

Olympians from the Beach and East Toronto

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[Olympians from the Beach and East Toronto – Chart](#)

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Introduction

The Beach and East Toronto neighbourhoods have a long connection with the Olympics, boasting more than three dozen Olympians – and 30 medals won -- who at one time or another have lived, gone to school, worked or trained within the boundaries of [TBETHS catchment area](#).

Thirty-two summer Olympics have been planned since the first modern Olympics were held in Athens, Greece in 1896. Local athletes and coaches have participated in most summer Olympics between 1908 London to 2024 Paris.



In addition, three local hockey players have won medals at the winter Olympics: gold for Hooley Smith at the first one held in 1924 at Chamonix, France, gold for Murray Dowey in 1948 at Saint Moritz, France, and silver for Manny Legace in 1994 at Lillehammer, Norway.

Hooley Smith, 1924



Murray Dowey, 1948

Our first local Olympian was **John “Jack” Tait (right)**, a member of the West End YMCA that set up the Harriers Club on Lake Front east of Silver Birch Avenue in the 1910s. At age 19, Tait, the so-called “Boy Wonder”, was part of a large team of Canadian runners (including Tom Longboat) at the fourth Olympics held in 1908 in London. At the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, one of Tait’s teammates in the relay was John Howard, Canada’s first Black Olympic athlete and the grandfather of Olympic sprinters Harry and Valerie Jerome. Tait lived on Wineva Avenue from the mid-1920s until his death in 1971 at age 82.



Local runners continued to participate at the Olympics - Alex Ponton in 1920 and Anthony Vince in 1924 - both coming out of the Broadview YMCA and later living in the local area.

In 1928, Ethel Smith of Norway Avenue and Myrtle Cook of Victoria Park Avenue were part of Canada’s first women’s Olympic track team, the “matchless six” that won six medals. The local pair often spent mornings running together through the Beach.

Myrtle Cook (left) and Ethel Smith gold medal winners at the 1928 Olympics

Despite initial concerns about over exertion, women have continued to excel in the Olympics. Indeed they accounted for 15 of Canada's 24 medals at the 2020 Paris Games, and five of the eight golds.

Balmy Beach Club has been the training ground for many Olympians starting in 1924 at Paris when Roy Nurse was one of the eight athletes demonstrating racing canoes and kayaks.



Roy Nurse gold medal winner at the 1924 Olympics

Canoeing became an official Olympic sport in 1936 with 19 nations paddling. (Women did not participate in kayaking until 1948 and canoeing until 2020). Harvey Charters teamed up with Warren Sakar in 1936 to win Silver in the C2-10,000 in 51:15.8 minutes. Perhaps practicing on the lake was a strength of Balmy Beachers as they again won long distance medals in the Olympics in 1948 and 1952 - medalists Norm and Ken Lane lived only a block from the Balmy Beach Club. More recent Olympians from Balmy Beach Club include Coach Jim Mossman, paddler Liam Jewell (1996), and several beach volleyball coaches and players, notably John Child and Mark Heese.

Swimming has arguably garnered our local Olympians the most glory, from Elaine Tanner's success at the 1968 games to Penny Oleksiak's phenomenal performance in 2016 and 2020. Penny is now tied with Andre De Grasse as Canada's most decorated Olympians, each having won seven medals at the Summer Olympics.

HERO OF KEW BEACH IS WELCOMED HOME

Great Public Reception is
Tendered Reginald
("Hooley") Smith

CARNIVAL HELD INDOORS

Last night's rain had little effect in dampening the welcome home which Kew Beach gave her hero, Reginald ("Hooley") Smith, youngest member and star centre player of the world's amateur champions. Although weather conditions prohibited the staging of the winter carnival in Kew Gardens, the Allen Beach Theatre was crowded to the doors with enthusiastic, cheering citizens, and hundreds were unable to gain admittance. To the bugling of Boy Scouts, accompanied by music provided by the Weston Boys' Band, the audience singing, "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," "Hooley" took his place on the stage. Voicing the pride of Kew Beach citizens, his Worship Mayor Hiltz, on their behalf, made the presentation of a club bag. "Hooley" responding in a speech marked by its brevity and modesty.

Two local events highlight the Beach and East Toronto's pride and appreciation of its Olympians. On March 4, 1924, Reginald 'Hooley' Smith, the "hero of Kew Beach", was welcomed home with a "great public reception" at the Allen Beach Theatre. He was the "youngest member and star centre player" of the Canadian hockey team that won gold at the first Winter Olympics.

Reception for Hooley Smith, *Toronto Globe*, March 5, 1924

Ninety years later, a large crowd turned out on August 28, 2016 to celebrate the city's Olympians following Team Canada's return from the Rio Olympics. The festivities began at East Lynn Park on Danforth with a parade that made its way down Woodbine Avenue to Kew Gardens for a rally and entertainment.



Penny Oleksiak (left) at 2016 parade
Beach Metro News

Gold Medal Winners (7)

- 1924 Roy C. Nurse, paddler
- 1924 winter Reginald “Hooley” Smith, ice hockey player
- 1928 Myrtle Cook, relay runner
- 1928 Ethel Smith, relay runner
- 1948 winter Murray Dowey, ice hockey player
- 2016 Penny Oleksiak, swimmer
- 2024 Aaron Brown, relay runner

Silver Medal Winners (10)

- 1924 Roy Nurse, paddler
- 1936 Harvey Charters, paddler
- 1936 Frank Warren Saker, paddler
- 1952 Donald Hawgood, paddler
- 1952 Kenneth Lane, paddler
- 1968 Elaine Tanner, swimmer
- 1984 winter Manny Legace, Ice hockey player
- 2016 Penny Oleksiak, swimmer
- 2020 Penny Oleksiak, relay swimmer
- 2024 Melissa Humana-Paredes, beach volleyball

Bronze Medal Winners (13)

- 1928 Ethel Smith, runner
- 1936 Harvey Charters, paddler
- 1936 Frank Warren Saker, paddler
- 1948 Norman Lane, paddler
- 1948 Viola Myers, runner
- 1968 Angela Coughlan, swimmer
- 1968 Elaine Tanner, swimmer
- 1996 John Child, beach volleyballer
- 1996 Mark Heese, beach volleyballer
- 2016 Aaron Brown, relay runner
- 2016 Penny Oleksiak, relay swimmer
- 2020 Penny Oleksiak, relay swimmer
- 2020 Aaron Brown, relay runner

Olympic Coaches

- 1964 -1976 Jim Mossman, paddling
- 2004 -2016 John May, beach volleyball
- 2004-2020 Ed Drakich, beach volleyball
- 2010-2020 Peter Martinek, paddling kayak
- 2010-2020 Mari Ellery, Balmy Beach paracanoe