

It was a real homecoming for Shawn Holman. Sure, the onetime alternate for the Canadian Olympic team comes back to Cambridge every year to visit his family. But it's rare the former Cambridge Speed Skating Club member has the chance to perform in his old stomping grounds.

Now, with more than 10 years of coaching experience under his belt, the 36-year-old returned on the weekend to where his skating career began, heading up Team Alberta at the Canadian Age Class Short Track Speed Skating Championships.

Along with Derrick Campbell, Holman trained at the Hespeler Arena, hoping to one day carve out a spot on the national team and Canadian Olympic squad. While that dream ended during the 1992-93 season when he broke his leg at the Olympic Oval in Calgary, it was a prelude to a career change for Holman.



Holman

He tried to come back from the broken leg and regain his spot on the national team, but the time off for recovery came at a transition time in the sport and it was an uphill battle in those remaining competitive years.

"It wasn't the same," Holman said after Sunday's relay events.

"There were a lot of advances in the sport the year I broke my leg, a lot of jumps in speed and different equipment, so it was difficult. Also, they staggered the Olympics, so I was an alternate in '92 and then '94 was coming up, and I broke my leg. It was a tough turnaround at that time."

After the leg healed, Holman continued skating until after the 1998 Olympics. Unable to make that team, he officially retired.

"Personally, I thought going into '92 I had a good shot and missed it. Skating the year after that I was doing quite well before I broke my leg. But you have your teammates and it was nice to see them do well."

He admitted that coming back did give him some closure in the sport, something he may not have had if he had called it quits when he broke his leg.

"I had some good results. Looking back on it, the national team, being able to go to a world championship, and those kind of events, were exciting. I got to see a lot of the world in both skating and coaching, so it's been a good experience."

That's probably when Holman fell off the map for a lot of people. When athletes are out of the spotlight, people tend to forget what happens to them. But Holman was far from finished with the sport and had a string connection with the national program after five years as a short track team member.

He coached out of the Olympic Oval from 1998 to 2004, training some of the best short trackers in junior and senior. His students included Amanda Overland and Alanna Kraus.

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In 2004, he decided to leave the national program and did some work with Speed Skating Canada, writing manuals on long-term athlete development. From there, he joined the Calgary Speed Skating Club as a coach and program director.

"I just needed a little change," he said about leaving the national program.

"Coaching is pretty demanding. There's a lot of travel and a lot of pressure. I think it's good to change it up. You can get a little stale, too. You go up and down (within the program), and it was time to bring more people up."

Now bringing his expertise to the grassroots level, Holman feels revitalized. Leading his charges at the Hespeler Arena brought back a flood of memories.

"It takes me back to skating in junior. We had a good team back then and I was able to win the junior age class when I was a kid. To watch these guys go through it is exciting.

And Holman's return didn't go unnoticed, as Ernie, Amanda and Cindy Overland dropped in at the rink to say hello.

"There's a lot of old faces," he said with a laugh.

"It's been fun to connect with everyone from the club again. I remember training at the other rink and it's great to come back.

He also had some praise for the event's organizing team.

"They've done a phenomenal job," he said.

"I've been saying to a couple people that you don't even see this quality at a national level or even Olympic trials. The building looks great, the ice is awesome. Coming from Calgary, we have the fastest ice in the world, but we have guys setting personal bests here and Canadian records. So that says something."

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