

OTTAWA DISTRICT BADMINTON ASSOCIATION

INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this document is to place on record, in one spot, a history of the Ottawa District Badminton Association. It is dedicated to the many champions and more importantly, the many dedicated volunteers who over a period of seventy plus years have laboured to promote the sport in a less than ideal environment.

The information here has been gleaned from the records of the former Ottawa Journal, the Ottawa District Badminton Association, the Ontario Badminton Association, the Canadian Badminton Association and the Civil Service Recreation Association (RA Badminton Club). Particular mention must be made of the contribution of Mr. Fergie Loathian, a dedicated badminton supporter of the 1930's and 40's who not only produced extensive coverage for the sport in the Ottawa Journal, but kept a scrupulous record of all of his articles and ensured that this record was passed on for future generations. It is unfortunate that similar records are not available for the period of the post war and present era's.

The sport of badminton is believed to have its roots in the East India sport of “ **battledore and shuttlecock** “ and to have been spread throughout the British Empire by soldiers returning from the former colony. It was common practise during those times for the soldiers to receive land grants in colonies when they left the service and this combined with the continued British military presence in its colonies, probably accounts for badminton's major popularity throughout the Commonwealth. Badminton received its modern name from the main castle of the Earl of Gloucester where it is believed that the sport was first introduced to British high society.

Badminton was apparently first played in Canada, at a demonstration in Ottawa, in around 1890, although I could find no record of same in the newspapers of that period. It is known that women's badminton had achieved a competitive level by 1908 with reports of interclub tournaments in the Montreal area for the “ Hodgson Cup “ which involved Women's Singles and Doubles play. This cup was held by the Montreal Tennis and Badminton Club for 18 years strait until the Badminton Club of Ottawa took control of the trophy from 1929 through 1933..

The Canadian Badminton Association came into existence for the 1920-21 badminton season. The Badminton Club of Ottawa was a charter member, original playing out of the Cartier Drill Hall. The Ontario Badminton Association was founded in 1924-25, again with clubs as the affiliated members. Colonel A.E. Snell of the Garrison Club of Ottawa was the first President of the O.B.A.. Mr. H.S. Southam of Ottawa donated the trophy for the Provincial Men's Singles Championship.

In the 1929-30 season the Ottawa District Badminton Association was formed as part of the re organization of the Provincial Association. At this point the O.B.A. membership became restricted to approximately seven districts, with District membership being restricted, loosely to clubs within the district boundaries.

Badminton in Ottawa seem to explode at the end of the Great War (WW1). There is tremendous irony in this fact. While WW1 was the main factor in the rise of badminton in this area, it was the Second World War which shot a fatal bullet into the sport , almost wiping it out. In between though, the sport

enjoyed a growth and popularity unprecedented by most sports. In approximately 1918 the Garrison Badminton Club was begun as a military club playing out of the "Cartier Drill Hall" at its location beside Lisgar Collegiate. In 1922 The Badminton Club of Ottawa was founded as the first private club. In 1929 they moved into new dedicated facilities near the corner of Slater and Elgin Streets. In 1924 the Rideau Badminton and Curling Club began operation out of the Arts building at Lansdown Park. In 1926 it moved to Balmoral Hall on Bank St. and in 1931 moved into its own \$ 80,000.00 facility at 471 Laurier Ave. East of Bank St.. As of 1995, all that remains of this facility is the lounge area, which is being used as a dry cleaning facility. If you should happen by this location, take a close look at the front facia. It will reveal to you the crests of the Badminton and Curling clubs spaced evenly across the front in four cement inserts. This is the only reminder of a sport which once dominated the downtown area. When the Rideau Club moved to its new facility, it was replaced at Balmoral Hall by the Capital Badminton Club which operated until 1935. In addition to these major dedicated clubs there were also clubs associated with several military units headquartered in the nations capital, as well as a number of government department clubs and an extremely active church league which at the beginning was as large as the district in membership.

To give you an idea of how the sport dominated the centre of the capital, it might be worth while to note that in the very early thirties, there were 3 dedicated, private clubs, 4 military clubs, 3 community based clubs and a 7 or 8 club church organization all functioning in the area south of Lansdown Park, west of the Rideau River and east of Bronson Ave. approximately.

During this period, Ottawa enjoyed a special significance on the Canadian Badminton scene. There were several national championships held at the B.C.O. and Rideau facilities. Ottawans also enjoyed great success on the court as well, holding several national and provincial titles during this period when the sport was at its zenith. Ottawa can also lay claim to the only World Professional Champion in the person of George Goodwin Junior who took the title, the one and only time it was contested on a world wide basis, prior to the modern era.

If WW1 spawned the sport, it was WW2 that dealt it a crippling and almost fatal blow, which this grand experience has never really recovered from. As the war effort grew, the military clubs disappeared, as units transferred to Europe. The church organizations disappeared as the efforts of everyone became focussed on the war effort and the young men disappeared into combat fatigues. The Capital Club failed due to the intense competition from the other two private clubs in the mid thirties, then the Badminton Club of Ottawa and the Rideau Badminton Clubs had to surrender there facilities to the war effort, because they simply did not have the membership to finance their operations. The BCO was turned over to the YMCA to be used as a military recreation facility, while the Rideau club housed the National Registration Board (for Conscription). After the war, attempts were made to revive one of the clubs but neither enough bodies, nor money could be gathered to rekindle the spark. In addition to this, many of the districts prime players unfortunately became part of the daily casualty lists posted during the dark days, including George Goodwin (Junior) listed on Oct.16, 1941 as missing in action as a result of air operations. It was the second time his bomber had been shot down.

It might be mentioned that Badminton as an organized sport ceased to function in Canada in 1942. Badminton and professional football were the only two sports to suspend their national championships during the war. It was felt that it was not feasible to maintain a system of championships in the environment created by the war. The CBA, OBA and ODBA all ended operations and while the CBA re organized right after the war ended and OBA began operations in 1946, it was not until 1954 that Mr. Dave Waddell, through his own personal sacrifice was able to

re-establish the District Association. In fact, from the data available, he was the ODBA as president and only member of the executive. On or shortly before 1954 a club was functioning at the High School of Commerce on Bell St.

Slowly but surely through the efforts of people like Dave Waddell, Kieth Holland, Marg Thom, Edith Hayman and many others, a new district emerged. Smaller, minus the dedicated facilities, minus the military clubs that failed to survive the war (Petawawa being the exception) and minus the church league, with focus shifted to small clubs playing out of high school gyms. In 1957 the District receive a shot in the arm when the Civil Service Recreation Association opened a brand new facility on Riverside Dr. and included four courts as part of its multiple use gymnasium. While not a dedicated facility, it did provide a focal point and encouraging environment for both competitive and recreational players. This lead to 1976 and the opening of a six court, state of the art, dedicated facility as part of a major expansion of the RA complex. The presence of this new facility has restored Ottawa to a prominent position in the Canadian Badminton community as evidenced by the hosting of numerous provincial, national and international events.

Unfortunately, the sport has not gained the type of prominence it once held within the community. With school gymnasium space shrinking and more diverse groups vying for the space that's available, the school based clubs are under tremendous pressure to remain in existence. The press of the pre WW2 era quite readily gave amateur sports significant coverage if for no other reason than that the professional venues were quite limited. Today, the pro scene dominates the press as well as the competition for the sponsorship dollar, leaving all amateur sports to compete for the footlights.

While this sounds grim, only time will tell. At a meeting of the Calgary City council, opposition to funding for a new facility, stated that badminton was a sport which would not last, was far too expensive to play and extremely hazardous to your health, as people were dying on court. The year was 1938. The pro side was lead by Mrs. W.R. Walton, Canadian Women's Singles Champion who countered that no more people were dying than in any other sport and that only the highly competitive players were paying the full \$1.00 per night cost of playing due to the high level of play. Only the dates have changed.

The information contained here is in no way considered to be complete or necessarily factual. Should any new information become available or inaccuracies noted, those responsible for this web site would, I am sure, greatly appreciate being advised and would endeavour to make a revision when warranted.

Joseph S. Hager