



The RICHMOND OLYMPIC OVAL

An Olympic Venue Legacy

BY KRISTA POPOWYCH

The Richmond Olympic Oval is like no other multi-use sport, fitness and wellness facility in Canada. Located just 20 minutes from downtown Vancouver, the Oval is an award-winning landmark building that will host long track speed skating events on its 400-metre indoor track during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. The 512,000 square foot building was built as a crown jewel venue for the Games and to be a lasting legacy for the community, province and Canada.

Two of the building's unique characteristics are its design and its incredible environmental features. The stunning design garnered a prestigious international sports and leisure structural award that beat out facilities such as



Wimbledon Centre Court and Beijing's Bird's Nest Stadium. The roof, one of the largest wooden roofs in the world, spans over 6.5 acres and is made of pine-beetle wood.

Energy efficiency and environmental sustainability are a high priority at the Oval. There are several other key elements that help the facility use

energy and other resources efficiently while minimizing waste:

- When heat is stripped from the concrete to build and sustain ice for the speed skating track, that heat is recaptured in heat exchangers and converted to help heat the building.

Rainwater is collected on the roof and used to supplement the building's



water needs including its sanitation systems.

- Redirected water from the pond helps irrigate the surrounding trees and landscaping.
- A storm water collection system incorporates public art along the buttresses of the building.
- Timber used in the building's finishing, including team-room benches, came from wood felled on the original site.

The Oval opened in December, 2008, and the Canadian speed skating team has been able to practice and compete on home ice since that time. Visitors and Oval members have also had the exciting opportunity to observe Team Canada train for the Games.

Upon opening its doors, the Oval was ready with a number of key features. These include:

- a Concept II indoor rowing and Keiser cycling studio with a 16-plasma-screen video wall
- a multi-purpose group fitness studio
- a mind/body studio
- a Kinesis room hosting eight stations
- child minding room
- four gymnasiums for basketball, volleyball, badminton, futsal, floor ball, etc.
- an indoor paddling and rowing centre
- change facilities and 10 team rooms
- a hosting suite
- meeting rooms
- an 8,000-square-foot fitness mezzanine with cardio and strength equipment (expanding to 23,000 sq. ft. post games)
- public tours and viewings
- publicly accessible speed skating track

One of the many challenges of opening the Oval in a short window of time was hiring and training enough staff to meet the diverse needs of such a large facility. With no similar facilities to which it could compare itself, managing, budgeting, operating, marketing and programming has been a work in progress.

Other challenges included creating a strong membership base in a facility that will close for programming for four months (December 2009 to



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April 2010) to prepare for and host the Games.

The goal has been to make the facility accessible to all members and visitors and to create as many “gold-medal member experiences” as possible. Member benefits include access to all drop-in fitness classes, discounts on registered programs, complimentary parking, use of the gymnasiums and fitness mezzanine and skating on the Oval ice during public times.

In many ways, the best way to describe the Oval today is “open, but not quite finished.” After the Games, the building will once again transform. It will continue to be a membership-driven facility with both a high-performance edge and accessibility to families.

After the Games, the Oval ice will be removed (with the ability to be reinstalled). In its place, a 200-metre training track, a 100-metre sprint track, four additional gym spaces, two ice rinks, food services, a sport medicine/

rehab centre, athlete training facility, and more will be installed. Future programs and equipment under consideration include an Oval Kids Zone, a baseball/softball academy and a climbing wall. The current marketing campaign will highlight all these possibilities with the tag line: “One Roof. 1000's of Activities.”

The Richmond Olympic Oval is a facility that highlights higher performance and an improved quality of life through sport, fitness and wellness for all. Created as a lasting community legacy, the Oval will evoke the emotions, pride and spirit of the Olympics long after the Games conclude. **FBC**

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