

① Sports For the Love of It. (C. Budner)

- Sports among Finns has a long tradition, going back many generations to ancient games and competitions.
- Throughout Finland interest in athletic activities have been a concern of the whole nation, where financial support from public funds made it possible for communities and organizations to build hundreds of sports fields and training establishments, throughout the country.
- The participation level for men and women ranged from recreational fitness programmes up to highly developed training of international caliber athletes -

The remarkable achievements of two famous long distance runners, Hannes Kolehmainen and Paavo Nurmi

(1) cont.

were among ~~numerous~~ athletes, who
made Finland known & respected
in Olympic and ~~other~~ international
sports events, all over the world

②

The awareness of physical fitness as a part of everyday living, with ideals such as "A Healthy Body promotes a Healthy Mind", had been handed down through the years. This philosophy was brought with the immigrants who came from ~~Fennland~~ Finland to North America, seeking opportunities for work and a better life during the late 1800's and early 1900's, as a result of political and religious oppression under the domination of either Sweden or Russia for many centuries.

Canada was among the countries promoting work and generous land grants to those interested in coming to vast but sparsely settled regions.

Northern Ontario was the centre of a great deal of development during this time.

(2-cont)

- With expanding railroads, the opening of the pulp and paper industry, the construction of huge grain elevators, and mining of various minerals in the area. The building of huge dams of Electric power were major influence on employment for tradesmen and women including hotel and restaurant owners, merchants, tailors, cooks and domestics. Finnish immigrant quickly gained the reputation of being dependable, hard workers.

(3) The first arrival of Finnish Immigrants to the Thunder Bay came by way of the United States in 1876. This was the "Erkkilä" family, who opened up a hotel, in Port Arthur. Other families and many single people soon followed, coming by ship or train. There were 1644 recorded Finns in Port Arthur and Fort William by 1911.

Although working hours were long and hard, those Finns who had come from close-knit communities, with strong religious and cultural affiliations, soon felt the desire to enrich their new lifestyle with some of their religious and ethnic culture.

Church ~~congregations~~ congregations were formed, taking part in family homes or in other local churches, with the benefit of visiting ministers from Duluth, until dedicated parishioners were able to build their own church.

(3) - cont. -

Those who felt strongly that facilities for ~~social~~, cultural & sports activities should also be an integral part of community organized groups, to build halls to meet these needs. The early Finns did not - push themselves into the social life of the community at large, but generally associated with other Finns, who had similar backgrounds and interest. Even in this new country, they were frequently divided into separate Religious, cultural and political groups, seldom involved with other groups except for work or business.

However, sports was a part of their life that Finnish people took a keen interest in, no matter where their other affiliations lay.

(4) - Sports participation was done with dedication, not only to develop individual skills, but also to pass on the knowledge and the love of sport, to the young people in the community -

The first Finnish Athletic group in Port Arthur, was organized in 1902, under the BANNER of the IMATRA Club, and were instrumental in the construction of the First "TEMPERANCE" Hall on Dufferin St. in 1903.

The "Athletic" group was under the direction of Jussi (John) Arnio, who had some previous coaching experience in Finland.

Differences arose among the members and a second Finn Hall was built on

Wilson St. in 1904, and this Athletic group took the name of Jyry (THUNDER), with Heikki Roine, the athletic director

(5)

Plans were soon under way to build a "Finn Hall" in Fort William on Robertson St. in 1906. It was decided to call the Athletic group the "KARHU" (BEAR) "Heikki Roine" was appointed to the position of Athletic director, and was assisted by Huikko Kavenius. They both had extensive sports training in Finland, and alternated coaching between the two halls - (P.A & FT. Wm.)

In 1908, the Topa Hall burned down and the ~~Temperance~~ Hall was too small to house all the "Finnish" activities in Port Arthur, so the two groups amalgamated and put aside their differences, to build a large "community" Finn Hall, on Bay Street in Port Arthur, that could house all the "Sports", Cultural events, theatrical productions and Labour Worker's Union Meetings.

Plans were prepared and construction in 1909, under the direction of Alex Beck a well known Finnish building contractor, in the area.

(6) Labour for the construction was donated by local tradesmen, money was raised for materials by selling shares in the "FINNISH BUILDING COMP." at \$5.⁰⁰ a share

The building was completed in 1910 and was named "THE FINNISH LABOUR TEMPLE", with a huge celebration and theatrical performances.

The first full time "athletic" director at the "Labour Temple", was Otto Heino, who had competed for Finland in international wrestling competitions (receiving a bronze Medal at 1904 Olympic games)

The sports that were popular during these early years, were gymnastics, group-Rythmics for men and women, track & field events, wrestling, boxing, cross-country skiing, and swimming.

Most of the sports events were recreational, although, wrestling, track & field events, boxing and skiing were often very competitive.

(7) Some of the local wrestlers achieved Provincial and National awards.

Professional wrestling was also extremely popular with Finns competing for top standing.

All sports and social activities slowed down during the first world war (1918-20).

Following came a new wave of immigrants who started to arrive from Finland, following a bitter civil war that took place when Finland gained her independence in 1917-18.

Many of the new arrivals in Canada spurred the old ideological and political differences among members of the "Finnish Labour Temple", and again a split occurred in 1919-20.

The larger group retained the "Labour Temple Building and equipment". They changed the Athletic Club name to "NAHTUS" coached by Alphons Oja. The smaller "leftist" group was ousted from all executive positions and activities.

(8) / However, the ousted group was allowed to rent the hall on occasional basis until they found permanent facilities -

This group purchased the "closed" Finnish Newspaper "Tyakansa" Building, next door on Bay St. (in 1922) and completed renovations by 1924. The Athletic group also took a new name, calling themselves the "Isku" Club, coached by "George Saino"

