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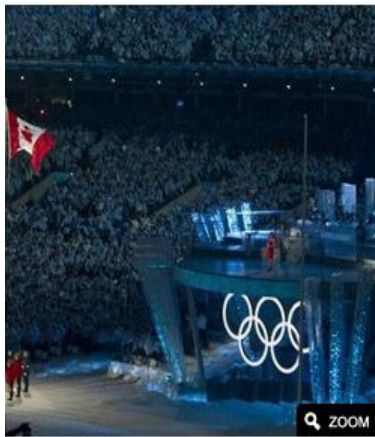


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Canadian sport legends light Cauldron

660News Staff with files from Canadian Press » Feb 12, 2010 23:22:29 PM

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Seven years of painstaking planning and rising anticipation reached a climax Friday night with a dramatic surprise lighting of an outdoor Olympic Cauldron that few were expecting.

Wayne Gretzky, Rick Hansen, Catriona LeMay Doan, Steve Nash and Nancy Greene Raine all helped in an unusual lighting ceremony on the floor of B.C. Place, just before fireworks started spouting from the outer rim of the B.C. Place roof.

But Gretzky, with flame held aloft, then ran out of the stadium and into a pickup truck led by a police escort. The truck wound through the streets of downtown Vancouver to Jack Poole Plaza. Gretzky then lit what will be the Olympic Cauldron that will burn throughout the 17 days of the Games.

The arrival of the Olympic flag and the final lighting of the cauldron were moments packed with Canadian star power. The Olympic flag was carried across the stage by Donald Sutherland, Romeo Dallaire, Barbara Ann Scott, Anne Murray, Jacques Villeneuve, Bobby Orr, Julie Payette, and Terry Fox's mother, Betty, all dressed in white.

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Earlier, General Michaelle Jean had declared that the Vancouver Games, the 21st Winter Olympics, to be open.

But the 60,000 fans packed into B.C. Place made their own declaration a little more than an hour earlier with an ear-splitting welcome as Canada's team marched into the opening ceremony.

Clara Hughes, the 37-year-old Winnipegger who has medals at both Summer and Winter Olympics, smiled as she carried the flag in both hands and waved it slowly back and forth. Other athletes held Canada scarves aloft as she walked slowly and savoured the crowd's adulation.

This is the third Olympic Games held in Canada. Canadian athletes did not win a gold medal in either the 1976 Montreal Summer Games or the 1988 Calgary Winter Games but that seems almost certain to change this time around.

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