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NEWS RELEASE

All Canada Sheep Classic finds the strike zone at Stampede

Calgary — The Sultan of Swat. Mr. October. Tinker to Evers to Chance. The Georgia Peach. The Black Sox Scandal. Hammerin' Hank.

It's said that the story of baseball is the story of America, rife with heroes, legends and miscreants. But America's pastime might not even exist in its present format if it weren't for a certain woolly ruminant that doesn't know a walk-off home run from a suicide squeeze.

The All Canada Sheep Classic has returned to the Calgary Stampede for the first time since 2001, and organizers are using The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth to educate the public about this versatile animal.

"You wouldn't have baseballs if it weren't for sheep," says Pam Barker, the Stampede's Sheep committee chair. "A baseball is stuffed with wool. The stitching is made from sheep sinew. And the cork, right at the centre of a baseball, actually has sheep's blood in it.

"Wool, or sheep leather, are also mandated for use in airplane manufacturing for carpeting and upholstery," adds Barker, "because wool will not burn. It will not melt. It will not give off toxic fumes.

"Most people have no idea how many products they use every day that have some component from the sheep industry."

The All Canada Sheep Classic show and sale has taken over Victoria Pavilion to close out the 2009 Stampede, and will feature more than 50 exhibitors affiliated with Canadian Sheep Breeders' Association, which pegs the nation's flock at about one million animals, about a quarter of those based in Alberta.

Ten breeds from across the nation are represented — Suffolk, Hampshire, North Country Cheviot, Dorper and Southdown, which make an annual appearance at Stampede; Texel, Charolais, Horned Dorset and Polled Dorset, which are more prevalent in Eastern Canada; and Shropshire, now considered a rare breed in Canada.

The All Canada Sheep Classic will feature a market lamb class and a fleece competition. Trophy classes are slated for Sunday afternoon from 1 to 5 p.m. at Victoria Pavilion, with the awards culminating in the Supreme Breeders' Flock Award.

The All Canada Sheep Classic will conclude Monday, July 13 with a sale of the show's entire contingent of 314 sheep, which have been transported from as far away as Vancouver Island and Prince Edward Island.

"The most important part of being at the Stampede is being able to interact with the public and consumers," says Barker. "There is literally no other place on earth where sheep people can interact with the public in the same way."

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Monday's sale at Victoria Pavilion, which begins at 10 a.m., is an essential part of the CSBA's annual show. Because the sale takes place one day after the conclusion of Stampede, there is no admission fee and no parking fee. Potential buyers are asked to enter via the Sunshine Gate, on the east side of Stampede Park, because of limited access at other entrances.

"All animals that are entered in the Classic must also sell, and you must have entered at least one ewe for every ram, so it doesn't become like a bull sale in the beef industry," says Barker.

"The sale is a mandatory part of the Classic as a way of exchanging genetics. It's for the health of the entire industry."

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The Calgary Stampede is a volunteer-supported, not-for-profit community organization that preserves and promotes western heritage and values. The Stampede contributes to the quality of life in Calgary and southern Alberta through its world-renowned 10-day Stampede, year-round facilities, western events and several youth and agriculture programs. All revenue is reinvested into Calgary Stampede programs and facilities. For more about the Stampede, visit www.calgarystampede.com.