

BRINGING FORESTRY AND COMMUNITY TOGETHER FOR OVER 100 YEARS

By Brenda Martin



Photo: Brenda Martin

Powell River's new amphitheatre was packed for the first logger sports in 11 years. Over 12,000 people came through the gates on Saturday!

After an 11-year hiatus, logger sports rose from the woodchips in Powell River, reminding us once again which industry built Powell River and remains its economic backbone.

Logger sports started as a form of entertainment at logging camps. The camps in the 19th century were a long distance from any town, almost exclusively male and usually dry. After a long day in the woods, what was there to do? Competition and gambling: It's a match made in heaven. The men would compete against each other using the skills they honed each day: climbing a tree, handling an axe or a saw, and birling a log.

In the early 1900s, logger sports had come to the coast of BC. As you can see, the stands were pretty full during a Courtenay show in 1927 (see photo page 46). By the 1950s, logger sports had captured the hearts of many across North America. The rodeo style competition combined with forestry skills hit a nerve with the public. There were enough shows running to create a circuit and those with the strongest skills took their show on the road. The Canadian Logger Sports Association was founded in the

1960s and it created a set of rules and regulations to govern the competitions that is still in use today.

In Powell River, logger sports had been around since about 1910. But the first professional logger sports show that was part of a broader circuit was held in 1976. Seven years later, Bill Marquis won Novice All Around Logger. Tragically, Bill was killed in a falling accident in 1984. His brother, Bob Marquis—owner of TLA member company Bob Marquis Contracting—started a memorial logger sports show in 1985 that ran until 2005. Over the years, several other memorial awards have been added. At its peak, it was a huge event attracting international competitors and was broadcasted on TSN.

The TLA was one of many organizations sponsoring the returning Powell River Logger Sports and there was clearly an appetite for the show amongst the local population. The stands were full all three days and there was standing room only at the show's peak on Saturday. Show organizers estimate 12,800 people attended the opening ceremony on Saturday and 25,000 bodies came through the gates over the



Photo: Brenda Martin

Photo: Bob Marquis



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three days. Considering the population of Powell River and the surrounding community is 20,000, it was clearly a popular event. Combined with the logging sports, there was also a wood carv-

ing competition and a trade show filled with local businesses—the TLA shared a booth with Powell River Living magazine. TLA President, Jacqui Beban was part of the official opening ceremonies

on Saturday morning and gave a heartwarming speech about forestry and her own experience of its role in rural communities.

The TLA sponsored six logger sports

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Photo: Bob Marquis



this season in Powell River, Squamish, Port Alberni, Campbell River, Port McNeill and Sandspit. Clearly, the appetite for these shows still exists on BC's coast. "TLA members are the eco-

nomie backbone of BC's coastal communities," explained David Elstone, TLA Executive Director. "We support these shows through our TLA Forestry Education Fund because they bring

forestry and the broader community together to celebrate something that is both our history and a big part of local economies today—logging!"

Terry Basso, a Campbell River resident,

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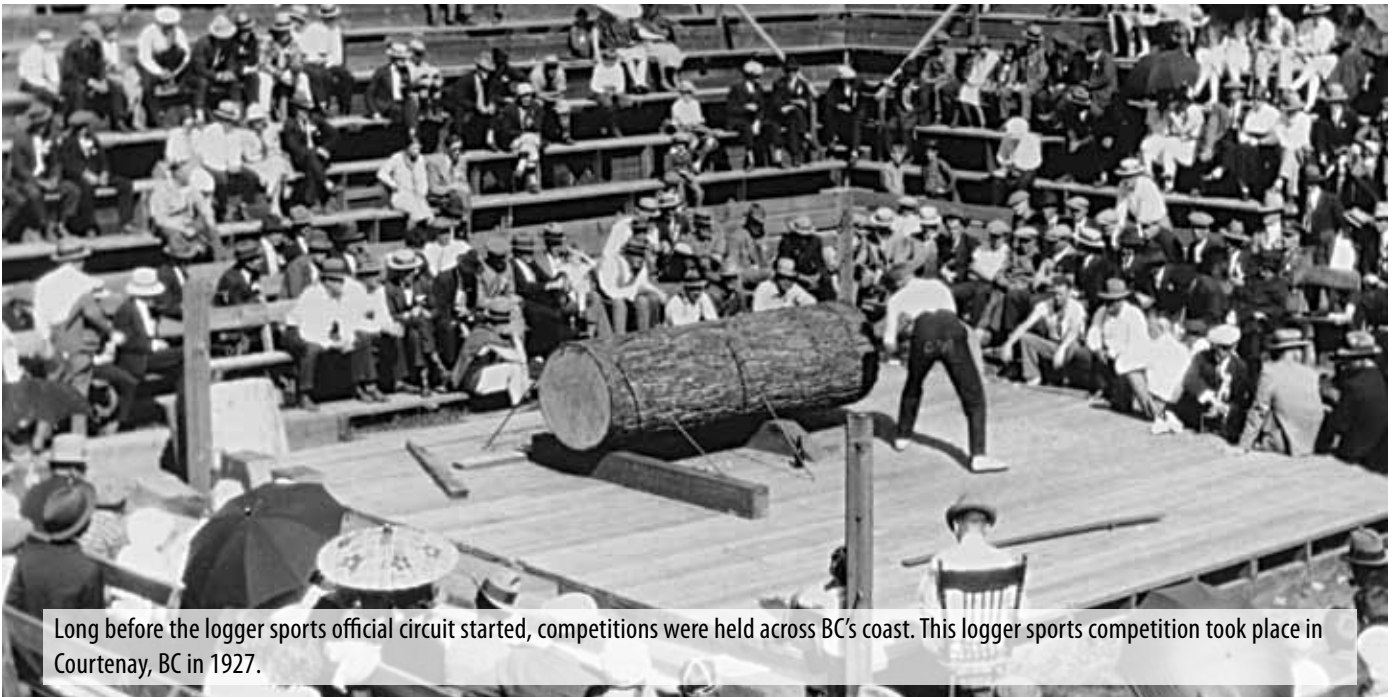
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Long before the logger sports official circuit started, competitions were held across BC's coast. This logger sports competition took place in Courtenay, BC in 1927.

forest professional and Probyn Log employee, volunteered at Campbell River's logger sports show this past summer. A past competitor with several Best in Canada titles under his belt, Basso hadn't been involved in the last few years. But the atmosphere and camaraderie he experienced last summer has drawn him back in and he plans to train this winter and compete next year. "Logger sports is different than other sports. If my axe



Photo: Brenda Martin

breaks, someone will run out and give me another axe to use," said Basso. "You're there to compete but not at the expense of the other competitors."

Bob Marquis echoes Basso's sentiment. "I competed all over the world for 35 years and I love the camaraderie. Also, it's a family event in every town—there's something for everyone." And how did it feel to have the show back after an 11 year hiatus? "It felt great," said Marquis. "We had some new blood in it this year and a really good executive. Next year, we'll have the biggest show in the world and a new event!" Marquis can't give details yet but the new event will tie back to Powell River's rail logging days.

The TLA is a proud supporter of the six coastal logger sports shows. The TLA Forestry Education Fund, generously founded and supported by TLA members, is committed to encouraging the continued entrance of youth into the forest industry, to promoting the TLA and its members and to supporting good forest stewardship. "I'm glad we're able to support logger sports on the coast," said Dave McNaught, TLA Director and Chair of the TLA Education Committee. "It's always difficult to decide what to support each year, but these events bring forestry into the community and inspire people. That's priceless."🌲

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