

Media Release

Track at West Vancouver Secondary named “Harry Jerome Oval”

WEST VANCOUVER, B.C. (February 23, 2021): West Vancouver Schools, in partnership with the District of West Vancouver, has announced that the running track at West Vancouver Secondary School is being named in honour of one of Canada’s most celebrated athletes, Harry Jerome.

Once recognized as one of the fastest men in the world, Harry grew up on the North Shore. He trained and competed at the West Van Secondary track in the late 1950s, before going on to a career in which he set seven world sprint records. In the 1960s, he represented Canada in three Olympic Games despite suffering potentially career-ending hamstring and quadricep injuries. He also received harsh criticism in the media across Canada when those injuries prevented him from completing competitions.

Harry was awarded the Order of Canada in 1971 and later named British Columbia’s athlete of the 20th century. He died suddenly at the age of 42, but not before devoting the last decade of his life to building programs designed to inspire Canadians to achieve their own athletic dreams.

Harry’s distinguished athletic career is just part of his story. Harry showed remarkable resilience in the face of deep racial injustice. He and his family members were ignored and rejected by neighbours and victimized by schoolmates in the years after moving to North Vancouver in 1951. He and his sister Valerie Jerome finally found acceptance competing in high school track. In 1958, both were invited to join a new track club, the Optimist Striders which trained at Brockton Oval in Stanley Park. Valerie has described it as “a fabulous oasis of peace, calm, and of family”.

“Here we were judged by the stopwatch and the measuring tape, not by the colour of our skin”, Valerie says. “Competing helped us develop self-esteem that was stolen from us in the name of racism. The track provided us with a safe place. We must provide safe places for those who are marginalized.”

After their competitive years, Harry and Valerie became schoolteachers. To this day, Valerie remains a vocal advocate for what still needs to be done in our schools and in our communities to combat racism.



"It's appropriate that we announce the 'Harry Jerome Oval' during Black History Month in Canada," says Mary-Ann Booth, mayor of the District of West Vancouver. "Harry's story is a reminder and testament as to why we must always strive to become a more civil society and combat racism. West Vancouver District is proud to be a contributing partner in refurbishing the track and dedicating it to Harry's memory and legacy."

The District has pledged \$2.2 million toward the \$5 million redevelopment of the West Vancouver Place for Sport at the school site. Community fundraising has raised an additional \$1.4 million to date.

"The power of sport can be transformative and it is important that we redevelop the track and field for students, for training and for the community at large to enjoy." added Carolyn Broady, chair of the West Vancouver Board of Education. "Once complete, the refurbished Harry Jerome Oval will be an integral component of the overall revitalization project, which will see new lighting, washrooms and an all-new artificial turf playing field installed at the site"

A video of the official naming announcement for the Harry Jerome Oval is posted at <https://wvpfs.org/track-name-reveal/>

For information about Harry Jerome Oval and the West Vancouver Place for Sport, visit wvpfs.org.

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