

Bill Cunningham

Notable – Accomplishments/Contributions

CUNNINGHAM NEW CHAMPION

IN RECORD-BREAKING HIGH TEMPERATURES, THE NORTH AMERICAN HOT AIR BALLOON CHAMPIONSHIPS (NAHABC) AND GREAT BALLOON RODEO (GBR), IN BROCKVILLE, ONTARIO TURNED OUT TO BE A HUGE SUCCESS.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PETER W. RICHARDSON



RUN IN CONJUNCTION WITH THEIR ANNUAL SPECIAL SHAPES RODEO, THIS YEAR'S NAHABC WAS THE FIRST COMPETITIVE EVENT EVER HELD AT THE COLLEGE. IT IS VERY RARE THAT A VENUE'S

first competition effort is a Category I event, but under the expert guidance of competition director, Garry Lockyer, his staff, and that of Grenville Christian College in Brockville, Ontario, the North American Championships went smoothly and successfully.

The North Americans were run under rules which had been proposed for the 1995 Worlds in Battle Creek. Those rules were refused by the CIA for the Battle Creek Worlds, but approved for this event. Neither the controversial rules nor the hot weather bothered the competitors in the least.

The first of the eventual six tasks was flown Thursday morning, June 16th. Some of the best pilots in North America were present, including Americans Bill Cunningham, Al Nels, Owen Keown, Joe Heartsill, David Levin, and reigning champion Mark Sullivan.

The Canadians were represented by Canadian champion Ray Ewing, John Davidson, Sebastian Msoya, Mario Bilodeau, Mike Cross, and Stan Wereschuk.

Canadians take the lead

John Davidson captured part one of Thursday's two-part task, with Mario Bilodeau second to give the Canadians a



first task lead for the event. This was followed by a win in the second part, a fly in task to the launch field, by Allan Fraenckel representing the Virgin Islands, with Al Nels second and Ray Ewing third. The quest for the title was already shaping up to be anybody's guess.

Thursday evening saw the pilots facing a maximum distance task. Sebastian Msoya and Stan Wereschuk, both of Canada, placed first and second while the next five finishers, led

by Joe Heartsill, were from the United States.

Virgin Islands takes over

Friday morning, poor visibility cancelled the task but the evening's multiple judge declared goal was again captured by Allan Fraenckel. This put Allan in the lead for the title and served to emphasize the benefits of consistent flying.

Saturday the 18th dawned bright and early with a 5:17 a.m. sunrise and generally clear

conditions. Garry set a two-part task consisting of a PDG followed by an FTT to the launch field and this time it was Al Nels followed by Owen Keown and Wayne Warren who took the top three places in part one, while Ray Ewing won the second part, followed by Owen Keown and another Canadian, Bill Whalen.

Meanwhile, some of the earlier hot shots such as Fraenckel, Msoya, and Heartsill found themselves near the bottom of the scoring, in what would prove to be the final day of competition.

Competing with the weather

With stiff ground and upper breezes both Saturday evening's task, a maximum distance double drop, and Sunday morning's task were cancelled, resulting in Friday night's and Saturday morning's tasks being crucial to a successful title bid!

United States on top

When it was all over Bill Cunningham, recently returned

to Tennessee from Mississippi, was the new North American Hot Air Balloon Champion, while Owen Keown was second, Al Nels third, John Davidson fourth, and reigning champ Mark Sullivan fifth.

Bill took home \$2,000.00 prize money along with his trophy and gold medal.

Meanwhile, the Americans also captured the team championship with a score of 179 to 151 over their Canadian hosts.

Final contest

However, last laugh would go to the Canadians in the end. Sunday evening the optional flight was a daisy pick for \$1,000 cash and some 16 other sponsor prizes. The competition was open to any pilot who wanted to stay and fly, including the fiesta pilots. Many took up the challenge.

These included Bill Cunningham and Owen Keown, as well as John Davidson, Ray Ewing, and Sebastian Msoya. Davidson, in fact, not only flew but flew in

his 250,000 cubic foot ride balloon, complete with a basket full of passengers!

When the wind shifted and neatly took away a low level right in mid-flight it was Edmonton, Alberta's Stan Wereschuk who finessed his way over the field to claim the \$1,000 prize and a beautiful stained-glass balloon as well!

And so it went—from a hotly contested and excellently run championship to a fun-filled final flight challenge — which saw pilots as close as 300 feet to a \$1,000 balloon, helplessly watching it drift by.

Everyone was pleased with the event. The crowds were awed and the flights were picturesque while the weather stayed friendly and dry.

Next year the college hopes to host the Canadian National Championships. With this year as an example, there is no reason they shouldn't.



RESULTS

1.	Bill Cunningham	USA
2.	Owen Keown	USA
3.	Al Nels	USA
4.	John Davidson	Canada
5.	Mark Sullivan	USA
6.	Allan Fraenckel	VI
7.	Sebastian Msoya	Canada
8.	Gary Cass	USA
9.	Joe Heartsill	USA
10.	Stan Wereschuk	Canada
11.	Dick Rudlaff	USA
12.	Wayne Warren	USA
13.	Ed Heltsche	USA
14.	Ray Ewing	Canada
15.	Craig McMachen	Canada
16.	Donna Fox	USA
17.	Dave Roberts	Canada
18.	David Levin	USA
19.	Phil Thompson	USA
20.	Mark Van Dis	USA