

Oval to be racers' edge

Long-track facility will be big boost for speedskaters, Le May Doan says

By PAT LEE Staff Reporter

Tue, Oct 5 - 4:53 AM



Olympic speedskating gold medallist Catriona Le May Doan speaks to reporters during a tour of the Canada Winter Games long track oval under construction at the Commons in Halifax on Monday. (Peter Parsons / Staff)

Get out your aerodynamically designed unitard and clap skates. Long-track speedskating is coming to town.

Organizers say the public will have a chance to take a spin around the ice in the weeks leading up to the 2011 Canada Games on the 400-metre oval under construction at Halifax's North Common.

"The free public programming will include learn-to-skate programs and daily open skates, encouraging everyone to skate for pleasure, fitness and skill-building," Games CEO Chris Morrissey said Monday at an event to show off the progress made

on the speedskating facility.

Spectators will also be able to watch long-track races during the Games for free.

With speed-skating Olympian, world champion and former Canada Games competitor Catriona Le May Doan by his side, Morrissey said the oval ticks off many firsts for the province and the region.

The refrigerated outdoor rink will be the first of its kind for a Canada Games, which will be held in Nova Scotia from Feb. 11 to 27.

In January, the \$2.1-million oval will also get a workout hosting the Canadian Masters Championships, marking the first long-track competition held in Nova Scotia.

"(It's) a historic event and a major milestone in the speedskating community," he said.

"These are events that many Nova Scotians have never seen before."

The athletic development and skating skills learned "will last much longer than the Games or the oval," Morrissey said.

The ice will be professionally maintained, with experts from the covered oval in Calgary overseeing the project.

Planners expect the track to be open to the public by Dec. 15. Weather will determine how long it remains open after the Games.

Le May Doan, who will be at the Games as a broadcaster, said she competed at two winter Canada Games in short track but never got a chance to compete in long-track skating. (There was no long-track event at her second Games in Cape Breton in 1987.)

She said even a temporary facility will leave a lasting legacy.

"It is absolutely incredible to see this happen in Atlantic Canada, not just for my sport of speedskating and the athletes, but for the community."

Le May Doan said the Canada Games are a stepping stone for most elite athletes, noting that three-quarters of those who competed in Vancouver last winter had also taken part in a Canada Games.

The oval will be dismantled after the Games, with the ice chillers being used at other sites such as, perhaps, another outdoor skating facility, Morrissey said.

The sport field on the Commons will be rebuilt, with improved drainage thanks to the oval.

The Games will be first in the province since Cape Breton in 1987. About 2,700 athletes will compete in 20 sports.

The Canada Games Centre, the venue for synchronized swimming, badminton and other sports, is under construction at the Mainland North Common in Clayton Park.

Ticket packages for the Games go on sale Thursday.

(plee@herald.ca)

'It is absolutely incredible to see this happen in Atlantic Canada, not just for my sport of speedskating and the athletes, but for the community.'

Olympic champion

CATRIONA LE MAY DOAN