

Drum Major of the Month

By Mary Ann Courtney

“Nothing beats Drum Corps as a hobby” is the firm opinion of Andy Henderson, Drum Major of the famed Toronto Optimists. When Andy was 15, he belonged to a school rifle team and through this interest in rifle work he discovered that rifles played an important part in Corps Color Guards. After seeing several shows, Andy joined the Toronto Optimists at mid-season in 1959. The Optimists at that time were the new Canadian Jr. Champions, a title gained in September of 1958. Andy was the only new recruit that year as he joined the Color Guard of the Corps. During the remainder of 1959 and through the season of 1960, Andy carried a flag in the Optimists Guard. In 1961 and 1962 he worked with a rifle in the Guard. When 1963 came around Andy was made Guard Captain. And in 1964 he received the honor of being Drum Major for the Toronto Optimists.

Andy’s first year as Drum major for Canada’s Jr. Champions was a critical one as he was replacing the famed Jim McConkey as Drum Major. McConkey, who was “Showman of The Year” and past Drum Major of many famous Corps including Blessed Sacrament and the Archer Epler Musketeers, left the Optimists at the end of 1963 Corps season to return to the United States. McConkey had been Major of the Optimists for two years. Andy Henderson moved up from the Guard Captain’s position to replace McConkey. Andy decided at the beginning not to copy the McConkey style, but not to be entirely unlike his predecessor on the field.

There have been many thrilling moments for Andy Henderson since he first joined the Optimists in 1959: getting issued the Optimist uniform for the first time; winning the Canadian Championship for a second time in a row (1959) . . . winning the Guard

Trophy and beating Blessed Sacrament in Rome, N. Y., July 14, 1962 with a score of 84.45 to 82.7. Another highlight for Andy was the first trip to the Province of Quebec — to Quebec City for three days over Easter of 1962. Andy discovered during this trip the whole new world of Drum Corps that opened up in this great province. And last but far from least, receiving the coveted “Five-Year Ring” at the Corps Dinner, October 1964.

Andy’s most disappointed moment with the Corps occurred in September of 1962. The Optimists entered the Pittsburgh, Pa. “State Fair” contest with a lineup of all the top Junior Corps in the United States (among them were Blessed Sacrament, Garfield, Cavaliers, and Madison Scouts). And when the big moment came, the contest was rained out. I’m sure everyone there shared Andy’s disappointment.

But as Andy knows the disappointing moments are few and the great



Top Drum Major of Canada

moments many. Where else can you travel, almost every weekend — put on a show for the general public in many centers and under many different conditions, and feel the satisfaction of a win greater than perhaps many other types of sport. As Andy says “Nothing beats Drum Corps as a hobby.”

Andy Henderson and the Optimists

