

Vancouver's Asians say: 'Go Canada, Go'



by Nathalie Alonso

Thu Feb 18, 9:27 am ET

VANCOUVER (AFP) – Vancouver's huge Asian population is throwing its support behind Canada at the Winter Olympics with the city's Chinese community dreaming of seeing the country's much-vaunted ice hockey team grab gold.

Thirty percent of Vancouver's city inhabitants are Asian, many of them descendants of the thousands of people who came to North America during the gold rush of the 19th century to help build the railway which linked one side of the country to the other.

Insurance salesman Reg welcomes clients to his office dressed in a red pullover with "Canada" blazed across the front.

His grandfather came from China in the 1930s and settled in Chinatown, the oldest such neighbourhood on the continent.

"I was really proud to see the Chinese team at Friday's opening ceremony, but my heart beats for Canada, especially for the hockey team," he said.

Just a few metres further down the street, older Chinese gather at a spice store, speaking in English and Mandarin.

The shop's owner Cai, who has lived in Vancouver for 15 years, supports the local National Hockey League team, the Canucks.

He says that he too dreams of a Canadian hockey gold on home ground in the final on February 28.

While a third of Vancouver's population is of Asian origin, in nearby Richmond where the speedskating is taking place, the figure shoots up to 60 percent with China, India, Hong Kong and Southeast Asian nations all represented.

"Vancouver is the largest Asian city in North America. The multi-cultural model is unique, one of the best in the world," said Tung Shan, executive director of SUCCESS, an Asian community organisation.

"The Chinese established here feel completely Canadian. They are politically, culturally and economically well-integrated," added Tung, who has lived in the city since 1974.

They have also embraced sport in the country, especially hockey, the nation's abiding passion.

"The Chinese are fervent fans," said Bowen Zhang, a reporter with Mandarin TV channel Omni.

The Chinese community also closely follows the Olympic fortunes of Canadian figure skater Patrick Chan and snowboarder Alexa Loo, both of whom have Asian roots.

"The Chinese here are behind them. For example, we organise fund-raising dinners to help finance training and their travel," said Zhang, who renounced her Chinese citizenship five years ago.

Indians boast a sizable community as well and they dipped into their pockets to help out Indian luger Shiva Keshavan in his unsuccessful quest to win the nation's first ever Winter Olympic medal.

Keshavan almost missed his fourth appearance at the Games when his sled broke during pre-Olympic training just days prior to his departure for the Canada, but a group of lawyers pooled 10,000 US dollars towards new equipment.

And in another headache, the uniforms supplied to the athletes and their coaches for the opening ceremony were mismatched and in poor condition.

But an event in Vancouver raised more than 8,000 Canadian dollars (7,580 US) for India's tiny three-man team and was used for equipment, future training and spending money while in Canada.

"People here understand that there is a lot more to sport. And maybe they also know the hardships we face being Indian," Keshavan said.