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Interview Summary:

Ms. Lois Wood – 1954 Vancouver, Canada Commonwealth Games Diver

We interviewed Ms. Lois Wood. She participated in the 1954 Commonwealth games in Vancouver. She was interviewed on March 27th, 2004 by Arthur Vrolyk. At the time of the interview, Ms. Wood was 73 years of age and was quite pleasant and pleased to answer all of the questions we had for her, with one exception. Included is a synopsis of some of her answers to the following questions. The answers given are not Ms. Wood's words verbatim, except where indicated by quotations. The questions asked Mrs. Wood are indicated in bold, and her answers are given subsequently.

Q: How did you get your start into diving?

A: She had always wanted to be a champion at something. Originally she wanted to be a figure skater but skaters needed a lot of money to get to an elite level. She started her swimming at Jarvis Street Collegiate. She was taught by a coach there how to do some of the basic dives. She had originally gone just for fun accompanying one of her friends. This was in 1946. She won her first junior championship in 1947.

Q: How did you get selected as a part of the Canadian Team?

A: Ms. Lois Wood went to a Diving club in Etobicoke where she was observed Ms. Edna and Dr. Howk who was the president of CADA. (Canadian Amateur Diving Association) She was then selected by this association to represent Canada at the commonwealth games

Q: What kinds of training regimes were there for the games?

A: “We just were left to train on our own at home, cause we didn’t have a coach, my husband came down and watched from the side of the pool.. . and he kind of took over as the coach.” However, Ms. Wood taught him all he knew about diving and coaching. For the two weeks prior to the games, the Canadian diving team assembled in Toronto together and trained during the week under various coaches. However, there was one coach; Dr. George Athens would come on the weekends to help with the coaching. He was the head diving coach to the team. The training was quite individualized as there were only four members of the diving team. (Ms. Lois Wood, Ms. Irene McDonald, Bernard Vallaw, and Billy Patrick)

Q: What did it mean to you as an amateur event?

A: Ms. Woods recalls some very stringent rules the classification of ‘amateur’ in those days. She read us a statement she signed stating the following. “Lois Wood has been granted permission to give a diving exhibition, as long as she turns over all expense money, and her remuneration or gift she is given. And this was in 1957.”

Ms. Wood also spent some time commenting on how it was a sacrifice in those days to remain as an amateur. It cost her about \$1000 a year in expenses such as coaches and travel expenses just to compete in these events. For her, competing was an honor and worth the sacrifices she made.

Q: How did you travel to the games?

A: Ms. Wood spoke extensively about many of the meets she competed in across North America. Her philosophy was that as long as a car could get there, that is how she would. She mentioned a 1 meter springboard championship in Winnipeg that she drove to with a diving board strapped to the roof of her car and a baby in the back seat. When asked

about the games in Vancouver, she told us that she took the train along with other Canadian commonwealth athletes. A train was sent across Canada from East to west picked up athletes in each major city along the way with its final destination being Vancouver. Many of the swimmers were placed together in the same cars.

Q: What was your favorite memory of the games in Vancouver?

A: Her favorite memory was seeing Roger Banister & John Landley run the 4 minute mile. This was interesting to her because they lived in the village along with all of the other athletes and there was a personal connection to them. She also enjoyed seeing Peters winning the marathon. However, she continued to tell us how he had won without ever finishing the race. However in reality, he in fact did not place because he did not finish the race.

Q: What was your worst memory of the games?

A: The first day of practice when Dr. Athens had been there for training, Lois went to the 10 meter platform. At this point she had done no previous training at any higher than the 3 meter springboard. She was instructed by her coach to do a jack knife at 10 meters exactly as she would at 3 meters. She did this and proceeded to over rotate and land flat on her back from a height of 10 meters. This knocked the wind out of her. "I never got rid of that, that sight in my mind. It was always the impression in my mind. So I never did Jack knives after that."

Q: What did it mean to represent your country?

A: "It was the most wonderful thing. I never thought I would make because Irene was the Canadian Champion." It was also important for her because it was the first time her mom

and dad ever came to see her compete. She also was quite enthralled knowing that prince Phillip was present at the games. This added to her nervousness at the time as well.

Q: Were there any political /cultural issues you remembered surrounding the games?

A: Ms. Wood recalled an issue with one of her teammate's amateur status. She remarked that this may not be cultural, but it may be political in terms of amateurism classification. Her teammate Jackie McDonald who competed in the shot put and the javelin was photographed holding an Orange Crush beverage. This photograph was later used in an advertisement by the company. She was not paid for this photograph. However, she was disqualified from the shot put before this issue was dealt with. She was cleared in time however to compete in the javelin.

Q: Who paid for what?

A: All of the athletes had to pay for everything themselves. However, some of the athletes, specifically the divers did some fundraising of their own to support some of the travel expenses. This however was left to the athletes to organize and no help was offered by any organization.

Q: Were females treated equally?

A: Ms. Wood offered an interesting answer to these questions. She refused to comment on this question, although she did it very politely. She did however remark that "it was just so terrible."

Q: What do you know about the history of the games?

A: She knew that the 1954 Commonwealth games were called the fifth British Empire Games. Other than that, she said “I guess I don’t really know too much about the history of them.”

Q: How do you view the progression of the commonwealth games?

A: Ms. Wood attending the 1994 games in Victoria as a visitor. She spent most of her time at the diving events. In her opinion, “I think they have been much improved, the officiating of the diving, and the facilities, just overall, the way it is run. And they way they choose the divers. I mean they used to have meetings until 3 and 4 O’clock in the morning, and it was almost like whoever yelled the loudest was on the team.” She likes the fact that now the teams are chosen by international competitive meet records. She feels as though this removes much of the subjectivity of the team selection. (This may also affected by Ms. Wood being overlooked to represent Canada as the 10 meter tower competitor.)

Q: After the games, what kind of impact did they have on your life?

A: After the games, the Canadian diving team got to spend some time in Kelowna, B.C. putting on Amateur diving shows being hosted by some local diving enthusiasts. Lois felt as though this was an amazing opportunity for her to expand her horizons both living in Kelowna for the short time the team was putting on these shows, while doing what she loved. As a person, this experience made her want to try even harder. She finished in 6th place. It made her anxious to learn more dives.

Q: Can you contrast the Commonwealth games experience to any other major diving competitions you had been involved in?

A: Ms. Wood spent much of her time in response to this question commenting on the masters' diving championships. She made the final conclusion that Masters' diving was all about the love of diving, while the commonwealth games were more about representing your country and your sport.

Ms. Lois Wood was a true representation of a Canadian Commonwealth athlete of her era. She made significant sacrifices to be able to compete at the level she did. These sacrifices included both money, time, and effort. At one point Ms. Wood told us that to be a good athlete today, you need only be good at a sport. But to be a good athlete in her time, you needed to be good at a sport, and be resourceful enough to allow yourself time to commit to that sport. She embodied the true Canadian athlete of her era: committed, resourceful, and competing out of sheer love for diving.