



David Wells, a member of the chaplaincy team, outside the athlete's village. GERRY KAHRMANN — THE PROVINCE

Spiritual help his daily task

SOUL MAN: Pentecostal chaplain available to Canadian team

BY DAMIAN INWOOD
STAFF REPORTER

TURIN — North Delta's David Wells is an Olympic soul man.

While coaches and team psychologists care for the physical and mental well-being of 2,500 athletes, Wells is responsible for their spiritual health.

"I've assisted people through several bereavements at different events I've been at," said Wells, who's a chaplain at the 2006 Winter Games. "Or it can be competition related. Maybe they've had a result and they're under a lot of pressure and didn't meet expectations

"I've seen a few tears over the years."

In his daily life, Wells is district superintendent of 180 churches

for the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada in B.C. and the Yukon.

In Turin, he's one of about 18 Protestant chaplains looking after the athletes.

"I specifically make myself available to the Canadian team should a crisis arise," he added.

The 50-year-old Wells grew up in Edmonton and started playing hockey when he was five.

"So there's a whole winter-sports passion," he grinned. "I worked the penalty box at the old Edmonton Gardens. My wife says if there's two kids playing in a mud-puddle and it involves sports, I'll watch it."

Wells first got the Olympic bug at the Calgary Games in 1988.

"I started as a volunteer working arranging for a lot of youth involvement," he said. "I arranged for hundreds of kids to go through

the Saddledome at the end of the hockey games and clean it in five to seven minutes."

He also hosted international chaplains who were working the Games.

Those contacts led to him going as a volunteer chaplain to the Commonwealth Games in Auckland in 1990, Victoria in 1994 and Manchester in 2002.

He also volunteered at the Athens Olympics in 2004.

At the Olympics, Wells performs an interfaith ministry and schedules services and prayer gatherings for the Christian community.

He also puts athletes from other faiths, such as Muslims or Buddhists in touch with chaplains of their own faith.

"I'm not trying to be a coach or take the place of any other sup-

port people," said Wells. "I don't get in the middle of team disputes or anything but I am a sympathetic and confidential ear."

It's all a question of trust, added Wells, who works out of Broadway Church in east Vancouver.

"The first thing I emphasize is that they're in the midst of life," he said. "We all focus in on 16 days of their life, but they're living life beyond that and normal things are going on back home."

Wells is living in Pinerolo, midway between Turin and the mountain venue at Sestriere, so he can come to either athlete village if needed.

"It's an interesting thing to be in this bubble," he said. "You meet a lot of people and then everyone goes their separate ways again."

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Harper urged to go to Italy

OLYMPICS CLOSING: High hopes for Canada in gold-metal hockey

BY ALLAN WOODS
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

OTTAWA — Canada's hockey-mad prime minister is being urged by his Conservative caucus to attend the Olympics in Turin in two weeks for his first overseas trip since being sworn in last week.

Tory MPs from B.C. have asked Stephen Harper to consider being in Italy on Sunday, Feb. 26, for the closing ceremonies of the Games, according to a party source.

The gold-medal men's hockey game is also being held on the same day and the Canadian team, staffed with National Hockey League players like Jarome Iginla, Martin Brodeur, Todd Bertuzzi, and Vincent Lecavalier, and managed by embattled hockey great Wayne Gretzky, is a favourite to win a medal.

"Some in the party are encouraging him to go," said one top Conservative. "The B.C. guys who get the Games in 2010 think it would be good."

They see the potential trip as a show of confidence for the 2010 Vancouver-Whistler Olympic Games and a sign that the Conservative government stands in support of the undertaking.

"He's [Harper] obviously committed to the 2010 Olympics and ensuring it's a success, but I don't think that the prime minister going... or not should be taken as a proxy for his support for the 2010 Olympics," said Tory MP James Moore, who represents Port Moody-Coquitlam-Port Coquitlam.

"He obviously has an incredible amount on his plate and I'm sure if he can go to the Games he would love to."

According to federal officials, Gov.-Gen. Michaëlle Jean and Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay are set to attend the closing ceremonies, but William Stairs, a spokesman for the prime minister, said he does not know whether Harper will join them.

"I don't think any decisions have been made that far ahead," he said, adding he has no knowledge of any request, nor who would be representing the federal government in Italy.

"I think Mr. Harper needs to decide on his priorities and then go forth in that light," said Burnaby Douglas New Democrat Bill Siksay. "I don't think anyone would complain if the prime minister chose to be there."

Snow grooming key to making super competition runs

BY CLARE OGILVIE
STAFF REPORTER

WHISTLER — Olympic alpine racers would have a fast and furious downhill on Whistler Mountain if the races were held here this week.

"We are good to go," said Whistler Mountain grooming

manager Greg Jarratt. "We are as good to go as [Turin] was at its event [Sunday]."

The secret is in the grooming. Drivers are currently crafting the natural surface on the Dave Murray Downhill in preparation for the Canadian national alpine championships in Whistler next month.

The same care will be taken

when the resort hosts the Games in 2010, said Jarratt.

"What the grooming machines will do is knock the air off [the snow] and facet the snow to make the crystals smaller and tighter, therefore increasing the density or weight of the snow."

"It is almost technically speaking ice and that is why it is an

Olympic-calibre event and not a weekend recreational experience."

This January saw record breaking snowfalls in the resort. But even if there was no snow the mountains can make mountains of snow. In fact the snow guns can make an American-sized football field covered in snow that is 540 feet high. clareogilvie@telus.net