

Discrimination at its worst!

Why did not the Olympic Body use The Bay famous white, red, green Blankets instead of insulting the Great Cowichan Tribes members of Duncan B.C. Canada.

Olympic Cowichan sweater won't be knit by First Nation

SANDRA McCULLOCH and LINDSAY KINES
Times Colonist

The Cowichan sweater is an iconic symbol of the West Coast, so it seemed a natural fit for outerwear for the Canadian Olympic team.

But when the Cowichan Tribes bid for the job, they lost.

Instead, The Bay opted for what some in the Tribes are calling an expensive knockoff. The Bay is marketing its hand-knit sweater for \$350, compared with \$215 for the Cowichan original.

"I was disappointed our bid didn't get in" said Emily Sawyer-Smith, assistant manager of Hills Native Art in Duncan.

Sawyer-Smith knit a sweater for International Olympic Committee president Jacques Rogge and another for Premier Gordon Campbell, each bearing the five Olympic rings.

Sawyer-Smith assured the bidding committee the



IAN LINDSAY, CNS

Canadian Olympic short-track speed skater Jessica Gregg models the team sweater.

dozen or so knitters in the tribe were up to the task. "Some of them are able to do a sweater in a day — or 24 hours," she said.

The sweaters are knit in one piece from Buffalo brand wool, a loose-spun wool that when knit in a

garment is warm but water resistant. When Sawyer-Smith saw the team sweaters to be worn by the Canadian Olympic team and sold at retail outlets across the country, she felt the Cowichan Tribes had been robbed, "like they were taking something away from what was originally Cowichan's."

Cowichan Valley NDP MLA Bill Routley called the decision a "tragedy."

He said Premier Gordon Campbell talks about a new relationship with aboriginal people and about providing them with economic opportunities.

"Well, this is one that's been sadly missed," he said.

"What's ironic is here you have The Bay, who ... more than a 100 years ago, they were trying to do business with First Nations all over British Columbia. And instead of doing business with First Nations, they've instead gone for some cheap imitation."

"To have an authentic

product available and to not go with it seems like a real slap in the face, especially when they've lauded these Games as involving the First Nations," said Tim Strang, an employee at the Hills Native Art outlet in Duncan.

The Bay's choice of a hand-knit sweater featuring an elk and maple leaf was meant to appeal to all Canadians, said Bay publicist Shari Burnett in a press release yesterday.

"In manufacturing the premium, hand-knit wool sweater for the 2010 Canadian Olympic team apparel collection, Hudson's Bay Company worked with a Canadian, world-class supplier of traditional and contemporary hand-knit sweaters who offers both the technical knitting expertise and effective business operations to help produce a quality product in the quantity that we anticipate needing for our customers."

smcculloch@tc.canwest.com