

Olympic Athletes

William “Bill” Griffith

Olympian, Sports Entrepreneur and Musician



In 1972 Cobourg was once again represented at the Olympics. W.R. (Bill) Griffith competed at Munich, Germany in the XXth Olympiad, **One-Person Canoe (C1) Whitewater Slalom.**

Bill's love for the sport began when he was paddling with his Dad and Scout troop in Algonquin Park.

Bill Griffith tells his own story.

I remember an elderly paddler in Algonquin Park saying that if I ever tried whitewater paddling I would be hooked.

A few years later, in 1969, I transferred from the University of Waterloo to the University of Washington in Seattle, Wa., **to study Aero and Astro Engineering.** Once there I went looking for local paddlers and met one from Hungary: Al Zob. Al introduced me to whitewater canoeing and, as predicted, I was hooked immediately, paddling initially in C-2 with Al and later C-1. That same year I **founded the University of Washington Canoe and Kayak Club.**

After competing throughout Europe in 1970 and 1971, I **qualified for the Canadian Olympic Team in Whitewater Slalom** to compete in the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Germany. The event was held at the famed “Ice Canal” in the City of Augsburg, a half hour train ride from the Olympic Village and Stadium. At this event, early in my paddling career, **I finished 16th in C-1 Slalom.**

Competing at the Summer Olympics was a very bittersweet experience. **The excitement of the games turned suddenly to horror** as terrorists took hostages and killed eleven Israeli athletes. It is an event still difficult to process.

Cobourg boy competes at Munich Olympics

For the first time in many long years, there is a Cobourg area resident representing Canada in an event at the Olympic Games.

Bill Griffith, son of Mr. and Mrs. Lew Griffith, is competing in the white water canoeing event as part of the Canadian team. It is the first time the water event has been included in the Olympic Games and the Canadian team faces stiff competition from countries from around the world.

Our Canadian team is made up of “volunteers”, who must take time out from their studies or businesses to train and compete. Other teams from other countries are sponsored year-round to do nothing but train.

However, Mrs. Lew Griffith says the Canadians have been doing well in international European meets being held prior to the Games and the team may well place.

“I’m so excited I can hardly stand to wait until we leave,” said Mrs. Griffith on Wednesday afternoon. She and her husband will be leaving Sunday en route for Europe to see Bill compete.

Cobourg is sending a letter with the Griffiths to give to Bill, who is now at the athlete’s village in Munich, Germany, the site of the Games.

And that’s not all. Many neighbors, friends and organizations throughout the area are sending tokens of their moral support to Bill.

One point of bafflement to the Griffiths, is the lack of national publicity given to our Olympic athletes. It seems they have to win on their own before support is shown.

But that’s not the case here in Cobourg. We’ll all be waiting and watching Munich, Germany, as Bill, and our other Canadian athletes, compete.

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Hamilton Township has sent a letter of encouragement. The town of



Cobourg Star

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While at the Olympics I attended an evening concert of African music which **kindled a passion for Ghanaian drumming**. One of the performers there, Kpani Addy, later became my friend and drumming instructor in Portland and Hood River, Oregon.

The 1970s were great years for me competitively. I was ten-time Canadian National Whitewater Slalom Champion in C-1 (1971-1980). At the 1974 Commonwealth Games in New Zealand I was Gold Medalist in the C-1 Whitewater event. At the World Championships in Skopje, Yugoslavia I finished 4th in C-1 Slalom narrowly missing the podium. That same year I won Gold at the International Slalom in Tacen, Yugoslavia. My fellow competitors and I were very disappointed when the **Canadian Olympic Association decided against including Whitewater at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal.**

In 1980 at the winter Olympics in Lake Placid, I attended as a design engineer with K-2 Skis and worked with the Nordic Cross Country skiers.

In 1981 I put down my paddle and took up windsurfing, designing sailboards for Connelly Skis in Seattle. I soon moved to Hood River, Oregon and started the first windsurfing shop in the Columbia Gorge, Wind Synergy. Being close to Mt Hood, I took up snowboarding and soon, with two others, **started the first Snowboard School on Mt Hood at the Mt Hood Meadow's Ski Resort.**

Presently, I live in Hood River, Oregon, where I enjoy kiting, cross country skiing, snowboarding and playing the Rhythms of Africa music on marimba and drums.

*Adrenaline, Agility,
Strength and Strategy*



Slalom run at London Olympics 2012.
See the little canoe above the bald head?

Three types of boats are used in slalom racing – the single kayak (K1), the single canoe (C1) and the two-person canoe (C2). Slalom boats do not have rudders and are steered with the paddle and by the athlete shifting weight to edge the boat and carve through the water. Kayakers use a double-bladed paddle and canoers use a single blade. In slalom, all paddlers are enclosed by a water-tight skirt. Kayakers are seated in the boat while canoers kneel on both knees. Helmets and lifejackets are important safety equipment.