

You lose some,

It should come as no surprise that politicians are a competitive bunch, but politics isn't the only game they're playing. As **TOM KORSKI** writes, MPs are four times more likely than the average Canadian to participate in competitive sports, and many credit their experience in the pool or on the baseball diamond for teaching them valuable lessons for the political arena.



NDP leader Jack Layton says competitive swimming helped prepare him for a life in politics. 'There's nothing like a race,' he says.



Fin Donnelly, with his father Cy. The New Democrat MP from B.C., started swimming at seven and at 21, he competed in Team Canada Olympic swim trials in the 1500-metre freestyle in Montreal.

One MP held a national swim record; another had a shot at playing professional baseball; a third credited kayaking with survival.

Politicians are almost four times more likely to participate in competitive sports than the average Canadian, an analysis for Postmedia News has shown.

Members of the outgoing Parliament — including a cabinet minister and a national party leader — credit serious game-playing with learning to perform under scrutiny and confront inevitable failures. And those are lessons that are serving many of them well as they battle for re-election in the May 2 vote.

"I have no doubt it prepared me for political life," says NDP leader Jack Layton, who swam competitively for almost a decade. "Water polo is the best analogy to Parliament. Above the water it's all smiles; under the surface it's a little different."

Layton competed nationally and qualified for water polo teams at McGill and York universities. His career highlight was a 1962 all-Canada age group record in the backstroke.

Layton's pacesetter came at the Montreal Amateur Athletics club, but was voided years later by an unusual discovery at the MAA pool. "Somebody found it was a fraction shorter than everybody thought it was," he recalls. "All the records we had were wiped out."

Former Olympian Dick Pound, who went on to serve as vice-president of the International Olympic Committee and president of the World Anti-Doping Agency, confirms Layton's account.

"They took it in their heads in the 1970s to have that pool surveyed," says Pound, an MAA member from 1957. "There was a half-inch between what they thought the pool was, and what it actually was. Everyone in the world with a 20-yard pool said: 'Aha! To hell with the MAA!'"

But nonetheless, Layton warns to the theme of competition: "There's nothing like a race."

And the losses? "You learn a lot of values," he says.

As a political candidate, Layton failed in his first two campaigns for Parliament. But as leader of the New Democrats, he's fought three grueling national campaigns.

Now, at 60, he's in a fourth election while recovering from prostate cancer and hip surgery.

"Most of us have careers where we lost along the way," Layton says. "There is no question of learning to look inside yourself to say: 'What do I have to do to win next time?'"

Politicians' passion for game-playing is statistically impressive. Only six per cent of Canadians nationwide participate in competitive sports, according to Statistics Canada. Yet of 308 MPs in the last Parliament surveyed for this story, 67 — or 22 per cent of the House of Commons — said they played sports at a competitive level as adults.

If Layton points to sport for sharpening his skills to lead the NDP, Liberal MP Bob Rae credits it with convincing him to quit the party.

"Competition tests character," says Rae. "It tests control of your emotions, taking advantage of your opponents' weaknesses. A lot of things similar to the nature of a competi-

tive game are similar to politics."

As a New Democrat, Rae served three terms in the House of Commons and one term as Ontario premier. He became a card-carrying Liberal in part, he says, because of lessons learned in competitive tennis. (Rae first played at Oxford's Balliol College as a Rhodes Scholar in 1968.)

"If you look at tennis, the key is controlling the centre," says Rae. "Most of the great plays are made in the centre. If you control the centre, you control the game. I think that's certainly one of the things I've felt in my own political evolution. You don't see too many points scored way off to the side."

Rae quit the NDP — but kept his membership in the York Racquets tennis club.

"The only trophy I've got in my house is the one I won at a doubles' tournament," he says. "It's prominently displayed. It's on a shelf."

Baseballer Colin Mayes, a Con-

servative MP from British Columbia, casts his political career in the light of "the road not taken" — an invitation to Triple-A camp in 1962.

As a 400-hitter and star pitcher in a North Vancouver juvenile league, Mayes was selected by a coach to attend camp for the Seattle Rainiers, a farm team for the Cincinnati Reds.

"I always thought, 'what if?'" he says.

Mayes missed the Seattle camp when his family moved 800 kilometres into the B.C. interior, settling near Invermere.

"My father decided he wanted to return to the country and so he just packed us up and away we went," he recalls. "It was a remote place that did not have those opportunities. But I had learned the good principle of baseball: be alert."

In life off the diamond, Mayes served as mayor of two cities: Salmon Arm, B.C., and Dawson City, Yukon, before winning two terms as MP for Okanagan-Shuswap.



Colin Mayes, third from right in back row, is now a Conservative MP from British Columbia. As a 400-hitter and star pitcher in a North Vancouver juvenile league in 1962, Mayes was selected by a coach to attend camp for the Seattle Rainiers, a farm team for the Cincinnati Reds. His family moved, and he missed the camp.

you win some



Steven Fletcher, with his sister Julia, was a two-time Manitoba champion kayaker before an accident left him paralysed.

But not all the Commons' athletes are team players — at least in one sense of the word.

Prior to the election, the House numbered 11 marathoners. Liberal MP Scott Brison competed in the New York Marathon three times; Treasury Board President Stockwell Day ran the 2009 Boston race in a time of 3:34:35.

And Day qualified for this year's Boston Marathon, but suffered a torn ligament in training. "Disappointing," he says.

Regardless of their sport, MPs speak candidly of the humbling impact of loss, letdown and failure.

"That absolutely resonates with me 100 per cent," says MP Fin Donnelly, a New Democrat from Coquitlam, B.C., and a champion swimmer. "You need to go through failure."

From age seven, Donnelly took to swimming, later training five hours a day — "putting myself to the limit," he says. At 20, Donnelly was a four-time gold medalist in world competition at Israel's Hapoel Games. At 21, he competed in Team Canada Olympic swim trials in the 1500-metre freestyle in Montreal — and missed qualifying by fractions.

"I did my lifetime best but didn't make the lifetime achievement goal I'd set," Donnelly recalls.

"You tell yourself, 'Awesome; great swim.' But there's failure. I didn't make the team. There is a sense of that dualism that exists with everything you do."

Tory Gordon Brown credits his experience as a national kayak champion as preparation for the long paddle it took to win a Commons seat as an Ontario MP.

"Most of us lost an election before we were elected," says Brown, who represents Leeds-Grenville. "I can name them off!"

'Competition tests character. It tests control of your emotions, taking advantage of your opponents' weaknesses. A lot of things similar to the nature of a competitive game are similar to politics.'

BOB RAE

Of 51 MPs in the government's Ontario caucus, 25 lost their first campaigns.

"Competing and losing gives you an understanding of what it takes to win," says Brown.

In his first campaign 11 years ago, Brown lost by 55 votes; the last he won by more than 19,000.

Racing for the Gananogue Canoe Club, Brown claimed national titles with teammates in kayaking pairs and fours between 1976 and 1980.

"I spent three to four hours a day training," Brown recalls. "When I was in Ottawa, I'd put the kayak in the Rideau Canal at Carleton University and paddle all the way down to Parliament Hill."

Competitive MPs describe serious game-playing as profound, even life-altering.

Winnipeg MP Steven Fletcher credits kayaking not as a preparation for politics — "It's the last thing I contemplated" — but in being able to deal with catastrophe.

The Minister of State for Democratic Reform was left a quadriplegic in a 1996 highway wreck when his car hit a moose. Fletcher was a two-time Manitoba champion in 1988 and '89, competing nationally and in the Western Canada Games.

"Nobody ever asked me about the kayaking before," he says. "Training was hours and hours paddling up the Red River in Winnipeg in solitude, starting and stopping, timing — I think it helps build character, self-reliance."

Fletcher's sporting career is chronicled in family scrapbook photos in which he appears as a lanky youth with a love of wilderness canoeing.

"There was no point in complaining," he recalls. "You're up to your waist in muskeg and mosquitoes. Nobody is going to take complaints."

Fletcher pauses. "I'd rather be canoeing than doing what I'm doing now. "Kayaking is very much about solitude," he continues. "Life in many ways is a solo effort."

Fletcher found himself going from an athlete to someone paralysed from the neck down. But, like in a kayak, "You rely on yourself, alone," he says.

"That can help as you move through life."

FOR POSTMEDIA NEWS

The games MPs play

The members of the last Parliament were asked, "Did you participate in 'competitive' sports past high-school age? And if so, which sport and at what level?" In total, 114 MPs responded. Of those, 67 played competitive sports as an adult. Here's the list:

Name	Riding	Party	Sport
Harold Albrecht	Kitchener-Conestoga, Ont.	Cons.	lacrosse
Dean Allison	Niagara W.-Glanbrook, Ont.	Cons.	marathon
Scott Armstrong	Cumberland-Colchester, N.S.	Cons.	baseball
Niki Ashton	Churchill, Man.	NDP	swimming
Larry Bagnall	Yukon	Liberal	marathon
Leon Benoit	Vegreville-Wainwright, Alta.	Cons.	curling
Carolyn Bennett	St. Paul's, Ont.	Liberal	hockey
Dennis Bevington	Western Arctic, N.W.T.	NDP	skiing
James Bezan	Selkirk-Interlake, Man.	Cons.	basketball
Ray Boughen	Palliser, Sask.	Cons.	baseball
Scott Brison	Kings-Hants, N.S.	Liberal	marathon
Gordon Brown	Leeds-Grenville, Ont.	Cons.	kayaking
Patrick Brown	Barrie, Ont.	Cons.	marathon
Ron Cannan	Kelowna-Lake Country, B.C.	Cons.	hockey
Lawrence Cannon	Pontiac, Que.	Cons.	hockey
Rick Casson	Lethbridge, Alta.	Cons.	curling
Chris Charlton	Hamilton Mountain, Ont.	NDP	golf
Michael Chong	Wellington-Halton Hills, Ont.	Cons.	rugby
Denis Coderre	Bourassa, Que.	Liberal	boxing
Nathan Cullen	Skeena-Bulkley Valley, B.C.	NDP	marathon
Stockwell Day	Okanagan-Coquihalla, B.C.	Cons.	marathon
Claude DeBellefeuille	Beauharnois-Salaberry, Que.	Bloc	softball
Dean Del Mastro	Peterborough, Ont.	Cons.	football
Barry Devolin	Haliburton-Kawartha L., Ont.	Cons.	marathon
Fin Donnelly	New Westminster-Coquitlam, B.C.	NDP	swimming
Ken Dryden	York Centre, Ont.	Liberal	hockey
John Duncan	Vancouver Island North, B.C.	Cons.	racquetball
Kirsty Duncan	Etobicoke North, Ont.	Liberal	marathon
Rick Dykstra	St. Catharines, Ont.	Cons.	soccer
Jim Flaherty	Whitby-Oshawa, Ont.	Cons.	hockey
Steven Fletcher	Charleswood-St. James, Man.	Cons.	kayaking
Laurie Hawn	Edmonton Centre, Alta.	Cons.	basketball
Ed Holder	London West, Ont.	Cons.	squash
Jim Kargianis	Scarborough-Agincourt, Ont.	Liberal	swimming
Gerard Kennedy	Parkdale-High Park, Ont.	Liberal	hockey
Greg Kerr	West Nova, N.S.	Cons.	football
Darryl Kramp	Prince Edward-Hastings, Ont.	Cons.	baseball
Carole Lavallee	Saint-Bruno-Saint-Hubert, Que.	Bloc	hockey
Jack Layton	Toronto-Danforth, Ont.	NDP	swimming
Dominic LeBlanc	Beausejour, N.B.	Liberal	water-skiing
Gary Lunn	Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.	Cons.	skiing
James Lunney	Nanaimo-Alberni, B.C.	Cons.	hockey
Peter MacKay	Central Nova, N.S.	Cons.	rugby
Gurbaj Malhi	Bramalea-Gore-Malton, Ont.	Liberal	kabaddi
Tony Martin	Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.	NDP	soccer
Colin Mayes	Okanagan-Shuswap, B.C.	Cons.	baseball
Phil McColeman	Brant, Ont.	Cons.	hockey
Thomas Mulcair	Outremont, Que.	NDP	swimming
Gordon O'Connor	Carleton-Mississippi Ont.	Cons.	hockey
Robert Olliphant	Don Valley West, Ont.	Cons.	rowing
Massimo Pacetti	St-Leonard-St-Michel, Que.	Liberal	rugby
Joe Preston	Elgin-Middlesex-London, Ont.	Cons.	baseball
Bob Rae	Toronto Centre, Ont.	Liberal	tennis
Yasmin Ratansi	Don Valley East, Ont.	Liberal	badminton
Geoff Regan	Halifax West, N.S.	Liberal	hockey
Gerry Ritz	Battlefords-Lloydminster, Sask.	Cons.	hockey
Pablo Rodriguez	Honore-Mercier, Que.	Liberal	soccer
Peter Stoffer	Sackville-E. Shore, N.S.	NDP	rugby
David Sweet	Ancaster-Dundas, Ont.	Cons.	marathon
Paul Szabo	Mississauga South, Ont.	Liberal	marathon
Merv Tweed	Brandon-Souris, Man.	Cons.	baseball
Maurice Vallacott	Saskatoon-Wanuskewin, Sask.	Cons.	hockey
Dave Van Kesteren	Chatham-Kent-Essex, Ont.	Cons.	baseball
Joe Volpe	Eglinton-Lawrence, Ont.	Liberal	football
Miek Wallace	Burlington, Ont.	Cons.	baseball
Rodney Weston	Saint John, N.B.	Cons.	marathon
Stephen Woodworth	Kitcheener Centre, Ont.	Cons.	baseball

From the arena to the House of Commons: All in a day's work for Howie Meeker

BY TOM KORSKI

Of thousands of parliamentarians and professional athletes who've practised their trade since Confederation, only a handful managed both at the same time. Former NHLer Howie Meeker was one of those few.

"It was a wonderful experience, (with) wonderful people!" recalls the Hockey Hall of Famer.

As a Calder Trophy winner with the Toronto Maple Leafs, Meeker in 1951 was drafted by then-Conservative leader George Drew to contest a federal byelection in the Ontario riding of Waterloo-South. "Score a Win with Meeker!" read his campaign flyers. He won by 2,467 votes.

Meeker then served for more than two years as opposition housing critic while playing for the Leafs



under Conn Smythe.

"It worked all right," says Meeker, 87, who remembers frequent train travel to keep pace with his NHL schedule and Commons' Orders of the Day.

"We'd play Montreal on the Thursday; I'd get the train out of Ottawa, for Boston, New York, whatever, I'd fly back to Montreal, take the train to Ottawa and return

to work."

Now retired on Vancouver Island, Meeker draws parallels between team and caucus.

"You bond," he explains. "You bond in politics and in games — same thing. If you win any kind of championship as a member of a team, you have tremendous trust in other humans."

Meeker retired from Parliament after one term, but not for lack of enjoyment of Parliament Hill, he says.

As an MP and professional athlete, husband, father and homeowner with a mortgage, he earned \$14,000 a year without a pension.

Looking back 60 years to his parliamentary career, Meeker says: "You have a true feeling for Canadian life. It's absolutely amazing what you learn in competition."

Meeker will return to Ottawa on May 27 to receive the Order of Canada, the country's highest civilian honour.

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