



In Memoriam

LORNE 'ACE' ATKINSON

June 8, 1921 – April 23, 2010



Sadly, the BC Sports Hall of Fame and Museum lost one of its proudest and most devoted members last week when Lorne 'Ace' Atkinson passed away at the age of 88. A former Olympic cyclist, Vancouver bike shop owner, keeper of local cycling lore, pillar of the Vancouver cycling community, and local living legend Ace Atkinson—the man with the

widest smile you ever saw upon entering Ace Cycles on West Broadway—will be missed by all who knew him.

Born in Vancouver, where he lived his entire life, Atkinson's father—himself a professional cyclist in Scotland—turned Ace onto the sport early on. The young Atkinson's imagination was fired watching the early six-day cycling events at the old Denman Street Arena in the 1930s. A few years later he honed his spoke skills delivering Liberty Magazine all over the city. By his mid-teens, he was racing in junior city races, one in 1937 particularly significant. After winning the Province Cup 'C' Division race around Stanley Park, newspaper headlines the following day trumpeted, "City Ace Triumphs in Province Cup." A nickname was born. Forever after in Vancouver there would only be one 'Ace.' "That stuck," he would laugh years later.

Perhaps his biggest victory came during World War II. Stationed in Quebec while serving in the navy, he competed in a 50km race essentially serving as the unofficial national championship owing to the war's disruption of regular competition. Outspringing all comers while fighting three ill-fitting bicycles the entire way owing to flat tires and frame problems, Ace took home the prestigious Gachon Trophy, a massive solid gold behemoth believed to be the most expensive sports trophy in Canada at the time. Other provincial and national titles would follow after the war.

Using his naval pay as a down payment, in 1946 Atkinson bought the landmark bicycle sales and repair shop on West Broadway that would become Ace Cycle, still operated to this day by his children. Over the next sixty-plus years, countless Vancouverites teetered unsteadily on their first two-wheeler in the showroom while Ace, the smiling proprietor, passed along a few kernels of wisdom. Still an active athlete, Atkinson would represent Canada at the 1948 Olympic Games in London and the 1950 British Empire Games in Auckland, New Zealand.

Coming out of retirement for the 1954 British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Vancouver, Ace couldn't resist one last shot at representing his country in his hometown—just down the street at China Creek Park as a matter of fact, at the newly built Empire Bowl wooden cycling velodrome. Battling injuries, crashes in training, and conflict with an unconvinced coach who felt he was over the hill, held together by little more than bandages and sheer will Atkinson turned in Canada's best cycling finish of the Games and the best managed by a Canadian cyclist at the Commonwealth Games during a thirty-six year period between 1934-70.

Ace would remain a staunch supporter and promoter of the sport in BC through the next half century, riding high during the sport's peaks of popularity and keeping things afloat during the lean years. On at least one occasion, he personally stood in front of bulldozers threatening to demolish his beloved cycling track at China Creek. In later years, he became a walking encyclopedia for anything cycling in the city. His series of massive scrapbooks containing meticulously kept clippings, programs, and photographs documented a century of the sport in Vancouver. Many a curious visitor to the cycle shop was led up the stairs to his apartment above and given a quick lesson in BC Cycling 101, from the legendary man considered the sport's guru. He could still be found pedaling the streets of Kitsilano well into his eighties.

As one of BC's oldest living Olympians, Atkinson was given the honour of holding the Vancouver 2010 Olympic torch outside his shop in the final days of the Torch Relay. Surrounded by family and friends, he considered it one of the highlights of his life.

For his devotion and dedication to his beloved sport, Lorne 'Ace' Atkinson was inducted into the BC Sports Hall of Fame in 1997.