

Generation saddled with Olympic bill

United Press International

MONTREAL — Last year's Olympic Games are just memories now. Entries in the record books. But the city that hosted this giant summer bash is still seeking a cure for a monumental hangover.

Quebec youth minister Claude Charron, assigned to recover whatever possible from the \$1.5 billion games — the world's costliest Olympics — said the bill-paying may last a generation. "Some things might be paid within 10 years, but all in all, the Olympics will cost for a generation," Charron said in a recent interview.

The cost . . . made the games a major political and economic issue," Charron said. "The actions of the past government on this issue is one of the reasons why we're the government now."

Barely three months after the games, Quebec's Liberal government was crushed at the polls by the Parti Quebecois.

The PQ's avowed goal of leading Quebec out of the Canadian confederation has propelled the nation into one of the gravest political crises in its 110-year history.

Diminutive Charron attributes at least some of the Liberal government's downfall to public indignation over lavish spending on the Olympics.

"The costs, which came mostly in the last 18 months, were just without control," Charron said. "The mandate was, finish the park at whatever cost, it seems."

The PQ government earmarked \$10 million to tend and promote the Olympic facilities this year.

The twin-pyramid Olympic village, empty since it housed the games' 8,000 athletes last year, could drain \$2 million annually from the \$10 million deficit subsidy.

But the largest amount is absorbed by the 70,000-seat, mushroom-shaped stadium which cost \$800 million to build. Even then it was without the retractable roof and supporting tower included in the original design.

Basic maintenance of the stadium costs more than \$1 million a year. Insurance and the upkeep of equipment drains the best part of another \$3 million. The stadium also will take a big bite of the \$2.5 million budgeted this year to find tenants for all the Olympic facilities.

The stadium is booked for 101 days so far this year. Charron would like at least another 100 days booked.

"We charge a minimum of \$25,000 daily for the stadium, and it goes up from there, depending on the facilities needed," Charron said.

The Montreal Expos of the National Baseball League have the stadium for 81 days and Charron expects revenues of \$812,000.

He anticipates \$412,000 from the 10 days taken by the Montreal Alouettes football team, and another \$282,800 from 10 days of rock concerts and a religious revivalist meeting.

A total expected revenue of \$1,509 million. The Expos drew attendance of 196,252 in their first 10 games there, more than double their 83,000 draw for the same period in their old home, the open-air Jarry Park.

"It's the first time we've been able to play every game in April, when the weather is pretty erratic," Expos spokesman Larry Chaisson said.

WIGGLY

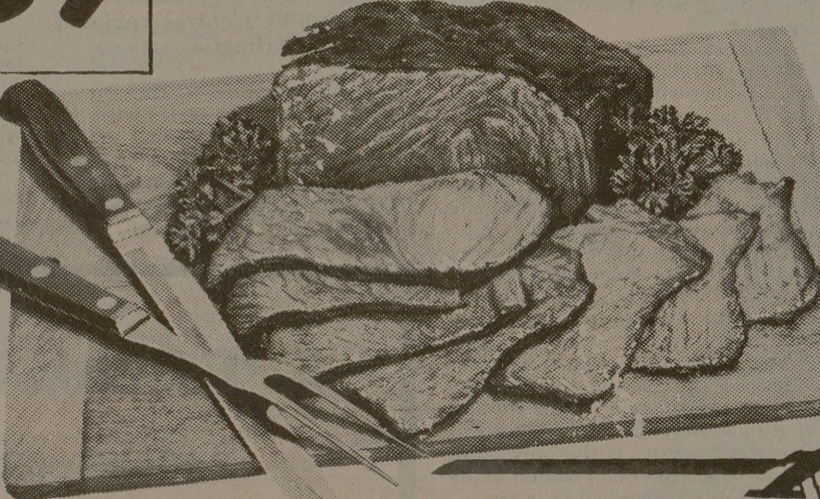


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