

Interview with Ray Lazdins

What event or events did you participate in?

In the Commonwealth Games, discus

How did you get started into your particular sport?

9th grade I went to Westdale, and Westdale has a lot of participation of teachers in the arts programs and all that. And there was a European guy who was an art teacher, and his name -----, he's still a teacher I think in Hamilton somewhere, and a he was recruiting people who were suitable for certain events . . . so he picked me.

How did you get selected for the Commonwealth Games?

The Commonwealth Games were not by selection, but you had to have won the national/Canadian championships.

What were the training regimes for the Games?

On a daily basis at that time, it was 6 days a week, and it was either 7 hours or 4 hours a day. So, sometimes I had 2 practices and sometimes I had 1.

What did it mean to you as an amateur event?

It added a lot of excitement compared to professional sports because it was really special times and you would go to the Games and it was once a summer if there was Games at all, because we also Olympic Games on alternating years with Commonwealth Games, so there was one year where you didn't have a major championship, but it was just tons of fun being on a big team which is not just track n' field. I saw those them all the time, all year, but the other sports – having them around was really a good experience.

What is your best memory of the games?

I had a sports career that was 12 years long, so there is a lot of muddled memories, but I can say that being on the podium and winning the gold medal was the most memorable moment, but it was also a shock because it wasn't like I was ranked or predicted to come in first at that time. There were a few other people who were ranked ahead of me and so it was fantastic feeling to beat them in the championships, and I didn't really go in there thinking realistically that I'd have a chance to win a gold medal, so, I'd say that was the most memorable experience.

But outside of the Games, there was a lot of, it was neat to be in Edinburgh because there were a lot of things going on, like almost all of the Royal family was there, and went to Garden Party at the Edinburgh Castle hosted by the Royal family, very upscale, it was a very neat experience.

What was your worst memory of the Game?

I just don't have any memories that I can say are negative.

What did it mean for you personally to represent Canada?

I kind of expected it because it didn't just happen overnight. I had a focus since I left

highschool that I would make the Canadian team someday. I made the national team the year before the Commonwealth Games, so I was already a member of the Canadian team, so I guess it was fantastic to make it the first time, I was very proud in every year, but at some point it's just not that fluid, you don't just lose your spot on the team unless you know it's coming and somebody's coming up their way and you know that they're really good. I held that spot for quite a long time and I was really lucky.

So was there a degree of pride and honour attached to that in terms of representing the country, or did you not really think of it?

At that time I don't think I was really that in tune with it, yes, there was some honour and pride but I was more focused on the sport and training. But now looking back, and seeing what I did and watching other athletes make Olympic teams and Commonwealth Games, I know what they're going through and I feel more pride then I did back then.

Were there any political/cultural issues surrounding the 1986 Games?

Were there? You know, did you read such stuff?

You don't remember any?

Do I remember any? There was . . . yeah, there was something around them - Was there a boycott?

Yeah! Good answer.

You have trick questions in here! One of my major competitors didn't come - Brad Cooper from the Bahamas...why was there a boycott, I don't remember that?

It was because of the Apartheid in South Africa.

Really...that's right. Of course South Africa wasn't part of the Commonwealth nations until like '94? We were just interested in how much the boycott impacted you in the Games. But maybe they blew it up in other places like the media and than what was being focused on in the Games.

My fast answer is that I concentrated more on the Games and the positive stuff, and the bad things like boycotts and whatever happens at the Games but they seem to fall of your memory much quicker.

Who paid for your expenses?

The National team - The Canadian National Track n' Field team pays for the time leading up to the Games, and then once you are there, I believe it's the Commonwealth Games Association that covers all of the costs. The host country has to pay a lot as well. My impression now is that there are very few number of countries that help

support the Commonwealth Games ... there are a lot of countries that get support to go to the Games. Canada, England and Australia and probably a few others are the countries that put in more money just to keep the Games alive, I bet Britain also.

Did you feel that females were treated equally?

Yeah, I also thought so. Well, I guess it depends, what do you mean by equally?

In terms of recognition, media coverage, appreciation.

Well, not being able to look at the papers here, I can't say how they were treated in our media, but definitely in the team atmosphere, everybody is treated equally... every media, every performance, is seen in the same way. Competition - I think with a very few exceptions, the competition was pretty equal, we all know that everyone has very tough competition.

Were there any affects on you regarding the boycott?

Yes, so major competitor. Probably if I was being honest, I can be honest now because it's a long time after, I think the person who would have really won the game or atleast been the most challenging competitor was boycotted.

Is that a relief to you or do you wish that they would've been there so you could compete against them?

A bit of both. In all honesty, I don't know how I would've done, but if I would've won with him there obviously it would've been even that much better. So it's hard to say. But later on in my career I met up with him in a couple competitions and he beat me in those ones. I mean, it didn't always happen that the one would beat the other every time, it could go back and forth, but he would have been a very big competitor.

How do you see the progression of the Games from 1986 until now?

I follow them a little bit. The last couple have been far away right - where have they been actually - Kuala Lumpur and then the last ones were in England. I honestly have no idea how they've changed. I know how the routines have changed but that's for the teams and that the performances keep getting better, but other than that, I don't know.

What impact did the Games had on your life?

Well, it's definitely provided a lot of really amazing memories, and I think there's probably a lot. Internally, alot of impact in that it helped build my self-esteem. You know I knew I could accomplish some pretty high things. So I never felt like there were any barriers to that, if I wanted to set my mind to something, I felt that I could it. It also made a big difference in the way people treated me. I got a lot of breaks in life

because of that because people think it's amazing, not so much the Commonwealth Games, I mean it was good, but especially the Olympic participation.- people just go crazy about that - they just can't believe that someone from their workplace went to the Olympics. And I won a Commonwealth gold medal, so I think it has done a lot for me.

Have you participated in any Commonwealth Games besides the 1986 Games?

Yes, 1986 was my first, and then 1990 I competed but got injured part way through the competition and that was in New Zealand. And then in 1994, that was when I was just kind of retiring out of my career, that was in Victoria.

How were your experiences different each time, or were they different at all?

Oh yeah, every game is really different. The one that I really should of done the best at, 1990, is when I was really coming into peak form, that was the one that I got injured at, and that was really disappointing, I mean part way through the competition I had to drop out because I was in a lot of pain, and it was difficult because the competition is only every 4 years, you just don't know when you're going to be in peak form or too early... you know, like in 1986, even though I happen to win, but I was sort of young. By the time it was 1994, I started to get really serious about graduating from school and getting a job and starting to get into grown-up life.

If you could describe your feelings about the Games in one word, what would it be?

Just the 1986 Games?

Sure.

Pride.

Did you participate in any other Games besides the Commonwealth Games?

Yes. The Olympics (1988 and 1992) twice and the World Championships which is the Olympics of the track n' field world - 4 times.

All of them were fantastic Games - just being part of the team.

One of the things I'll never forget is the parade - really something else - it's special.

Do you do anything today for fun or involvement to do with discuss/track n'field?

No, not even a bit. I have a lot of my stuff still in the basement. But it's not a sport that you kind of go and shoot around a ball. If you're not going out there to try hard it's not fun. But I do intend to get into it, I have 3 boys, so I'm sure I'm going to show them how to do it.