

Sport in Lethbridge in 20 years

Shaun Ward and Gary Bowie are known for their commitment to various community service projects.

Between them, they have nearly a century of community service to their credit – Ward as a Lethbridge College faculty member and long-serving city councillor, among many contributions that span his decades-long residency in Lethbridge; and Bowie with more than 50 years in Lethbridge as community advocate for sports, social services and many other causes in addition to an academic career in Kinesiology and Physical Education at the University of Lethbridge.

In all of their many interests, one is constant: Sport and sport development in the community at a lifelong recreational level, and also at an elite athlete level.

Both were active as young people and remain active today.

Both coached – Ward, wrestling; Bowie, basketball and hockey.

Both of them were on board at the founding of the Lethbridge Sport Council in 2008 and, prior to that as contributors to a large-scale report Lethbridge City Council commissioned in 2007 to define the future of sport development in the community.

The Lethbridge Sport Council asked Bowie and Ward to imagine Lethbridge in 2034 – 20 years from now, and forecast what the community looks like from a sport perspective.

Their passion for the topic is evident in their similar viewpoints, though they approach the concept from different angles.

Talking to them about the future of sport in the community sets a writer up for a long interview that's part conversation between old friends, part 'verbal tennis match' as ideas are lobbed back and forth, and with a firm eye on the future.

Neither Bowie nor Ward look backwards. Nostalgia is not in their vocabulary. Instead, it's '...how far can we move forward?' 'What can we do now that will help out years from now?'

"As we set goals for our future development, we appreciate the level of commitment and expertise brought to our organization by Gary and Shaun, and many volunteers like them. Their input will be tremendously valuable as we plan a future for our city that includes sport as a key part of the Lethbridge experience," said Susan Eymann, the Executive Director of the Lethbridge Sport Council.

“What we’ve done with the information they provided to us is assemble it as a Q&A format so people can look at their comments and, in turn, make their own to help us further refine what sport means in our community.”

Eymann added that comments from readers are welcome, and that the Sport Council is interested in hearing from people who want to encourage new types of sport or have suggestions about future facility needs in the city.

“We don’t have a crystal ball, but want to encourage as many people as possible to dream big, as Gary and Shaun have done, to help us stay relevant.”

Comments are invited at info@lethbridgesportcouncil.ca

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How will the Lethbridge Sport Council evolve over the next 20 years?

The Lethbridge Sport Council (LSC) becomes a stronger entity in relation to the community:

- It is a strong advocate for long term athletic development in line with federal and provincial trends — a system that will provide a chance for children to take part in sports and do so for years and years
- It helps strengthen a culture of sport and recreation as being of equal value
- The LSC is the hub of a coordinated effort where people work together with different sports agencies and other groups -- educators, health and business – to support entry-level and life-long appreciation for sport.
- LSC maintains a consistently updated volunteer pool of more than 3000 people – a legacy of the 2019 Canada Winter Games bid process – who are able to help out with sports activities, and who see volunteering as a key part of their community service experiences.

What Sport Trends do you see in 20 years?

- there are well-established sports that will always be with us – basketball, hockey, football, baseball, soccer, volleyball, etc...
- there will be non-traditional sports emerging - both team and individual - which need to be planned for and worked into the community
- The aspect of planning must include not just the performance sport organizations and facilities, but those that encourage unstructured play, recreation sports and non-traditional sports as integral parts of children's development.
- We will have a balance of recreational opportunities with high performance opportunities
- Elite athletes stay in Lethbridge to train because of a strong Alberta Sport Development Centre in the community

- Lethbridge College and University of Lethbridge have increased the number of sport teams. Kodiaks have a hockey team and Pronghorns a football team.
- We have become a centre of excellence in sport development, coaching at national and international levels and are known for the development of officials in numerous sports.
- We will have more sport facilities and clubs that are Canada and western Canada training centres for specific sports – we are known for this across the country. We have several facilities that house national-level training programs, coaching and other services to support athletes.

What types of Infrastructure / Facilities will we have in our city?

- 20 years from now, the City will have more than 120,000 people, and the twinned arenas, aquatic centre and field houses on the west side are operating successfully
- The Crossings area is a downtown core for the west side of Lethbridge
- Because the city has expanded significantly, there are now walking and cycling trails that link every quadrant of our city assisted by the construction of a footbridge across the river.
- The city has continued to invest in school construction to ensure that the gyms and sports facilities are of sufficient size and quality for joint use by the community. The joint use agreement between the city and school division is stronger than ever.
- Immigrants and international students have introduced new sports to our community such as cricket, and recent parks now have cricket fields and see continued use.
- We have an Olympic size ice arena, and as a result speed skating has become a highly-subscribed sport in the community. The international ice surface size encourages other sports that need more ice space, and adds to the inventory of quality sport facilities in the city.
- The City's trail system is thought of as a gigantic community facility, used by all ages and people of all abilities. Its extensive development has allowed cyclists, walkers, wildlife photographers access to the river valley and other natural spaces in the community. The running and cycling communities now has access to a well-developed space to host high profile running and cycling events.
- The outdoor pool at Henderson Park celebrates its 20th anniversary with continued use throughout the summer months
- a new specialty field house is under construction that would allow for large-scale sports – football and baseball — to be able to have their athletes train indoors year 'round. The building features a massive addition to the court-sport community: numerous basketball, volleyball, tennis and badminton courts to significantly increase the usability of the facility.

- A specialized indoor shooting range will allow for the development of a variety of shooting sport disciplines
- facility programming is based on the sport for life concept — bookings for unstructured and structured activity, multi-sport programs for youth and adults, inclusive programming for all ages, genders and ability, recreation and high performance sport programming

Hosting Sport Events

- Lethbridge has acquired a reputation as a place to hold national and international sporting events and guarantees athletes and all visitors an exhilarating experience in the community and the region.
- We have successfully hosted many more international competitions
- The Tour of Alberta is now a favoured community activity, as are other formerly non-traditional sports.
- we are the hosting experts and our events will be of such high caliber that we would have people fighting to attend and have their events in our town.
- We have a bidding process, with a sustainable funding system, and we will have a calendar of events for the community that would be up to date and used by all
- There is a tight collaboration between the City, the tourism community, economic development organizations, and the Sport Council who all work together to consider all aspects of the community when looking to attract people, business and organizations to the city.

Community Development

- The relationship between the sports community and the arts and culture community has blossomed and the crossover aspects of sport tourism, art and culture are ingrained in the community.
- We have benefited from several successful business partnerships with hotels, restaurants and other organizations, and the level of corporate support for sports is at an all time high due to investment in facilities and sports venues upgrades supported by individuals and corporations.
- The continued growth at the college and the university has brought even more young people to the community, and facilities at both institutions allow for the development of athletes at those venues.
- a special fund supported by the Lethbridge Sport Council exists through the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta to assist elite athletes training for international events such as the Olympics / Paralympics, Commonwealth Games, PanAm / Para PanAm Games, etc.
- The public and private sectors are partners in sport recreation health endeavours, motivated by the increased interest in sport and wellness brought on by the appreciation of sport and wellness as a key part of people's lifestyles.

- people of all ages including seniors are taking part in more variety of sports
- At all new facilities, senior athletes and officials would be an important part of the sport concept and would be sustained by a solid plan that involves the life long aspect of sport and training
- the spectator experience in our facilities is top notch. In person, guests can sit in a comfortable environment and have a great experience. For those not able to attend, facilities will be up to date with technology and allow for internet broadcasting and social media distribution so all sports have a chance to be seen by as many people as possible.