

Edmonton Journal Indoor Games participants enjoy 'amazing experience'

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A flurry of action in the elementary girls' 800-metre semi-finals at the 2011 Edmonton Journal Indoor Games, held at the University of Alberta Butterdome in Edmonton, March 19, 2011.

Photograph by: Ed Kaiser , The Journal

Adam Hawrelak and Brett Robbins were visibly exhausted after running in the elementary boys' 800 metre race semifinal heats of Saturday's Edmonton Journal Indoor Games.

The Earl Buxton Grade 4 students weren't fast enough to qualify for the finals, but both enjoyed being on the track, even though it was a little scary.

"It's scary when that gun goes off and you've got butterflies in your stomach. I was deaf the whole race," Adam said.

Brett thought running at the Edmonton Journal Indoor Games was similar to another sport he competes in.

"It just feels like cross-country to me," he said.

Adam and Brett were two of more than 6,000 students from elementary to high schools who competed in preliminary rounds leading to quarter-final, semifinal and finals at the University of Alberta Butterdome on Saturday.

The event has occurred annually since 1979 when it attracted students and world-class athletes from across the globe. Since 1983, the focus has been on students, but there were also medals presented to Masters-level athletes.

It's one of the largest indoor track and field events in the world and meet director Irv Barros said the only reason it runs so smoothly year after year is the army of volunteers. This year volunteers helped oversee more than 100 races.

"Not only do we have volunteers for this competition, we have volunteers who come back year after year," Barros said. "Some of those people go right back to the Coliseum days."

Most of the racers were from Edmonton and surrounding areas, but there were a few who have travelled more than a couple of hours to compete.

"It's unusual, but we (had) a few students from Calgary competing here this year," he said.

Hannah Leggatt isn't from the stampede city, but she nearly set a new personal best time by winning the junior high girls 800 metre race with a time of two minutes, 27.23 seconds.

The Grade 8 H. E. Beriault Junior High student was proud of the way she ran the race and enjoyed being out on the track in such an intense environment.

"I felt strong, had a good kick and was very comfortable," Hannah said. "It's an amazing experience and I love training with my teammates, and to be in front of all these people is a really fun experience."

Some of the other winners were Archbishop Jordan's Shane Ohrt, who won the senior high 200-metre dash with a time of 22.73, and St. Stanislaus's Kael Tupper, who won the elementary 800-metre race with a time of 2:32.96.

Of note, boys and girls teams from Michael Kostek Elementary both ran in the 8x200-metre relay finals on a night when their coach, Bob Shulko, was presented with the Irv Barros Edmonton Journal Coach's Award.

Hundreds of family and friends flocked to the Butterdome to cheer on the athletes, but Barros said the biggest thing is the cheering the athletes do for their friends and classmates.

"We had great competition once again," Barros said. "The best part is that even if runners are not out in front, their buddies are screaming for them, whether they're in third, fourth or whatever place."

Even though the Journal Games are over, Adam still asked one of his coaches, Geoff Kearney, one question: "Can we still have early-morning practices?"

Otherwise, Adam said, he will get bored.

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