

## Ben Heppner to sing anthem at Olympic closing

Feb. 23, 2006. 08:51 PM

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CANADIAN PRESS

TURIN, Italy — Canadian-born opera star Ben Heppner will sing the national anthem to kick off the start of an eight-minute Canadian segment where the world will be invited to "Come Play with Us in 2010" during Sunday's closing ceremonies at the Turin Winter Olympics.

Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee (VANOC) officials released some of the details about the segment at a Thursday news conference. Heppner, who was born in Dawson Creek, B.C., will sing a cappella, flanked by an honour guard of members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The segment will also feature a Vancouver-based dance corps together with the latest concepts in boarding, "sk8ting" and skiing as well as an acrobatic performance from members of the acclaimed Montreal-based National Circus School. Rock star Avril Lavigne of Napanee, Ont., will headline the production, designed to celebrate Canada and to capture the spirit of the 2010 host city.

"This segment is about inviting the world to Canada," said John Furlong, VANOC's chief executive officer. "It's about making the world feel that they'll be welcome in Vancouver and in Canada, that we can't wait for people to come to our region and it's to give them a little bit of a glimpse of who we are."

After Heppner's performance, the Olympic flag will be transferred from Turin Mayor Sergio Chiamparino to IOC president Jacques Rogge, who will present the flag to Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan, who will accept it in a specially modified wheelchair. A skiing accident left Sullivan a quadriplegic at the age of 19. It's traditional for the new mayor to wave the flag — which is six square metres — back and forth eight times. This presents a special problem for Sullivan who has lost the use of the muscles in his fingers. Engineers have designed a special stainless steel holster to fit on his motorized wheelchair so he'll be able to receive the flag.

A ceremony to honour Canada's First Nations will follow the flag transfer, after which a celebration of Canada's passion for winter sport and teamwork will begin. With 32,000 spectators on hand and hundreds of millions watching around the world, Furlong said he's ready for Vancouver to enter the spotlight.

"It's pressure but it's good pressure," Furlong said. "It's the kind of pressure I think an athlete feels a little bit when they go on to the field of play. There's little bits of uncertainty and they look around and you see all the things that you have to compete against and all the people. But you find a way somehow to get to the finish line first. "And that's the job that we have to do."