



CASSIE GAIRDNER/TORONTO STAR

Proud skater: John Sands, 50, has been named to the Canadian Amateur Speed Skating Hall of Fame. The Mississauga printing salesman was a member of Canada's Olympic speed skating team.

Mississauga man named to speed skating hall of fame

By Stu Nicol Toronto Star

MISSISSAUGA — John Sands hasn't competed for almost 16 years but his performance as a member of Canada's Olympic speed skating team is still remembered.

Sands, 50, was named to the Canadian Amateur Speed Skating Hall of Fame in November in recognition of his outstanding accomplishments during the 1950s and early 1960s.

In that period he dominated male speed skating in this country. Between 1953 and 1958 he either held or shared Canadian senior titles and represented Canada at the 1956 and 1960 Olympic Games.

In 1956 at Cortina, Italy, Sands set a Canadian record in the 500 metres, clocking 42.7 seconds in the pre-Olympic Games, a mark that stood for 12 years.

Ego bruised

But in the actual games, disaster struck when he fell in the 500-metre race.

"At the time, it was a crushing blow to my ego," he recalls.

In 1960 at Squaw Valley, Calif. Sands redeemed himself by skating 500 metres in 42.8 seconds. The time placed him in 25th spot but it was 2.5 seconds off the winning mark.

Sands' achievements don't match the five gold medal performance by Eric Heiden of U.S. in the 1980 Olympics, but they still made him one of Canada's top speed skaters.

"I knew there was a hall of fame but I didn't think they bothered with this sort of thing for people like me," says Sands, a printing salesman who moved to Mississauga two years ago from Montreal.

"I thought this kind of stuff was reserved for

skating executives who are still active, a kind of pat on the back to keep them doing the job they've been doing."

Sands is the 29th member of the hall, which was founded in 1965. Actually, there is no physical hall of fame. Rather, it's an honor roll kept at the Canadian Amateur Speed Skating Association in Ottawa.

Received crest

John Hurdis of Etobicoke was president of the Canadian association during Sands' heyday and was the person who nominated him for the hall of fame.

"I remember his accomplishments well. This is what the hall of fame is all about, to honor Canadians who have become speed skating greats," Hurdis says.

Sands was given an embroidered crest he can sew on one of his old Olympic uniforms and a mention in the association's magazine.

Sands remained active coaching and training skaters in the Montreal area after he retired from international competition. In 1968 he coached Bob Butler and John Cassidy, who went on to the Olympics.

While he has been out of speed skating circles for almost three years, Sands keeps an eye on the big names. As for Canada's chances at the Olympics, well, that's anybody's guess, he says.

"Canada's biggest problem is the weather. Most of our top skaters go to Norway in August and stay there for the whole winter," he says.

"If they could just start here a little earlier on our own artificial loop, then we would be a lot better off."

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SANDS, JOHN