



THE GOLDEN AGE 1976 – 2000 (THEME 10)

(31/05/2021)

The racquetball boom beginning in 1976 is instrumental to the construction of numerous private clubs offering plenty of new courts equipped with glass walls. Handball benefits from these new facilities, as not only experienced players play there, but they recruit followers. The visibility of the sport is total with the arrival of professional players, the organization of many national, provincial and regional tournaments and with extensive media coverage. The Côte-de-Liesse, Cavendish, Mirabel and Dorval clubs in Montreal, Val des Arbres and Tennis 13 in Laval as well as the Sani Sports and Nautilus Plus clubs in Brossard were created in these years. In Quebec, the Du Vallon, Lebourgneuf, Neufchatel and Lac-Beauport clubs had the same consequences as well as the new clubs on the South Shore of Quebec City. Clubs in Jonquière and Chicoutimi were part of the loop. The same positive impact for handball can be seen throughout North America.

In addition to the new installations, a development program for junior players is implemented by BAMQ. Coaches Donald Côté and Alain Pélissier met at CEGEP de Ste-Foy in 1973 with promising young players such as Pierre and François Desruisseaux, Danny and Michel Bell, Jean-Louis Perez, Denis and Peter Morin. Under the leadership of Pierre Desruisseaux and Danny Bell other newcomers will join this group: Mark Tremblay, Luc Gosselin and Denis Gingras. Robert Laarhoven and Shawn Massey of Montreal, under Ben Joffe, will be part of the Quebec team. The Neufchatel and Lebourgneuf clubs have made it easier for the next generation of players by providing access to their courts at advantageous rates. The presentation of the Canadian Championships and the exhibitions of the American professional circuit, as well as the Quebec-Open tournament at the PEPS and at the Club Du Vallon, have brought motivation to the new breed for competing.

The new wave was ready to hit the road across North America. Pierre Wintle Desruisseaux has brought new standards by being the first player from Quebec to win a Canadian junior championship (Edmonton, 1976) and he did it again by winning the North American Intercollegiate Championships. At the 1981 Canadian Championships in Vancouver (B.C.) Pierre won an adult open title, a first for a Quebec player: Men Open Doubles with Bob Dillon from Montreal. Passionate, Pierre even went on to perfect his game by settling for six months in California with Luc Gosselin and Gilles Cloutier, two other Quebec players.

In regards to the juniors, Jean-Louis Perez and Martin Simard also won their share of tournaments. In 1981 Martin brought the talented Irish Ducksie Walsh to

a tiebreaker during the US Junior Nationals (Phoenix, Arizona), and Jean-Louis defeated favorite Keith Gracey at the Canadian Nationals in Edmonton (1979). Not to be outdone, Danny Bell was one of the first Canadians to qualify on the US Professional Spalding- Gatorade Tour (1984). Another first, Danny is the only male Canadian to have won a title in an Open category at the US Open: he indeed earned the victory in doubles, in Chicago (Ill.) with Charlie Kalil (1989). His first world title followed with his Men Open Doubles victory with David Chapman as his partner (World Chicago, 2000).

Within the same generation, Robert Laarhoven of Montreal also has great achievements to his credit with victories at the Albany Open (1985). Note that Robert was the first Canadian player to earn a scholarship in handball at the University of Memphis (Tennessee). He was instrumental in opening the doors for other Canadian students to the American universities like Shawn Massey, Rob Pearse, Jeff Cottam, Don Cottam, Chris and Grant Jennings, and Mark Beverly. Mike Bargman, for his part, ended up at Lake Forest College in Illinois and Tyler Hamel at the University of Missouri (he was followed years later by Michael Gaulton). In fact he helped some people to realize there were great players in Canada.

It was also around this time that adult players from Quebec began to be recognized out of the province. Mario McNicoll, Gérard Caya, Jacques Corneau, Réjean Viens, Guy Vigneault, Richard Vandal, Donald Côté, Pierre Morin and Jean Rioux won titles in Vermont, New York, Albany, Ottawa, Hamilton, Ste-Catherines, Winnipeg, Regina, St-John, Vancouver, to name a few places.

At one point, Quebec's representation was so strong, in quantity and in quality, that the organization of the Vermont Open released the edition of its program in a bilingual version which has been truly appreciated by the Quebecers.

We cannot also ignore other competitors like Éric and Carl Bédard, Michel Audet, Dominique Nadeau, Pierre Châteauvert, Louis Boivin, Pierre Patenaude, Norm Kelly, Ray Lafrance, Allan Schaffer and others who proudly wore the colors of the Quebec province (see Eastern US Tournament Finalists and Champions list at the end). Among others, Éric Bédard made a name for himself at the USHA national intercollegiate tournament with a class B final and Robert Laarhoven with a victory in the same class (1980). In 1983 Michel Letarte also won the Canadian national title in the 23 and under category.

Quebec's approach was simple: create a team spirit within an individual sport.

It should be noted that the coaches of the rest of Canada were also very active in developing new players of quality. In addition to the members of the University of Memphis team, the Maritimes had Mike Stevenson, David O'Keefe, Jim Ackerson, Lawrence Crest, Jeff Yeo, Jeff and Donald Kearney, Larry Salmon, Kevin Murphy; on the Western side Kevin Kopchuck, Rob Golan, Roberto

Meneses, Jeff Wilson, Keith Gracey, Tyler Hamel, Graig Kulch, Henry Traa, Lindsay Hall, Jack Sargent, Myron Borys, Jim Forest, Trevor Huber, Dan Santha, Sean McGrath and Lonnie Homenuk and, in Ontario, Barry Glass, Brad Warren, Dan Suter, Larry Martin, Mark Philips and Ryan Bowler among others.

All these efforts showed very well when the following five Canadian players became regular players on the professional Spalding - Gatorade Tour: Danny Bell, Jeff Wilson, Roberto Meneses, Tyler Hamel and Peter Service.

The 3-wall competitions were another form of pilgrimage for our Quebecers. The St-Augustin Seminary in Scarborough (Ont.) (5 courts) allowed the presentation of the Canadian 3-wall championship for several years. Denis Gingras performed well in both singles and doubles and Kathleen Bédard won three Women Singles titles. Ontario's Peter Service and Chris Jennings dominated this tournament for several years. Peter and other Canadians also left their marks in Toledo (Ohio) at the USHA 3-Wall National Championship.

To explain these golden years, in addition to the availability of new clubs, we must add the involvement of qualified coaches who have taken charge of the development of a new generation of players. It should be noted that a coach is the one who recruits, develops, supervises and supports young emerging players. In this sense, the following people have done the job the right way and beyond in Canada: Ivan Elliott, Bill McGrath, Mel Brown, Stan Bargman, Mark Broverman, Stan Fisher, Brian Goto, Richard Kearney, Wayne Amminson, Alain Pélissier, Donald Côté, Ben Joffe, Dinty Moore, Doug Santha, Paul Cummings, Dave Coulter, Derek Hampton, Lavonah Muloin-Madden, Danny Bell, Pierre Desruisseaux, Jack Enns, Shane Vigen, Skip Smiley and Rick Mooney.

We must not forget the importance of the level of quality of the referees since the performance of the players is dependant to it. The period 1976-2000 was rich in refereeing activities. It was during this period that Mac Horsburgh, Guy Vigneault, Donald Côté, Bob Meyer, Ivan Elliott and Brian Goto worked to set up structures aimed at the development and certification of Canadian referees (clinics, establishment of a committee of referees, etc.). A seeding committee for the Nationals was set up too and is still active, thanks to Ivan Elliott.

Locally, the support of the written and spoken press, particularly the Journal de Québec (Dorik Moisan, Robert Jutras) and Le Soleil (Roland Sabourin, Jacques Arteau), drew a lot of attention towards handball.

On the provincial side, we must underline the support given by Michel Foster, full-time employee of BAMQ, assisted by the active return of Alain Pélissier to handball. Together, administratively and financially, they have ensured the viability of our sport. Alain's work was recognized by the Canadian Handball Association when he was inducted into the Hall of Fame as a builder in 2012.

Sponsors also have played a major role in the establishment of special events. Jim Barriere, Eddie Brennan, Skip Eaman, SSQ Insurance and later John Cammett are part of this essential group.

On the Canadian side, it must be remembered that Don Brownell, Robert Pruden and Stan Fisher have activated federal budgets which financed for each provincial association the sending of representatives at the national championships: an administrative representative, a referee, elite male and female players, a coach and a junior representative as well as a doubles team. It was an encouraging approach for the development of our sport.

The arrival of new facilities, the recruitment of new players, the development in the schools, the support of private sponsors and governments, the promotion in the medias, the presence of competent coaches and the involvement of volunteers in setting up events and tournaments have contributed to the growth of handball and the achievements of our athletes. We will see in theme # 12 that this effective recipe sustains great results with a long term vision.

NEXT THEME (#11): PROS ET EXHIBITIONS

Thanks to: Maxime Pélissier (special collaboration), Skip Smiley, Merv Deckert, Richard Kearney, Kathleen Bédard and Marie-Michèle Trudel.

PICTURES SECTION



Danny Bell, Jean-Louis Perez,
Denis Morin, Pierre Desruisseaux - 1974



Danny Bell, Jeff Wilson, Keith Gracey,
Denis Gingras 1988, Edmonton (Alta.)



Back from Vancouver (B.C.) 1981 : Pierre Desruisseaux, Jean Rioux,
Pierre Morin, Jean-Louis Perez, Kathleen Bédard, Sylvain Bédard and Martin Simard.



Bell, Desruisseaux, Pérez, Rioux,
Morin, Bédard and Côté



The road warriors with an average of 3
tournaments per month. Bell, Gingras,
Côté, Desruisseaux – 1982.

Below : 3-walls Scarborough (Ont.)
Denis Gingras, Scott Allison 1984
Top right: Richard Vandal (1979)
Down right: Mario McNicoll



VIDEO SECTION

Digging in the attic some unique videos have been found and they cover some great matches from the past even if for some they have been filmed by non-professionals:

1. Atlantic Open (1983): we can see in action Jeff Yeo, Larry Salmon, Lawrence Cress, the Kearneys, Bob Madden, Lavonah Muloin-Madden, Wayne Amminson, Rick Daniels, Steve Appleby and from Quebec City Alain Pélissier, Kathleen Bédard, Donald Côté and Denis Gingras. (filmed by Richard Kearney).

<https://youtu.be/M1QTXKTD3K0>

<https://youtu.be/5GEZ0TTA2Gs>

2. Canadian championships (Ontario, 1990) Men Open Singles: nice final between Danny Bell and Jeff Wilson on local television.

<https://youtu.be/QhuEVHMS9uU>

3. US Open (1989), Men Open Doubles final with Danny Bell/Charlie Kalil versus the Dunn brothers from San Francisco (California) at the Charlie Club (Chicago, Illinois).

<https://youtu.be/WP4NRyDZ0OQ>

4. During the 80s each country had to qualify its representatives to participate in the World Championships. The Open formula was not in place then. So here's the final match for the qualification of the Canadian Open Doubles team to represent Canada in Kelowna (B.C.) at the 1986 World. Robert Laarhoven and Jacques Corneau (Qc), Nationals defending doubles champions, against John Philips and Mario Fisico (Ont.). Intense match with a dramatic ending (1985).

<https://youtu.be/a84nnAIL1t8>

ADD-ON TO THEME #8 : QUEBEC-OPEN TOURNAMENT



Quebec-Open 1975 – Donald Côté, Gilbert Labbé, Marcel Ponton, Alain Pélissier, Alphonse Brisindi, Allan Wade

ADD-ON TO THEME #5 : AUSTRALIA AND CANADA

Souvenirs - Skip Smiley (member of the Canadian Hall-Of-Fame)

In 1969 I, with my family of 4, moved to Edmonton (Alta.) from Kitchener (Ont.). I was always a YMCA rat playing all the sports at the Y. I got to be a good hockey player and a football player. When playing football, I had a coach who learned the game of handball while at College in the USA. Had some coaching come from Toronto, from an Irish police officer....that got me going. The 1st place in Edmonton I went to was the YMCA. There were 2 courts. I decided to practice my handball skills there, and an older Jewish gentleman suggested maybe we could get in a game: final score 21-3, and not for me. The YMCA was ripe with Jewish, Ukrainian, Polish, and farm boys, all playing handball. There was always a line-up to play.

The 1970-1980 years came along. There were guys playing paddle ball at a West End Y. I went over and had them all playing handball with used balls, gloves and no eye guards. Courts began to open up everywhere and many new courts were available: Royal Glenora Club (4), University of Alberta (8), Quenelle Club (4), Capilano Courts (8), Sport Connection (8), NAIT (6), Grant MacQueen School (5), Riverbend Club (8), Sherwood Park Club (6). Around this time there were over 180-200 handball players and racquetball came along with another 3--50 players who were converted to play handball.

From 1970-2021 there were 18 Canadian National Championships played in Edmonton, and 1 World Handball Championships (2006) as well with 1 more World's played in Calgary (2015).

During this period there have been over 320-500 Junior handballers ranging from 8 years to 21 years old learning the game at the Public Schools, YMCA, Riverbend Club, Capilano Club and Sherwood Park Club. The University of Alberta have had Handball Clinics for the past years for students.
2010-2021 There has been the demise of Handball Courts from 125 to 200 due to potential to earn capital for other activities.

In closing 4-WALLS/ 1 WALL/ WALL BALL/ ANY WALL!! will only stay alive as long as we have COURTS/ANY COURTS to play on, and the YOUTH TO KEEP OUR GAME 'ALIVE'!! **"LIVE LONGER / PLAY HANDBALL"**

Edmonton, Alberta, May 2021

Tournaments – Eastern part of the USA (albanyhandball.com)

Every year October and November were launching the competition season for the Quebecers going down to the USA (Vermont Open and Albany Open). Great hospitality from the local people. These tournaments were used to measure the evolution of the Quebec caliber because the players could compete there with the cream of the East Coast players. Below are some achievements of the Quebecers in Albany.

Kathleen Bédard: Finalist Women Open Singles (1984), champion Women Open Singles (1985)

Danny Bell: Finalist Men Open Singles (2004), champion Men Masters Singles (2015), champion Men Open Singles (2019)

Joseph Berthiaume: Finalist Men B Singles (2013)

Frédéric Blouin : Champion Men B Singles (2001)

Laurent Couture : Champion Men Super Masters Singles (2017)

Michel Fontaine : Champion Men C Singles (1985)

Denis Gingras: Finalist Men Open Singles (2003), finalist Men Masters Singles (2001), Champion Golden Masters Singles (2019)

Lucie Joyal: Finalist Women Open Singles (1983)

Robert Laarhoven: Finalist Men Open Singles (1984), champion Men Open Singles (1985)

Michel Letarte : Champion Men B Singles (1987)

Stéphane Mélançon: Finalist Men B Singles (2016)

Pierre Morin: Champion Men Super Masters Singles (2007 et 2008)

Mathieu Pelletier: Finalist Men B Doubles (2014)

Jérôme Santerre: Finalist Junior Singles 19 and under (2010), finalist Men Open Doubles (2018)

Benat Urrutia: Finalist Men B Singles (2017)

The Quebecers developed a solid tradition in doubles and the results reflect that:

1982: Champions Men Open Doubles – Jacques Corneau and Mario McNicoll

1983: Finalists Men Open Doubles – Pierre Morin and Jean Rioux

1984: Champions Men Open Doubles – Pierre Morin and Jean Rioux

1985: Finalists Men Open Doubles - Gérard Caya and Donald Côté

1986: Finalists Men Open Doubles – Charlie Kalil and Danny Bell

1987: Finalists Men B Doubles B : Luc Gosselin and Michel Letarte

1987: Champions Men Senior Doubles: Jean-François Duhaîne and Michel Saillant

1994: Finalists Men Open Doubles : Charlie Kalil and Donald Côté

2009: Champions Men C Doubles: Frédéric Morin and Raphaël Santerre

2016: Finalists Men C Doubles: Guillaume Chouinard and Samuel Richer

Vermont Open/champions Mario McNicoll, Kathleen Bédard, Danny Bell in Singles and Donald Côté in Doubles with Charlie Kalil and Michel Audet

In New York City (Big Apple Open and NYAC Open): great performances of Pierre Desruisseaux, Danny Bell, Laurent Couture and the Pierre Morin-Jean Rioux team.