

Roy E. Heath
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Radio Interview

START OF INTERVIEW

(Interviewer): Alright back with you on WGR Sports rap and right now we're going to go to the telephone I guess all the way up there to Marquette - Dr. Roy E. Heath, doctor how you doing?

(Roy Heath): Doing pretty good but I'm in Sun City, Arizona.

(I): Oh for crying out loud you've run off to a warm spot!

(RH): You know it! After all, the temperature is only sixty here today. I thought it was cold!

(I): Oh rub it in, rub it in! I shouldn't complain we had a low last night of right around 30 degrees. I had forgotten how nice thawing sounded until I got home last night – it's thawing a little bit anyway, doctor. How you doing?

(RH): Well I'm doing pretty good.

(I): Let's talk about the facility up at Northern Michigan University and I know this is something you've been working on a long time, in fact, I'll just start and set the folks up a little bit if I can, Roy. 1976 a group of sports enthusiasts, civic leaders in and around the upper peninsula area, Marquette county and so on, believed the area had the potential necessary to become a training center for Olympic athletes. And it says in the release, doctor, that one Dr. Roy E. Heath lead the whole thing and they called themselves the Great Lakes Training Site Association. It began the monumental task of gaining designation of their area as an Olympic training site. Well that has finally come to fruition. From what I understand, Dr. Heath, you've been a big part in that and you've got to be a rather satisfied gentleman right now.

(RH): Of course we started it in 1966.

(I): Sixty-six?

(RH): Yes

(I): So you have been working on it a while? [RH seems not to have heard] You have been working on it a while then haven't you?

(RH): Sure have! [laughs]

(I): Well, alright so let's talk about what this means. First of all, you started in '66, was it evident to you then that the Olympic movement in this country needed some designated Olympic sites for training, were you convinced of that then?

(RH): Oh yes. I was convinced because it seemed to me that if you were going to be training athletes you should have the modern academic in an academic community so that they wouldn't just become ski bums but they could practice and become proficient in their art but at the same time progress toward a lifetime of success. I thought that should be on a university campus.

(I): Well this will be the first, and there are three sites now with the naming of this one – Colorado Springs, Colorado one and of course Lake Placid the other – but this is the first that's located at a university.

(RH): Yes. Of course there are schools in Colorado Springs but they aren't that convenient, and the air force academy is, what, 17 miles away. So there's an awful lot of traffic involved on this, whereas at Northern you're pretty much in walking distance on most of its campus.

(I): I guess I was originally under the assumption, doctor, that it was going to be for winter sports considering the location of Marquette and so on, but that's not the case is it?

(RH): Well the 1966 proposal was for winter sports, but then after Fran ____ Ford started the revamping of the U.S. Olympic committee, and I did attend all those hearings and so forth, when we got into that we realized that we have a lot more to offer than we had imagined because our athletic facilities are really good and they were built for 12,500 students and it looked to me as though we weren't going to exceed 8,000. So the net result was that we said, "Well why don't we just go ahead and do everything." So we figured we could handle, I figured 20 sports, some other people say 30, but realistically I think then we'd better stick with around 20.

(I): Alright let me go over some of the sports that will be included; archery, bobsled, cycling, field hockey, ice hockey, alpine skiing, soccer team, handball, basketball, boxing, diving, figure skating, rolling, cross country, speed skating, biathlon, canoeing, kayaking, fencing, gymnastics, shooting skee, jumping and swimming. And I didn't name all of them so we're talking about a lot of them. Now, are the facilities all in place up in Marquette or are there going to have to be facilities added?

(RH): Well, in bobsledding, which you didn't mention, in bobsledding we do not have the bobsled, but we do have the luge run – the second one in the United States – that is operating. Speed skating – we have a 400-meter oval up there that's natural ice that's being used very significantly this winter. And of course all of the other facilities in gymnastics I don't think there's any place that can compare with us that has a university structure and a gymnastics laboratory that's as completely set-up.

(I): What's all this going to mean to the Marquette area business-wise as well as just recognition?

(RH): Well, hard to tell what it's going to be business-wise, the idea is that it's a training site, it's not an international competition site. In other words we aren't going to shoot for the Olympic games in the next quadrennial. But the idea – it is a training site – and that of course will bring in local competitions and some regional competitions and bring in some foreign people. Now for 97 years the Suicide Hill ski-jumping program has been going on which is a very well-known international competition and that'll have its effect. And out in Colorado Springs they tell me they figure the Olympic training site out there means 17 million a year in income to the community. And I wouldn't expect Northern maybe to hit that amount, but if it can be 17 million there and if our facilities are better than they are at Colorado Springs or at Lake Placid, from the standpoint of training, it would seem as though we can make out pretty good!

(I): Now Northern will maintain room-and-board for what is it 80 athletes per day and 85 and 186, 87...?

(RH): That's the arrangement that was made, but I would anticipate that that would be filled immediately and then there will be a request from the national governing bodies to put more people in there.

(I): Okay, now something I didn't realize until I started reading the material doctor is the fact the site designation remains in effect through '92 Olympic games, 91-92, and can be extended on an annual basis after that time so it's not here and forever per se, but it's something that's going to have to be looked at again later on.

(RH): Well you must realize that the U.S. Olympic committee operates on a quadrennial basis – every 4 years, every Olympiad period. And at the end of the Olympiad period new officers are elected so there's a new situation. So obviously you can't make an agreement with an organization that's going to change every 4 years but it's been very consistent, Colonel Miller's been there for many, many years and I presume if Northern does the job that I assume they're going to do, they can't afford not to continue to deal with them!

(I): Well I wouldn't think so, and not only that, but they'll have the facilities and the whole mechanism in-place so it would be an obvious place to continue to have it, wouldn't it?

(RH): They did discontinue one at Squaw Valley, though.

(I): Oh, I didn't know that.

(RH): Yeah, they discontinued the site at Squaw Valley that was basically a winter site and they did not have enough facilities and they didn't have enough area to handle the deal and so they pulled out of Squaw Valley.

(I): Dr. Heath let's go back, you said '66 you started working on this thing. What happened, what all was involved, just briefly kind of bring us up to date, who did you start calling and I know you spent a ton of time on the phones and visiting meetings, but what was it like all that time?

(RH): Well Ed Harden was president up there then at Northern and he had acquired the property that sits in Shiras Hills inside the city of Marquette that had belonged to the prison. There was a hill there, part of Mount Marquette, that had a 600-ft. drop. The president called me in one day and said, "Hey Roy, figure out what to do with that property!" So I read the deed and it said it was limited for educational and recreational purposes only. Well I figured there was snow and a hill and so forth and the city adjacent to it had the city ski hill, so I just said, "Well why don't we make an Olympic training site out of it?" That's how it started.

(I): You haven't spent any time on the phone since then, have you?

(RH): [laughs] I've been to all the training sites, I've been to all the hearings and I've gotten around, but you have to get around if you want to know what's happening. And of course I'm not the only one that's been doing this, _____, goodness gracious that man has really put the hours in supporting this program.

(I): It takes a lot of folks to pull something like this off. I got to ask you, I guess the obvious question, we have an aspiring Olympian out there that is fascinated by the fact that you're going to have this facility up in Marquette. How does he go about contacting people and trying to become a part of it all?

(RH): Well on his part, he will have to determine who the national governing body or a group that runs sports, for instance basketball the ABA runs it, and so he should get a hold of the breakdown of the U.S. Olympic committee and indicate his interest to the U.S. Olympic committee and have his coaches tell him how good he is, and if they're really good then it's up to the national governing bodies to recommend the people to Northern that will be accepted on training.

(I): And now the idea, of course, is that they can be taking some schooling at the same time right?

(RH): That's right. Don't just talk about college kids now. You understand, a person in middle school or high school that wants to go to Northern without going through the group can go up there. It would cost him, it wouldn't be paid for on this basis, but the thing is there is a training program for developing athletes.

(I): Good point, I'm glad you brought that up. Okay, now the kids that are in the regular program – going to school and also taking advantage of the athletic facilities – are they in a scholarship situation?

(RH): Well a high percentage of kids going to school are on grant programs...

(I): Well I guess what I'm trying to say is, the kids going through the Olympic training do they get some sort of subsidy, some sort of help?

(RH): Well if they are recommended by the national governing body, yes.

(I): Yeah that's what I meant. Okay, I was just wondering how that worked. This has gotten to be so important and has it not, doctor, because they have this sort of thing in other countries for the Olympics – I know the Soviet Union has all sorts of facilities and so on. America almost had to do this to keep up, did they not?

(RH): That's right. If you want to have respectability you have to have training. Fortunately in the last quadrennium Colonel Miller was able to find the money to provide the training for the team.

(I): What was your impression of this last summer Olympics and especially from the standpoint of they came out with the excess money, bought it off without the whole community being in debt. Were you impressed with the way that well, the now commissioner, of baseball and his associates carried that off?

(RH): Oh it was fantastic. I don't even know if he had MBA from Harvard!

(I): [laughs] We're talking of Mr. Uberroth, the new commissioner of baseball and what was he, Time magazine's man of the year or something like that so some other people were impressed with what he did. This all starts when? When is the first group going to be entered?

(RH): Well I'd have to look at the proposal to see but I think it's in the summer. So there will be groups in there before then. You understand that the junior figure skaters have been in there for the last 4 or 5 years training for a couple of weeks in the summer. Two weeks ago, three weeks ago I guess it was, 14

members of the Canadian luge team were training there and every winter of course the ski teams come in there and train on cross-country so it's an ongoing affair.

(I): Okay. Well doctor we appreciate you spending some time with us and explaining it. I think it's a great thing for Northern Michigan University and I'm sure they're very pleased with your participation and all the other folks who had helped bring this thing off.

(RH): Well Dr. Hearst and I took a plane into New York when Colonel Miller was there and we presented our first proposal to the U.S. Olympic committee, that is, after the revised set-up. It's been an interesting but developing program and I certainly appreciate the support we've been getting. Some people thought we were crazy, but I think the people realize we did a pretty good job.

(I): Yeah well there's always going to be somebody that thinks you're crazy when you try something that's a little daring, right?

(RH): Yes. This will mean an awful lot to the upper peninsula because it will mean a lot to Northern Michigan University. I hope that it will mean a great deal to the Midwest.

(I): I do too. Dr. Roy E. Heath, we say thank you.

(RH): Mhmm.

(I): Okay thank you very much, sir. Dr. Roy E. Heath who really was the instigator, if you will, into the Olympic facility up at Northern Michigan University. And you know, something you might want to think about if you're taking a vacation or something or you have an aspiring Olympian, someone you might consider pushing in that direction – Northern Michigan.

END OF INTERVIEW