

A promise of victory 10/10/02

By JOHN BROWNE, The Telegram

Bob Spearns said something athletes on the eve of a big game are not supposed to say.

The 17-year St. Lawrence Laurentians veteran promised the home fans a win against mighty British Columbia tonight at King George V Field.

That took guts, something no one ever said the 36-year-old centreback lacked. Perhaps he'd like to take it back, but you know the promise comes from his heart, even if it isn't politically correct.

Spearns and his teammates worked out Wednesday night at Feildian Grounds in preparation for the Canadian Challenge Cup soccer tournament opening game, set for 7:15 p.m., following the official opening ceremonies.

Spearns says "bottom line, it's time" St. Lawrence delivered a gold-medal performance.

"This is this team's ninth opportunity and it's time to take home the gold, plain and simple."

Spearns says the club has to take advantage of playing at home in front of avid supporters.

The game isn't being played in St. Lawrence, but team members have no doubt they'll have everyone from St. John's, Mount Pearl and across the province behind them in their quest.

Newfoundland midfielder Paul Slaney is one of about a halfdozen Laurentians, including Spearns, who says this is their last season at the senior-level game.

Slaney adds, "anything short of a win is unacceptable for us."

He wouldn't go so far as to predict a victory, but he did say the team will represent Newfoundland and Labrador as best it can.

"I can tell you it will all be left on the field and we'll do anything we can to get the win. We owe it the fans, who have been supporting us over the years, to give them a good showing."

Slaney, another 17-year veteran, turns 36 Monday, the day the gold medal will be decided.

That's a lot of games from now and he isn't looking past the opener. Slaney does not underestimate the B.C. opponents.

"Other provinces are strong every now and then, but B.C. always fields a strong team," he said. "They play hard-nosed, very skilled soccer. They are big and they are always tough."

Both Spearns and Slaney agree their team has never been fitter and more focused than for this year's tournament.

It will mean some adjusting for the offensive-minded Laurentians.

Spearns says the difference in playing against mainland competition at this level is that the visiting teams like to use the entire field more than the local sides.

"They play a build-up game moreso than the constant pressure from forwards that you see in the Newfoundland game," explained Spearns.

"They also have a much quicker counter-attack," noted Slaney. "You can't afford to make mistakes in the neutral area because they will take advantage of it leaving you very little time to regroup and their forwards are merciless if you allow them an opening and don't defend properly."

St. Lawrence coach Junior Edwards says, "The boys are ready and we are hoping for a good result (tonight)."

Edwards says you can expect his team to play a physical game with emphasis on defence while taking advantage of their offensive chances.