Vallon club: spectacular and emotional. The suspense was maintained until the end of the tiebreaker.

Twice the organization of the Quebec Open benefited from the presence of professional players in parallel to the tournament: in 1978 at the Du Vallon Club Naty Alvarado in exhibition matches had dominated Terry Muck and Brewer Kitching. In 1988 Jim Barrière and Eddie Brennan convinced the USHA authorities to present a pro stop of the Spalding-Gatorade Pro Tour at the Sani-Sport club in Brossard. The two accomplices, the previous year, had won the bid, with the support of some professional players, against the representatives of the City of Denver (Colorado).

Strong friendships have developed during the different editions of the tournament which led to players teaming up and distinguishing themselves in doubles: Danny Bell and Merv Deckert reached the World Cup final in 1997, Charlie Kalil and Danny Bell won the US Open (1989), Charlie Kalil and Donald Côté won the Vermont Open twice, Charlie Kalil and Denis Gingras won the Manitoba Open (1990), Brian Goto and Donald Côté won the Hamilton Open, Saskatchewan Open, Rick Jackiw and Donald Côté won a Canadian title. The same goes for women with Kathleen Bédard and Lisa Fraser-Gilmore world champions (1988) and Lavonah Muloin-Madden and Lisa Fraser-Gilmore became US Open champions.

Regional, provincial and Canadian handball championships opened the door to competition, but the Quebec Open Tournament allowed players from Quebec to broaden their knowledge of the game by increasing their experience and their confidence to win major championships.

## **Next Theme: Women and handball**

As a image is worth a thousand words, now let's have a look at some pictures from the past as well as a never-seen-before short film.

## VIDEO AND PICTURES SECTION



1976 Alain Pélissier, Joe DeBella, Marcel Ponton 1978 Naty Alvarado, Terry Muck



1976 André "Frenchie" Fortier, Richard Vandal, Merv Deckert, Raymond Morin, Joe DeBella, Alain Pélissier, Jerry Yee, Donald Côté, Barry Leech



1977 Alain Pélissier, Joël Bonneau, Sandy Rassenti, Ken Ayube, John Sabo, Merv Deckert, Donald Côté



1978 Conrad Gagné, Alec Schaffer, Ben Joffe, Ken Ayube, Terry Muck, Alain Pélissier, Naty Alvarado Sr., Donald Côté, Merv Deckert, Gérard Caya, Robert Laarhoven.



1990 John Bike, Ken Ayube, Danny Bell, Charlie Kalil    Alain Pélissier, John Philips, Brian Goto

It is with great pleasure that, by chance, we found a short film shot by René Provençal in 1976 and showing us little moments of players of the time. You will see Joe DeBella, Merv Deckert, Jerry Yee, Gérard Caya, Gerry Kitner, Barry Leech, Marcel Ponton and even Pierre Morin and Donald Côté. The film (no sound) has suffered the ravages of time but the souvenirs, fortunately, have remained intact.

<https://youtu.be/7mXE7F-wYuA>



D. Côté, Ken Ayube, René Provençal,  
A. Pélissier 1979



Nancy Molter, Kathleen Bédard 1985

**Thanks to :** Kathleen Bédard, Marie-Michèle Trudel, and special collaboration of Maxime Pélissier.

Many players have contributed to making the Québec-Open tournament a memorable success. We would like to present the list of those who have reached the finals over the years.

<b>1975</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	Marcel Ponton	Alphonse Brisindi

<b>1976</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	Joe DeBella	Merv Deckert

<b>1977</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	Ken Ayube	John Sabo Jr.
Masters Singles	Sandy Rassenti	Georges Robillard

<b>1978</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	Merv Deckert	John Sabo Jr.
Masters Singles	Georges Robillard	Sandy Rassenti

<b>1979</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	Ken Ayube	Merv Deckert
Masters Singles	Ben Joffe	Sandy Rassenti
Men B Singles	Robert Laarhoven	Jim Ackerson
Men C Singles	Kevin Murphy	Conrad Gagné

<b>1985</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	Charlie Kalil	Ken Ayube
Women Open Singles	Kathleen Bédard	Nancy Molter
Masters Singles	Alphonse Brisindi	André Léveillé
Golden Masters Singles	Ritchie Robinson	Tony Tavilla
Men B Singles	Jeff Cottam	Jean-François Duhaîne
Men C Singles	Christian Grommaire	Michel Delisle
Juniors 19 and under	Jeff Cottam	Barry Glass

<b>1986</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	Merv Deckert	Charlie Kalil
Women Open Singles	Nancy Molter	Jery-Lynn Wagner
Men Senior Singles	Brian Goto	Gérard Caya
Masters Singles	Brian Goto	André Léveillé
Golden Masters Singles	John Bike Sr.	Ritchie Robinson
Men B Singles	Chris Jennings	Barry Glass
Men C Singles	Dan Suter	Mike Coakley
Juniors 19 and under	Jeff Cottam	Rob Pearse
Juniors 16 and under	Jeff Cottam	Donald Kearney

<b>1987</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	Danny Bell	Merv Deckert
Women Open Singles	Kathleen Bédard	Lucie Marcoux
Men Senior Singles	Brian Goto	Tom Malet
Masters Singles	John Friesen	Terry Nolan
Golden Masters Singles	Vince Gabriel	Morris Hoffman
Femmes Classe B	Cécile Rhainds	Colleen Deckert
Men B Singles	François Bilodeau	Roch Drouin
Men C Singles	Jean-François Légaré	Mario Couture
Juniors 19 and under	Chris Jennings	Michel Audet
Juniors 16 and under	Grant Jennings	François Rioux

<b>1988</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	Merv Deckert	David Steinberg
Women Open Singles	Kathleen Bédard	Anna Engele
Men Senior Singles	Rick Jackiw	Alphonse Brisindi
Masters Singles	Brian Goto	Ted Pritchard
Golden Masters Singles	John Bike Sr.	Vince Gabriele
Femmes Classe B	Sherrill Zukowski	Jennifer Beverly
Men B Singles	Christian Grommaire	Michel Fontaine
Juniors 19 and under	Chris Jennings	Michel Audet
Juniors 16 and under	Mark Beverly	Jean-François Soucy

<b>1989</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	John Bike Jr.	Danny Bell
Women Singles Open	Kathleen Bédard	Lisa Fraser-Gilmore
Men Senior Singles	Gérard Caya	Rick Jackiw
Masters Singles	Brian Goto	Donald Côté
Golden Masters Singles	Alec Shaffer	Morris Hoffman
Women B Singles	Lavonah Muloin-Madden	Colleen Deckert
Men B Singles	Denis Couturier	Michel Fontaine
Men C Singles	Donald Kearney	Richard Harvey
Juniors 19 and under	Donald Kearney	Mark Beverly
Men Open Doubles	Denis Gingras/Donald Côté	Chris Jennings/Norm Voisine
Men B Doubles	Daniel Letarte/François Royer	Lee Hardy/Rick Kelly

<b>1990</b>	<b>CHAMPIONS</b>	<b>FINALISTES</b>
Men Open Singles	John Bike Jr.	
Women Open Singles	Lisa Fraser-Gilmore	
Men Open Doubles	Pierre Morin/Jean Rioux	Denis Gingras/Donald Côté