

Bethany DeHaan & Katelyn Kooy

Prof: Dr. John Byl

March 30, 2009

History of Sport (PED 201)

## ***Cecelia Carter-Smith: Community and Sports Enthusiast***

For Cecelia Carter-Smith, the phrase “Go!” has more than one meaning. It can simply mean the start of a race, but it also defines who she is as a person. Cecelia’s involvement in the Hamilton community, love for sports, and youth are what drive her to continue to “Go!” in her everyday life and what keep her passion alive. Cecelia Carter-Smith is an incredible individual who naturally possesses humility and enthusiasm. All of these traits and aspects of her life make her an ideal candidate for the Hamilton Sports Banner Series Award.

Growing up, Cecelia Carter Smith lived with her grandparents in the north end of Hamilton as she was raised in a family that wasn't very well off. There was an enormous amount of love, happiness, and encouragement present in her home, from her parents that helped her to develop the values she has to this day. The support from her parents compelled her to work hard and always try her best at everything she achieved. As she attended kindergarten at age 5, there were play dates every so often throughout the year. For one play date, Cecelia participated in a doll buggy dress up competition. During the competition, young girls would dress up their doll buggies and walk behind them to show them to the audience attending. When the time came, all the girls and Cecelia (with the buggy her nanny had decorated) lined up for the start of the event. When the man in charge shouted “Go!” for the girls to begin walking, Cecelia started running as fast as she could! The man in charge ran after her and she began to cry because he made her stop running. From this story, one can see that from the very beginning of her life, running was very much a part of her and her explosive energy continues to be a trait that she naturally possesses.

Throughout elementary school, Cecelia's favourite part of the day was recess. School for her,

was very formal and children were always required to be proper and polite. Cecelia loved recess because it meant freedom – a chance to run around without boundaries or perimeters. Cecelia's love for sport and activity continued as she went onto high school. As a natural athlete, Cecelia admitted that she “lived for Phys. Ed.” and added that “it didn't take [her] long to catch on to many of the sports”. By Grade 11, Cecelia was quite superior to every other girl in her age category for various activities – throwing, jumping and running were a few that she listed.

Cecelia decided to focus on running and chose it mainly because it did not cost a lot of money, seeing as her parents were not very well off. She started out as a sprinter, running short-distance races and was very successful at her local high school. Cecelia easily surpassed her peers and went on to shine at various track meets. At a track meet in Grade 11, Cecelia ran to become the overall champion. As she was heading back to the bus with her team-mates, she was approached by two coaches from the Hamilton Olympic club (a track and field club) who without her knowing, had been watching the races. They asked her if she was part of a track and field club already and since she wasn't, she decided to rise up to the challenge and train with the Hamilton Olympic club. She continued to run throughout high school and found it a real outlet and something she thoroughly enjoyed.

After Cecelia finished high school in 1962, she attended teacher's college because she was not in a financial position to go to university. She faithfully ran and competed while in school even though it was not likely for women to continue to compete as an athlete following high school. As she competed with the other runners from the Hamilton Olympic club which she remained a member of, she was not winning all the short distance races like she used to and she became a little bit discouraged. Cecelia's coaches assured her that she had the potential to run competitively and do well, but that she may perform better as a middle distance runner. Training to become a middle distance runner required dedication, determination, and a lot of hard work – all of which Cecelia does not shy away from.

During her teaching career, Cecelia continued to run competitively and was ranked in the top half dozen in the country for the 400m race. As she continued to compete, she was selected to run with

Team Ontario. It was with this team that Cecelia went on to race in Vancouver for indoor track odd distance races like the 300 yard and 600 yard. Her coach, who was quite the sports icon at the time, was Lloyd Percival, a man whom Cecelia greatly respected. Lloyd Percival played an important role in Canadian history as he was very involved in the world of athletics. He started a fitness institute in Toronto, was paid to go to Russia to teach the Russians how to play hockey, and still found time to be heavily involved with coaching track. Cecelia was mesmerized by his enthusiasm and still feels blessed today by his influence.

In 1966, Cecelia experienced the most pivotal year in her career. It was not only a highlight for her personally and athletically, but it also was what sparked her career from the recognition she acquired as a result of her accomplishments from that past year. Cecelia vividly remembers when she ran a 600 yard race against other amazing runners: a top European, a Canadian, and an American champion. The stadium was completely sold out and the audience was captured by the excitement of the races. Indoor racing is very physical and Cecilia describes the strategic side of the race, saying that, “If you don’t get your place, you can really be pushed around”. Cecelia began the race with a good start, and found herself in 4<sup>th</sup> place on the first lap, but only a stride separated each of the runners. With the runners strongly keeping their positions during the second lap, the announcer raised the level of tension in the stadium by announcing that they were running on record pace. As she moved into the 4<sup>th</sup> lap, Cecelia strategically moved into 3<sup>rd</sup> place and then after coming off the straightaway she moved into second. With the whole crowd screaming, Cecelia sprinted as fast and hard as she could. She pushed herself physically to give more and then found it in herself to push even harder. Neck in neck for the finish, Cecelia and the other runner both almost touched the finish line simultaneously. Cecelia instinctively looked back at the board to see who had won the race and recollects that moment as one of the most incredible moments of her life. As she looked up, she saw her name with flashing words: “World Record” on the big screen. She immediately fell to her knees in tears, feeling so blessed

and thankful for her family, parents, and her humble beginnings. “It was remarkable and is still so vivid,” Cecilia says with a smile, remembering how her excitement gave her enough energy to run a victory lap around the track. Including Cecilia's time, 6 world records were set on the same track during that day.

The year 1966 was Cecilia's breakthrough and she learned for herself that it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, if you put your mind to something you can make it happen. In the summer of 1966, Cecilia headed to the Eastern Canadian Championships. Unfortunately, her and her team got into a bad car accident in Montreal the night before the track meet. They were hospitalized for a couple hours, where Cecilia found out that she had a concussion and the rest of the team suffered minor scratches and bruises. All of the team was affected emotionally and physically from this upset the night before their race. Despite her doubts for not competing the next day, Cecilia carried on and ended up running the 400 yard race and won. The trials for the Commonwealth Games during the same summer also saw Cecilia through with more success as she made her first international team. The year 1966, especially from January to July, was a defining stage in her life, not just as an athlete, but also as a person.

Cecelia represented Canada in the Commonwealth Games in 1966 which took place in Kingston, Jamaica. The Commonwealth Games is a multi-nation sports event and a competition which takes place every four years (2). Two years after her breakthrough year, Cecilia went to the trials to make the Olympic team in 1968. She was teaching high school at the time and her husband was a student getting his PhD at McMaster. She did not achieve her goal to make the Olympic team as she had hoped and on top of that, her and her husband separated. Cecilia stated that both of these circumstances were “very devastating for her.” She was brought up in a home that was full of love and happiness and as she got older, she noticed that not everything is going to go the way you want it to go. Through all of the negatives, Cecilia found running very therapeutic and she was driven to keep going in her running career. She trained hard and represented Canada again in the Commonwealth Games

during the year 1970 (Scotland, U.K) (2).

As a female athlete Cecelia had to endure several stereotypical barriers in her life. Along with her financial barrier in the early stages of her life, Cecelia also had to live with the challenge to be accepted as a female athlete. It was sports like hockey and basketball that typically defined sports to be more for men than women. However, Cecelia felt driven by this barrier as she rose to meet the challenge, taking what was a negative influence and turning it into something positive. Cecelia explained how she rose above this in high school saying, “I found something that none of them had” and for her to take what was supposed to put her down and channel it into moving forward caused her career to “skyrocket”. Other challenges that she remembers are the limits that her teachers tried to put on her. In grade 10, she was told that she should not continue on to pursue post-secondary education after high school. However, she ended up attending completing her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science in 1974 at McMaster University and was on the Dean’s Honour List (1).

In the 60’s and 70’s during the time of her athletic career, although she may not have been directly impacted by it, there was a growing influence of drugs in Europe. There were suddenly many articles and news about women with larger builds and deeper voices. Compared to the use of steroids today, Cecelia Carter-Smith competed in a time when athletics was “pure” and she never questioned that people she raced against were cheating or on steroids. Cecelia found a freedom and encouragement in her running that made her believe that she could do the things she dreamed. For Cecelia, seeing how sports are now incorporated into a world of cheating and lying, causes her to worry about the influences of sport on children who look up to sports heroes. “I love what sport can do when it’s done right,” says Cecelia as she explains the amazing effect athletics have had on her own life, and how careful you have to be when you have youth looking up to you.

Although Cecelia was a female athlete and had various barriers in her athletic career, she had an incredible support system. Cecelia can recall many positive influences on her career and life. Of all the encouraging and motivating people, organizations, and government groups that helped her along her

path, her family was the most important. Cecelia's family and parents were always encouraging of what she did and very supportive of her athletic dreams. Cecelia finds it a huge blessing to have been provided with the opportunities that have put her in the right place at the right time. Not only was her family very encouraging, but she also had the amazing coaches and team-mates from the Eastern York Track Club and the Toronto Olympic Club which were both located in Toronto. Cecelia was positively supported by team members who embraced her as a fellow runner and encouraged her to be her best. When Cecelia was asked about whether the City of Hamilton supported her, despite all the training she did outside of her home city, she responded saying, "Absolutely . . . I feel so lucky to have [had] such a strong support team". The community, the media, Hamilton sports clubs, teams, coaches, and family were all incredible influences that spurred her on in her athletic career.

Cecelia Carter-Smith was always a driven athlete, as she started out wanting to be the best of her school, then the best of her club and then the best of her country. She admits that her greatest achievement in her sports career is getting her Civic Ring. In Hamilton, it used to be that when an athlete became a Canadian Champion, they would receive a Civic Ring. Since Cecelia Carter-Smith was a four-time Canadian Champion, she received the ring, a diamond and a ruby to go on opposite sides of the ring and a certificate for her achievements. The ring represents her life of hard work and as she was showing it to us, she said, "this ring is really unique . . . you can't just go out and buy it". The Civic Ring represents the four times she became a national Champion, but more than that, it symbolizes the love and pride she has for the City of Hamilton. As some people may know, the City of Hamilton has acquired the nickname: "the Hammer". According to Cecelia, the word has power and strength and truly defines the community of Hamilton. Her parents, grandparents, and the rest of the people who came to Hamilton (Italians, Europeans, Scots, English, Irish, etc.) are those who made the City of Hamilton the way it was and the way it is today. Cecelia is "so proud to be the first generation to come from there".

Cecelia is a very achieved woman and the different awards she has been given can attest to that. In

1984, Cecelia was selected Woman of the Year in the Health, Sport, and Fitness category (1). The following year she won the Bill Paterson Award from the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (1). As a result of her contributions to the university, McMaster's School of Physical Education and Athletics presented Cecelia with the Friends of Distinction Award (1). In 1994, Carter-Smith was inducted into the McMaster Sports Hall of Fame in the Builder Category for her coaching contributions to the university (1).

Cecelia taught in the three different school systems: catholic, public and private for a total of 30 years. She taught at the elementary and secondary levels and also was a principle and vice principle. Some of her teaching years were during her athletic career and her students were always very excited for her and encouraging. She commented to say that for any student to see their teacher in the newspaper is something to get excited about. While teaching, Cecelia continued to have a passion for sports and went on to coach at the elementary, secondary, and university levels. Cecelia has been retired from teaching for 10 years and while smiling she said, "I love every day". She has served on various volunteer committees including going to Sydney, Australia and working as a sports ambassador and conversing with the IOC delegates. She also was part of the Hamilton Community Foundation and sat on a board which reviewed money grants for the youth in the community. Cecelia did a similar thing on the Hamilton Tiger-Cats Trust Fund where she again reviewed money applications for grants. The United Way and OFSSAA were two other organizations she mentioned that she was involved with during her lifetime. Cecelia Carter-Smith is a community enthusiast who seems to take any opportunity to get involved. She has a heart for sports events and the City of Hamilton, which may have contributed to why she was chosen to be the Co-Chair of Sports for Hamilton's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in 1996 (1). On top of her volunteer positions, she also worked politically for the City of Hamilton (specifically for the Liberals).

Believing that "age is just a state of mind," Cecelia follows kids from all over which she sees as

her tool to keep in touch with youth, since she has retired from teaching. She is an incredible role model to youth – just how she has overcome everything in her life and went on to attain remarkable accomplishments. Since she had such humble beginnings as a little girl, Cecelia has confidence that with all people who have determination and guidance and direction can lift themselves out of the status of lower to middle class. The teacher persona within Cecelia strongly states for everyone and especially for youth: “Don't allow impediments to step in your way . . . and don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something.” She is convinced that by just believing in oneself, each person can make a difference. Athletics is not about socio-economic status or who comes from where, instead it is about hard work and deciding not to let anybody or anything stand in your way.

For leisure and free time, Cecelia enjoys running, bicycling and travelling (1). She has been running for almost 50 years! Because of her engaging personality and her ability to connect with people, she is an excellent guest speaker for different events and organizations (1). She loves to talk about the power of performance, meaning that every person has a chance to perform and do something. Along with that, Cecelia lives her life by the phrase, “I want to do something better tomorrow than I did today – could be anything, could be small, whatever”.

As a track athlete, Cecelia Carter-Smith has competed at both the international and national levels and performed exceptionally well. Additionally, her teaching career and coaching experiences were what allowed her to connect with youth and become so involved with athletics. Throughout her life, Cecilia was very supportive of different sports events that took place in Hamilton and continues to extend her commitment to the various events to this day. Resulting from her dynamic personality, she brings a large level of excitement to every race or sports meet she attends. Cecelia would like to be remembered for, “bringing joy and laughter to others” (1). She is definitely well on her way to becoming the person she strives to be.

## Citations:

1:

"Cecelia Mary Carter-Smith." McMaster Alumni Association. 27 Mar. 2009

<[http://www.mcmaster.ca/ua/alumni/gallery/programs\\_recognition\\_carter\\_smith\\_c\\_m.html](http://www.mcmaster.ca/ua/alumni/gallery/programs_recognition_carter_smith_c_m.html)>.

2:

Redmond, Gerald. "Commonwealth Games." The Canadian Encyclopedia. 27 Mar. 2009

<<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0001799>>.