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Ice back at Calgary's Olympic Oval

CALGARY — Rather shiny. Kind of cold. Real slippery.

Yes, there is actual ice at the Olympic Oval.

Until recently, it had appeared that July – typically the training-time kickoff for elite speedskaters – would present difficulties for the Canadian team. Because of a financial shortfall, ice would not be made until September, leaving a summertime gap for athletes. In an Olympic year, no less.

According to Don McSwiney, the University of Calgary's director of communication for kinesiology, it costs more than \$10,000 a day to operate the Oval and maintain its ice.

But good news arrived in May – a much-needed funding boost of \$530,000 from WinSport Canada (formerly the Calgary Olympic Development Association), the Own The Podium program and the University of Calgary – and, suddenly, the Oval was back in business.

Monday marked the first official day of new ice.

Tamara Oudenaarden, a member of Canada's national team, was there to enjoy it.

"I mean, it's awesome that the ice is back in," Oudenaarden, a sprint specialist from St. Albert, Alta., said after her afternoon training session. "I'm really excited to be back on the ice."

A lack of a suitable surface would have sent skaters scurrying for alternatives – possibly to Richmond, B.C., where the 2010 Olympic speedskating competition will be contested; possibly to Salt Lake City, which hosted the 2002 Winter Games.

"We usually get on in July," she said, "so it was really nice to see that they got the ice in on time here and we are able to train with no problems of having to go other places to get on the ice."

"But I knew things would get worked out."

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