

uOttawa Gee Gees and the Ottawa Lions Track & Field Club Establish a Sport Future ...

A unique facility, "The Dome @ Louis Riel" had its official opening October 21, 2005, revealing the first 400 metre indoor track in North America in a facility assisted by the Ottawa Lions Track and Field Club in a preferred agreement. Then 2 years later, the University of Ottawa Track and Field Program was to emerge (Fall 2007) under an agreement with the uO and the Ottawa Lions. The Club now manages the intercollegiate programs of cross country and track for the Gee Gees. The first 2 years will see a focus on track events and a move towards the adding of field events to the program in the Fall of 2009 as we establish our teams.

Anne Mullins, the Lions Club President through the last 6 years of these dynamic times stated; *"It's exciting times for our Ottawa and Eastern Ontario high school graduates who are among some of the best young athletes in our country. Student athletes now finally have a choice to stay close to home ... they can run in a great university environment, get a Degree and do it at our nation's only bilingual university. They can continue to train with the best coaches in a proven system that can and will take them to their highest levels".*

"I don't know how any 17 year old high school student athlete is expected to make a smart life choice at this life juncture and have the odds favor making the long term correct choice. We are losing so many of our talented Junior (U20 years) athletes across Canada to pressured choices and to mostly poor choices." states Hugh Conlin (Athletics Canada - National Athlete Development Director and a high school coach and teacher for more than 30 years)

Andy McInnis (Ottawa Executive Director) follows this point up ...

"With our outstanding facilities and coaching programs, post-secondary athletes can stay or they can delay their leaving by an added 1 or 2 years but need not delay their lives. Our athletes mostly just need some time ... time to gather more knowledge and to add social and physical maturity and one cannot accelerate this time. The loss of the old Ontario 5 year Secondary School System has not be a positive and we need to find other solutions. Generally speaking, a strong university academic "B student" who is also a "reasonable athlete" can transfer to just about any university program in North America after 1 or 2 post secondary years. A well prepared 20 year old athlete is going to make much smarter choices and have a much greater success rate in education and sport. When things go right on all frontiers, student athletes can have fun doing what they love to do. We are seeing this success trend in the NCAA Hockey Programs with matured OHL players going to university at the ages of 20 years plus. We are in the business of "athlete development" and we are in a sport that does not see athletes achieve their potentials until after university graduation. So that also makes our business "long term athlete development". We are not about the "school colors" an athlete runs in but rather how well and how long they compete and improve and what kind of an adult they mature to become. Our coaches

and teachers prepare athletes for leadership roles ... for the challenges ... for the failures and for successes that life will confront them with."

The Dome is incredible ... a 400 metre facility that allows athletes to train year-round and not have to worry about the cold weather. You don't have to worry too much about crowds on this track or that it's too small. By training on the track, which has six straightaway lanes (150m long) for sprinters and hurdles and four lanes on the oval, athletes and coaches now have an ideal practice area as they prepare for national and international events at any time of the year.

“There’s no place like Dome”

The Dome at Louis Riel has allowed athletes who want to train in Ottawa to finally come in from the cold. Martin Cleary (The Ottawa Citizen, Monday, November 07, 2005.

The thought of relocating to Ottawa for winter training would have been totally ridiculous, out of the question and absurd in the past, but not now. Hurdler Charles Allen (04 Olympics Finalist)

For the past three decades, officials from the Ottawa track and field and running communities worked towards building a proper field house for a 200 metre indoor track so runners, jumpers and throwers could come in from the cold. There are about 20 indoor tracks throughout Canada, but Ottawa, home to the top current track and field club (Ottawa Lions) in the country, didn't have one.

Then out of the blue, the athletics community hit the jackpot. Louis Riel High School needed more gym space for its students. Pierre Tessier, Superintendent of the Eastern Ontario French Public School Board at that time, had a vision to convert the 400-metre outdoor track at Louis Riel into an indoor venue for gym classes and a public training centre for athletes in several sports.

The \$7-million domed project would have a multi-lane track, a FieldTurf playing surface on the infield and enough space to practise and compete in any track and field event.

"First, I can train in comfort, and I don't have to worry about the cold and getting injured. I can train at full speed over +100 metres," Charles Allen said. The longest straightaway on indoor 200-metre tracks is 70 to 80 metres (leaving up to 20 metres to stop). At the Dome we can run a straight 150m and still have lots of room to slow down

The oval running track has a Mondo surface, the world leader in sport surfaces. The rubberized Pro Turf infield is 50 metres by 100 metres and can be divided into three different practice fields separated by see-through netting.

During the March school breaks, the Lions' athletes won't travel to warm weather for outdoor camps ... they have a choice as they are already in outdoor running mode.

“First and foremost is to have a consistent place to train and be able compete year round,”

said Andy McInnis, Director of the Lions & uO programs. "With consistency comes the improvement of the athletes and the quality of the programs."

"We also need to focus on getting elementary and high school students and teachers excited about track and field to new levels. I see that it's critical to stimulate the school students," McInnis said. "We want to offer opportunities to find our next Olympians."

The Lions and new uOttawa programs will give schools as much help as possible to grow their programs, to train in the Dome, to have sport education in the Dome and have a regular series of competitions that they can count on. There will be no athlete reluctance to the starter's commands of "Sweats Off" ... let the rain or snow or the cold outside do what it likes. "Who wants to long jump into a cold and wet sand pit in April or try to warm-up for a hurdle race in 5 C." McInnis said. "Now, we've created our own summer under the dome.