

Canada's Silver Star and Golden Girl take the court to pass the 56-year baton



By Brock Weir

In 1959, Robert Bedard set the standard for Canadian tennis at the Pan American Games.

Well, actually, he won a silver medal in the Chicago games in the Men's Singles. But, it was still the best Canada has fared in the sport at each subsequent Pan Am outing ? until last week when Ottawa's Gabriela Dabrowski and partner Carol Zhao of Richmond Hill brought home the gold in women's doubles.

If he was chagrined that Canada had now set the gold standard, he didn't show it as Mr. Bedard picked up his racquet on Saturday afternoon to play a match with the young woman herself on the lawns of Hillary House.

The championship duo were on hand to preside over the formal opening ceremonies of the Aurora Historical Society's new grass tennis court, recreated on the site of the very first tennis court ever to be built in Aurora over 110 years ago. It was a project made possible by grant funding available through Pan Am for community projects.



?History is not old and stuffy, it is not dusty documents, it is the fabric of life,? said John Webster, Aurora's Official Town Crier. ?It is the continuum of time where events blend into each other so gradually, so seamlessly, that it is impossible to say where one becomes the next.?

This continuum was best demonstrated by Ms. Dabrowski and Mr. Bedard as they prepared to show onlookers what it takes to be a champ.

?Winning the gold was very special,? Ms. Dabrowski, who also took home the silver in mixed doubles with partner Philip Bester of Vancouver. ?To win it on home soil is much nicer and it kind of hits home more than it would abroad.?

But, she was humble about her win.

‘I wouldn’t say I was basking. [Philip] and I went out to dinner and he brought his medals with him and was showing them to everyone. He was basking in it, but I wasn’t!’

Although their respective wins are separated by 56 years, both champions were eager to get out there and improve their game. ‘Somebody thought it would be nice to bring the old-timers together with the new-timers,’ said Mr. Bedard with a laugh. ‘That’s what it is, but I am looking forward to it.’

‘I am looking forward to it too,’ especially if you have any tips for me,’ Ms. Dabrowski told the educator and former headmaster of St. Andrew’s College. ‘I am totally open to any criticisms!’

‘That’s fine,’ I’m good at that, but I don’t like taking it. Just kidding!’

There was plenty of good-natured ribbing going on as they took on a number of opponents.

For Bill Albino, Vice President of the Aurora Historical Society, it was a fitting way to truly kick-off the long-planned exhibition and programming surrounding tennis, a sport which has such close historical links to Hillary House, Aurora’s only National Historic Site.

The original courts on the property helped nourish the early roots of the Aurora Community Tennis Club, an organization which continues to thrive to this day, and the revitalization of ‘where it all began’ couldn’t be timelier.

‘Tennis is enjoying a huge resurgence in Canada right now,’ said Mr. Albino. ‘Last year, according to Tennis Canada, 5.5 million Canadians played tennis and about two million play regularly. We saw nothing more fitting than to try and tie in tennis heritage and this court, which has been here since about 1890.’

For Mayor Geoff Dawe, the addition of the new tennis court will make significant headway in the municipality’s goal of making Aurora the most active community in Canada.

‘We are very committed to moving forward to making Canada an active place,’ he said. ‘It is the best way to be.’