



Sports Talk

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The North puts its best foot forward

The Canada Summer Games begins in Charlottetown and Summerside, P.E.I., Aug. 15 and the excitement is building.

The NWT and Nunavut will have teams competing, so I decided this would be a good time to break down each sport where we'll have athletes and see what the medal hopes are for each.

Basketball

The boys from the NWT are the only team competing from the North and they will need to have all cylinders firing.

This team doesn't have the size or the talent pool to pick from like the provinces do, so it will all come down to how tough this team plays defence and how quick they can be on the fast-break.

Fast-breaks are where this team may have the advantage, as they've been training twice a day since late June, both on fitness and ball movement.

Making the playoffs will be a tough goal, but surprises are what makes events like this so popular. If they can catch a break or two, good things will happen.

Look for Chad Hinchey to be the offensive star for this team.

Beach volleyball

Team NWT will have one team competing on the women's side. Becca Canam and Meika Stewart will be under some pressure to have a good showing and for all intents and purposes, it's a crapshoot.

Canam and Stewart will most likely be given one of the lower seeds for the tournament because that's what organizers of major sporting events like to do to Northern teams.

The duo will open up in Pool D against British Columbia on Aug. 17 in the first of its five matches. In order for this team to make the playoffs, they will need to have at least three wins as only the top three in each pool will play for medals.

It will be tough, but they've had help from Olympic bronze medalist Mark Heese and they could spring a surprise or two. They will need to use quickness and ball control in order to be successful.

Soccer

Team NWT will have a boys and girls team each in the competition. The girls will compete in the first week and will only have two chances to make a big impression in Pool D.

Games against Quebec on Aug. 17 and Manitoba the next day will determine whether it's medal round or consolation. There is plenty of experience on this team as a majority have played together for a long time. It will come down to whether the team can put it together in a short amount of time.

For the guys, they will also be in Pool D against British Columbia on Aug. 24 and Alberta on Aug. 25. As with the girls, it will be the same deal - if they can hunker down and hold out, the chances will come.

Swimming

If Team NWT is going to win any sort of medal, this is the best chance out there. There are plenty of top-notch swimmers from the territory - Stephen Giovanetto, Noah Colford and Colton Yee on the boys' side, while Jenny Aitken,

Cassandra Mooney and Courtney Northrup will lead the way on the girls' end of things.

Giovanetto just came back from the Age Group National Championships in Montreal and looked extremely fast in the breaststroke.

The games will be Ian Legaree's swan song as head coach, so you know he would be happy to go out on a high note before handing the clipboard over to Jane Mooney.

Tennis

Lots of experience dots this team. Pooja Chugh is a perennial favourite in most events and she will be again, in my view. Gillian Waugh and Roza Balasanyan will join Chugh on the women's side, but Chugh will be looked upon to carry the women's team, even at the young age of 15.

Tyler Comeau and Ryan Weir will be in tough on the men's side. If they can get into a good rally and contain their opponents, it could be good. However, it will be difficult.

Wrestling

This will be Nunavut's only entry at the games, but it's a good one. Wrestlers from the territory usually do well at major events and, as head coach Michael Soares said, there could be some surprises in store for the other provinces.

Joe Karetak Jr. of Arviat managed to win a silver medal at the 2008 North American Indigenous Games. His brother, Samuel Karetak, also snagged silver.

Both will be expected to lead the team into battle and could parlay their success at the indigenous games into medals in Charlottetown.

For Team NWT, Sam Palfrey and Chavez Marin will look to take their experience from the indigenous games and put it to use in Charlottetown.

Palfrey took home a silver medal, while Marin finished in fourth. Diane Marin, also a silver medalist at the 2008 event, will lead the charge for the women. It's tough to say where the teams will finish, but it will be interesting to watch.

There you have it. Medals could be few and far between, but these are the best in both territories.

Let's channel our positive energy all at once towards them and hope they bring back some medals.

Ready? Begin - ohmmmmmmmmmm...