

Courage and Heart: Adult Nationals 2015  
By Maureen Bennie, Olympia Skating Club

Adult Nationals is always an exciting event and this year's competition on April 3 – 5<sup>th</sup> in Calgary, AB was no exception! Competitors came from all over Canada to showcase their hard work and dedication to a sport that is both difficult and challenging. The level of skating and complexity of programs is increasing with each passing year because competitors are pushing each other to raise the bar. All of this is done in an atmosphere of encouragement, support, friendship and fun.

The most exciting group to watch this year was the men. We never have many of them in a competition and they were not evenly matched for skill level, but that didn't seem to matter. The guys pushed each other and gave incredible performances. Each program we saw was unique, a gem, and an expression of each one's personality and ability. You couldn't even compare them; they stood on their own. The men just went for it, no matter what their level, and that made them exciting to watch.

Gary Beacom and Eric Francois stole the show in the Interpretive event. Their terrific showmanship and exceptional skating skills sent the spectators into a fever pitch. No nerves for these guys! David Dickie's incredible body line, extensions, and flexibility wowed us – no one believed they were watching someone who was 61. He has inspired me to not have any more excuses for not getting low enough on a sit spin.

What always amazes me at an event like Nationals is how prepared and polished everyone is in spite of all they have to do in their personal lives – working, attending university, raising families, caring for aging parents, health issues, travel and volunteering. Skaters like Sarina Tsai from Toronto and Katie Wiltshire from Okotoks are both doctors yet somehow find time to keep their skating skills at such a high level. Many skaters are in demanding careers. With plates so full, it makes their accomplishments even more breathtaking.

I was also surprised that many of the larger skating groups this year were in Class III – ages 46 – 55. It's inspiring to see how well people are taking care of themselves and that they are pushing their fitness levels. Competitor Brenna Loudoun, 61, wowed the audience in her Master's Freeskate as she moved like a young girl out there with such speed and power. New Brunswick skater Pat Noddin, a perennial favorite, is 78 and skated in the Silver Interpretive class.

Wouldn't it be interesting if skaters had their ages posted? It would certainly add to the "wow" factor.

This event was well represented by Alberta skaters since it was a home province competition. Skate Canada ran a first class event at the incredible WinSport facility. Out of town skaters were impressed with the venue and how warm the arenas were – a big plus for aging bodies. The huge team of volunteers kept everything running smoothly, made skaters feel welcomed, and had everyone in the right place at the right time.

The best thing about participating in Nationals is the people you meet. You always leave with new friends and great memories. Most of all, this group of adults worked hard to reach personal goals in spite of all they had to do in their lives and other challenges like health issues. Attaining a personal best and accomplishing the goal of competing at Nationals makes everyone a winner. What an outstanding holiday weekend!