

Carstairs to carry Alberta flag

TERRY FARRELL – Herald-Tribune staff

Vancouver had Clara Hughes.

We have Sam Carstairs.

Team Alberta North, meet your flag-bearer for the Arctic Winter Games opening ceremonies.

Alberta North officials had to look no further than the recently-concluded 2010 Winter Olympics for inspiration.

Hughes was a natural as Canada's flag-bearer in Vancouver.

As the only Canadian to ever win medals in both the Summer and Winter Olympics – and only the fourth such athlete worldwide – it was an easy choice.

Carstairs boasts a similar background.

He has represented either his zone or the province four times on the provincial and national stage.

He has come home with medals three times.

Like Hughes, Carstairs is a multi-sport athlete. He has represented Alberta as a wrestler and a basketball player.

He won a bronze medal in 2006 as a wrestler at the Alberta Winter Games.

The same year, he was a member of the Zone 8 basketball team at the Alberta Summer Games. The team finished fifth.

In 2007, Carstairs represented Alberta at the Western Canada Summer Games, finishing with a silver medal and this past summer, he wrestled in the Canada Summer Games, winning a bronze for Alberta.

At 18, these will be his last such games.

It's a fitting farewell.

Carstairs was told of the selection Thursday afternoon.

"I was pretty proud and excited," he said. "I've never carried the flag before, so this is something new. One of my wrestling teammates carried the flag for Alberta at the Canada Summer Games, but that's as close as I got. I am very honoured."

Carstairs will be a member of the Alberta North basketball team for these Games – his first Arctic Winter Games.

A 2009 graduate of Grande Prairie Composite High, Carstairs has been a resident of Grande Prairie since September 2007.

He was born in Perth, Western Australia. He immigrated to Canada in 2002 and lived in Nunavut from 2002-05, then moved to the North Peace town of High Level.



Sam Carstairs has been selected as the Team Alberta North flag-bearer for the Arctic Winter Games.

Terry Farrell

It was at that point that his provincial and national sporting experience started.

He has made a lot of contacts in the past few years, on the provincial Games circuit.

The Arctic Winter Games will be Carstairs' adieu to the provincial Games stage, but are also a chance to reunite with friends from the past.

He knows a few of the athletes on the Nunavut team.

"There's a few people from there that I still talk to and a couple of people coming down for the Games," he said. "I know a couple of the members of the (Nunavut) soccer team.

"It was in Nunavut that I first heard about the Arctic Winter Games, but I was too young to qualify back then."

Team Alberta North's Chef de Mission, Cam Berwald, was part of the selection committee.

"We sent out a form to all the sports (staff) and they were allowed to nominate any of their athletes as flag-bearer," she said, explaining the process.

"The nominations forms were reviewed by the mission staff and we as a staff make the decision."

There were many reasons for the choice of Carstairs as the flag-bearer.

"His past sporting excellence, being a dual-sport athlete, speaks very highly to his commitment in sport, and certainly his talent," she said. "To be able to exceed not only in one sport but two sports.

"We were looking for someone who is going to be a great ambassador for our province, leads through leadership; such as the role of a captain, encouraging his teammates to work hard and push hard.

"So he is a leader in the sport, but also a great performer as well.

"Those are all characteristics that we consider in making a selection for an important role such as the flag-bearer."

Berwald and her selection committee will have to go through the whole process again in a week when the time comes to determine which athlete carries the flag at the closing ceremonies.

"Once again, we will send out nomination forms toward the end of the Games, and we will ask coaches to nominate an athlete who they feel is worthy of carrying the flag for the closing ceremonies," she said.

"And again, we will be looking for someone who not only performed well, but someone who was a really good ambassador, both on and off the playing field."

As for Carstairs, while this chapter of his sporting life ends at these Games, it's quite possible the next could include provincial and national opportunities as well.

Carstairs will be heading to University of Calgary in the fall, where he will be a member of the Dinos wrestling team.