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NUMBER OF BEIJING-BOUND FRASER VALLEY ATHLETES CONTINUES TO GROW

July 16, 2008 – ABBOTSFORD – With only 22 days to go until the opening ceremonies of the XXIX Olympiad and 51 days to the Paralympics, the list of athletes qualified to participate continues to grow. The latest tally indicates that 37 athletes who train, live and/or whose hometown is in the Fraser Valley region – from Hope to Surrey – are heading to the Beijing Games this summer. With a BC total of approximately 150 Beijing-bound athletes, Fraser Valley athletes will represent a healthy 25 percent of this total.

As spring gives way to summer, many Canadian athletes across various sports are still seeking qualification for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. For those who are in their hometowns or training communities, send-off events have been hosted around the province: July 6th in Victoria, July 9th in Nanaimo, July 11th in Kamloops, July 12th in Abbotsford and July 14th in Vancouver.

The region-wide Beijing Bound Rally hosted by the PacificSport Fraser Valley last Saturday recognized the growing number of Fraser Valley athletes and their families. "When the event was first considered, the athlete tally was 17. As the athlete numbers steadily increased, our challenge was to find a suitable date that would ensure we would have some athletes in attendance," says Linda Palm, general manager of PacificSport Fraser Valley. "Pulling everything together in just three short weeks was tough but we felt it was important to hold a send-off event in the 'home region' of these athletes. Outstanding performances have led to dreams being realized and we wanted to recognize that in a way that the community could be involved too."

Mid-way through the send-off ceremony, PacificSport Fraser Valley organizers received news that the athlete tally had again increased by one. Competing in Chula Vista, California, 20-year old BMX rider Scott Erwood of Surrey had just secured the last spot on the Canadian Cycling Olympic team. An enthusiastic cheer erupted when the event emcee, George Peary, announced the news.

Another cyclist, Svein Tuft of Langley, was delayed as he was departing his home for the send-off event. He was met at the door by members of the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) Anti-Doping Committee, requesting the predictable but unannounced random urine sample, as it is empowered to do.

Athletes prepare year-round to earn the opportunity to compete in the Olympic or Paralympic Games. Yet the rigorous physical and mental training is just one aspect of the successful formula. As observed in Tuft's case, once qualified, athletes must observe strict conditions as specified by the COC.

Palm notes, "We all enjoy reading and discussing the successes of our local sport heroes but few of us understand the full spectrum of what an athlete faces as they rise to the top in their sport. Athletes face extended absences from their families and friends while training and competing; increasing costs for travel and accommodation; and the loss of privacy due to media interest and sport regulations including anti-doping testing. If we



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engage in the celebration of athletes' successes, as a community, we also need to be prepared to invest in their support. With the approaching Beijing Games," concluded Palm, "there is greater awareness of the achievements of our BC athletes but we are challenged to keep that awareness heightened throughout the years between Olympic and Paralympic events."



"One clear example of the need for ongoing support," cites Palm, "is that an estimated twenty-five per cent of qualified athletes do not receive financial support as Sport Canada-carded athletes. Consequently, they face the burden of independently covering all of their expenses associated with international competitions, ongoing training and attending the Games."



To learn more about how you can support BC's athletes, contact the Canadian Sport Centre Pacific or PacificSport Fraser Valley at 604-557-4021.



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– 30 –

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