

Chapter 22: 1972 – What Will Be, Will Be

One of the final impressions from the end of last year was given by a report from the Eaton's Santa Claus parade. The Optimists, it said, with thirty horns, looked very impressive. When measured against the fact that both of the other Toronto Corps, De La Salle and Scarborough, were also in it, this is no mean compliment. It was another sign of a renewed Optimist Corps. Generally recognized was the fact that the Optimists were again going strong, in excellent shape for the coming season. After three years of defeat; they had survived and made a recovery.



1972: Toronto Optimists Full Corps photo (US Open)

News

The Corps would be keeping part of their 1971 field performance. “Patton” and the concert, both with improvements, would be retained. “Superstar”, from The Carpenters, would replace the melodious “San Francisco” as the closing number.

Current predictions were that Optimists would be a powerhouse this year, and that De La Salle was having problems. As we have seen before, rumours and predictions are not worth much until confirmed or otherwise.

Counter to this, De La Salle was still heavily favoured though, having been sort of, three times, National Champions. Individual Corps aside, other things were happening in various departments of the Drum Corps World.

The Shriners contest, a big attraction, was changing its location from Toronto to Hamilton, Ontario. Since its inception, it had been held in Toronto. CNE Stadium, where it had been

held, was to be equipped with new drainage and artificial turf. This was for the Toronto Argonauts football team, whose stadium it was. The alterations would not be complete by the contest date, June 17th. Choosing to stick with the set date, the contest committee had to change the location. Hamilton Civic Stadium, now Ivor Wynne Stadium, became the new location. It turned out that this hurt neither the contest nor the crowd.

Remaining a top draw for both Corps and crowd, there were already seven good Corps entered, including the Optimists. Gord Robinson, of the Optimists and Shrine, would be the contest co-ordinator. Who else but Don Daber would be in charge of publicity and public relations.

Another positive event in Canada was the reforming of La Salle Cadets on January 9, 1972. A dedicated group of twenty-nine men and women took over this fine corps, setting them once more on the road to competition. They were the defending C.D.C.A. champions and, if they could make it back, it would make the season more interesting.

In Scarborough, on January 30th, twenty-nine Corps had a meeting. The object was to gain acceptance by the C.D.C.A. of the Drum Corps Canada presentation. Drum Corps Canada was represented by one Bob Christie.



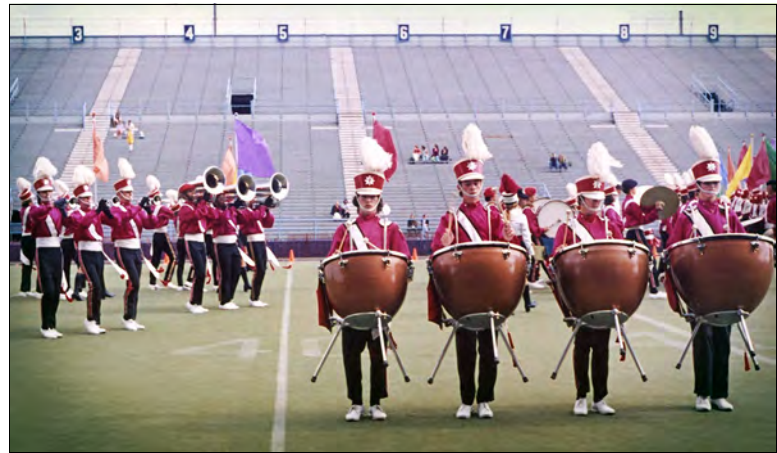
1972: Toronto Optimists (Big 10 Finals, Hamilton)

The next item of news was of significance mostly to the Optimists. The indestructible, indefatigable, overworked Don Daber stepped down as Director of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps. He had filled this position for nine years and seen the Corps through some of its best, and worst, years. His dedication had never wavered, and it is safe to say that without his presence there might well not be an Optimists Corps in 1972. He would stay on with the Corps, handling publicity and personnel. Mr. Bob Christie would fill his place as director. This man had been the Assistant Director to Mr. Daber, as well as a member of the equipment department. Before this, he was a marching member.

The Corps had a new drill man on basics. This guy had really been around. John McAlpine was an ex-Optimist, ex-Boston Crusader and, hold it, ex-De La Salle man. This reversed an earlier trend. If nothing else, he certainly had experience and was rumoured to be working on a new style of drill.

The Optimists Colour Guard was still getting its feet wet, placing 19th in a January 29th contest. Twenty points out of first.

Scarborough Firefighters, now the Scarborough Princemen, having been taken over by the borough from the fire department, would sponsor this year's Ontario Individuals. They had done this for the last few years and usually ran a good show.



1972: Seneca Princemen (Big 10, Hamilton)

On the same lines, La Salle Cadets were to sponsor the first Canadian Open National Guard and Individual Championships. To be held in Ontario, in March, it was for Canadian members only. This Corps, having briefly folded, had picked up where they had left off, barely missing a beat in the process.

South of the border, the Corps that was once the idol of the Optimists, Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights, were still going strong. They had encountered some problems but seemed to be able to handle them. They had been around a long time and were one of the most famous and consistently good Corps.

In a magazine, *Drum Corps News*, it was reported that Agatha Christie, the famed mystery writer, had alternately panned, raved about, Green Capsule Comments. Since it had never reported any murders, this report must have been of dubious origin.

Don Daber began a cartoon series in *Drum Corps World*. Although now only responsible for Corps publicity, he still did this for the C.D.C.A.

At the Ontario Individuals Contest, Sam Kays, of the Midlanders, won the solo snare award with a score of 89. This was the high mark of the day and a harbinger of future prominence.

An article in *Drum Corps News*, by one Myron Melnyk, stated that De La Salle had enjoyed their greatest year ever in 1971. This was true, having been ranked seventh in the world, higher than any Canadian Corps before. Harry Clark was still the drum instructor, but Terry McKolskey was no longer with them, on bugles. What was not mentioned in the article was that the Optimists had pulled themselves up fairly close to Del that year. This fact, though loaded with promise, was probably not considered noteworthy, and ignored.

Canadian Corps, registered to enter the first D.C.I. Championship this year, were the Optimists, De La Salle, and Scarborough Princemen. This competition was not to be limited to the founding Corps.

As far as the Optimists were concerned, they were planning to field a moderate size Corps, but with a percussion section that was large for this era. Eight snares, four double tenor, four tympani, backed up by a bass drum section and three or four cymbalists. This percussion ensemble would complement the most difficult music program in the history of the Corps. Moves such as these demonstrated that the Corps was still committed to moving onward and upward, aiming, yet again, to gain the coveted National title.

With De La Salle's previous year, La Salle Cadets resurgence, and the Optimists evident promise, this year showed signs of being reminiscent of just a few years ago – tension packed and exciting.

At a C.D.C.A. meeting on March 4, at the prestigious Valhalla Inn, Don Daber was named the new vice-president. If he quit one job, he took up another one, or two. He was also appointed contest co-ordinator for this year's Nationals. At this meeting, although the details are not clear, the four Corps that had left the C.D.C.A. were reinstated. This must have meant that they were happy with the C.D.C.A. It also meant that all Canadian contests this year, including all those with titles, would again be "official".

Dave Shaw, a well-known figure, had compiled a master schedule. It showed that the Optimists had eleven contests this year, three of which were in the United States. Compared to this, De La Salle was entered in sixteen, eight of them south of the border. This was an example of how the best Corps got the most attention. During the late fifties and the sixties, it was the Optimists who were the busiest. Also, during those fondly recalled days, Bernie Beer had been on the Optimist's staff. Now, after an absence, he was back with De La Salle. The end of March saw the Optimists guard defeat two guards in Rochester, N.Y. This only kept them from last place, which they would see again, but it was a beginning. At the end of the season for guard contests, the "Optimiss", as they were known, were improving.

The Canadian National Championship in this category was held in Guelph, Ontario, April 22, 1972. After practising all morning in Toronto, where the show was broken down into details to



1972: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE)

improve its execution, off they went. Appearing thirteenth, they placed ninth, for a new guard, this was not bad. Above them in sixth was the Scarborough Princemen, and in first, the Canadian Ambassadors of St. Catharines.



1972: Toronto Optimists at the "Big 10"

The field show of the Optimists, this year, was changed considerably from the previous year. It would, however, consist mostly of popular, known melodies, often in contrast to modern practice. The use of well played but obscure music tends to leave ordinary fans in the dark as to what is being played.

The Optimist program was aired at a Scarborough Princemen Concert on April 8th. In a prelude to the approaching season, a powerful presentation was given. Optimist morale was very high this year, and they were eager for the competition season to begin. They felt that they were capable of challenging the best. In order to test these high hopes, the C.Y.O., POW WOW, and U.S. Open, were just some of their future dates. They would also be appearing at the Optimist International Convention in Montreal, a tribute to their founders. Now, in an unusual happening, there was a new Corps director for the Optimists. George Wright, a former marching member, replaced the incumbent Bob Christie. The reasons are obscure.

The new feeder Corps, the Lancers, elected themselves a Corps Council. This was a move in the direction of independence and was to become significant. A planned trip to Calgary was in the works for them.

Girls in the Colour Guard

Something happened in April that was not entirely unexpected. Due to a lack of members in the Optimists Corps Colour Guard, girls would now be allowed into these positions. Why not enough boys were available is not known; however, as a result of this situation, the Optimists discarded an age-old custom, the use of an all-male guard. But this was, really, nothing new. Girls' guards, for boys' Corps, went back as far as anyone could recall. Also, by doing this, the Optimists were only following a current trend. Their move in this direction left only three major Junior Corps in North America that were all male. These were De La Salle, Madison Scouts, and the Chicago Cavaliers. This would also diminish in the future.

There were some boys in the Optimist Guard but not enough. More secondary flags for the field show were needed. On April 11th, eight girls joined up, with more following in short order. All this went on with the presence of Hugh Mahon, of Garfield, as an advisor.



1972: Toronto Optimists first female rookies (Camp)

The promising Etobicoke Corps, the Crusaders, held an indoor concert on May 13th. It included almost all local Corps. The Optimists, in an unusual display, showed a flashing red light, with the number "12" on it. This could be interpreted as a show of confidence as regards their ambitions this year. It was unusual, because such displays of intent were not often promoted. It did, though, signal their intentions and confidence.

In order to help realize these aspirations, the Corps went to camp for the long weekend of May 19th – 22nd. A week prior to this the Corps, or the more devoted members, had participated in a ten mile walkathon to raise funds. This was a young, spirited bunch, which they would have to be to realize their goals.

There were still some events to fulfill before the true season got underway. A parade at Ontario place saw a very poor performance in the morning. After a strenuous practice the afternoon show was much improved. The next day, and the day after, saw no poor showing. Indeed, on the third day, the Corps was seen as superb, both marching and music. The potential was evident.



1972: Toronto Optimists at Ontario Place

A parade in Hamilton on May 27th saw the Optimists and the Optimist Cadets in attendance.

The Cadets, although the first feeder Corps created since the demise of the “Peanut Squad”, were the most inexperienced at this. As a result, the Optimist Lancers became the number two concern of the York-Optimist Club. The Lancers would perform the pre-show exhibition at the Shriners Contest, a job previously handled by the Cadets.

Prior to this, and the season, the third annual T.A.S. night was held. Rookies were officially welcomed and old guys renewed their “Tradition, Allegiance, and Spirit”. Corpsman of the year, elected by the Corps, for 1971 was Greg Oxenham. Special speeches made this night culminated in the one that announced George Wright as the new Corps Director. He was untried in this position, but would be seen to grow into it.

Now that the Corps was finally on a solid footing, with show, executive, instructors and schedule all in place, they could face the coming season. The Optimists were third in the local pecking order, behind De La Salle and the La Salle Cadets. Due to this, they did not have the best schedule, not even a very demanding schedule. This was because they were not champions. De La Salle was not a champion either. The Canadian powerhouse, the La Salle Cadets were the titleholders.



1972: La Salle Cadets (CNE)

1972 Contest Season

Whether the Corps stayed in this position remained to be seen, and the results of the first contests were to give mixed indications.

Scarborough

Opening on June 3rd, at the Preview of Champions in Scarborough, Ontario (not Jersey City, N.J.), they looked very good. In a field of eight Canadian Juniors, the Optimists placed second to De La Salle by only 0.35. In doing this, they topped the third place La Salle Cadets by over three points. The Scarborough Princemen were fourth, but fifteen points back. Seen to be steadily improving were the Etobicoke Crusaders, noted as the surprise Corps of the evening.

This was a fine beginning for the Optimists, serving to bolster their ambitions. Only two weeks away loomed the 8th Annual Shrine Show, the first big test for this rejuvenated Corps.

Shrine Show

Alas, the results were somewhat disappointing. In a field of eight good Corps, the Optimists were eighth. Worse, they were six points behind De La Salle, who were sixth. This was a blow after such a promising beginning and probably the cause of the Optimists being discounted as a serious threat to anyone in Canada this year. It was, though, reported that they were in good form. The others were just that much better.

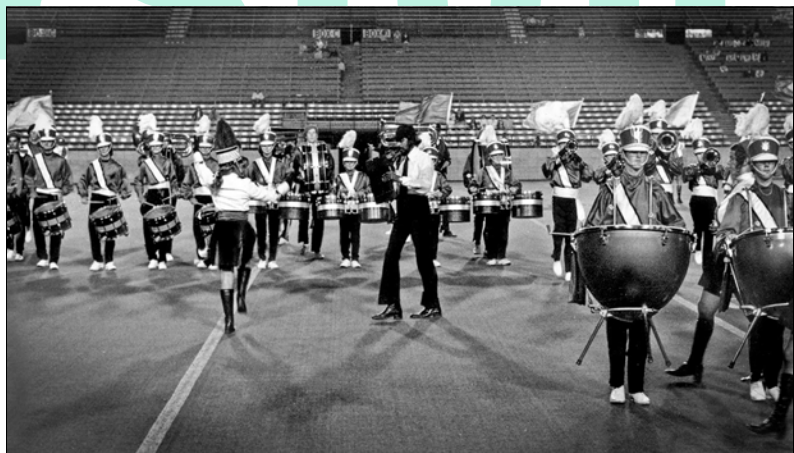
The season was yet young, so there was still time to effect change in scores and standings. This would become evident soon enough.

Brantford

July 23rd, Brantford

1st De La Salle.	82.25
2nd Optimists.	77.95

A loss by 4.30! Tied for third at this show was the Etobicoke Crusaders and the Seneca Princemen, at 66.1. Note the name "Seneca Princemen". Formerly the Scarborough Firefighters, they had become the Scarborough Princemen; however, they had been somewhat rudderless since leaving the Fire Department sponsorship, and had at last accepted a good alternative. The whole Scarborough Drum Corps organization moved to the neighbouring borough of North York. There, they came under the sponsorship of Seneca College, to form the Seneca College Community Drum Corps Organization. The college, one of the fine community colleges in the Metropolitan Toronto area, offered to sponsor this as a student and community service. It would be open to all. The Junior "A" Corps became the Seneca College Princemen, soon to become just the Seneca Princemen. The Junior "C" Corps, once the "Sparkies", would become the Seneca College Knights.



1972: Scarborough Princemen

Back to the main topic, the competitive scene.

Once again, after the blip of the Shrine Show, three Canadian Juniors were again in close contention. Understandably, rumours at the beginning of the year favoured De La Salle to reclaim the Canadian title. Increasingly, though, the Optimists were being looked at with different eyes.

The girls had now moved into the Corps in a big way. Except for five working rifles, the entire Optimist Guard was composed of girls. They wore a very attractive uniform that served to compliment the improving Corps with whom they marched. That corps now entered the field using eight snare drums, four double tenors and four tympani included in their percussion section. Growth like this was necessary for a corps to remain competitive, as things were changing rapidly. The re-activated La Salle Cadets were fielding forty-two horns, a number at one time only common to Senior Corps.

Musically, the Optimists program was no doubt enhanced by a concert of very popular, if old time, numbers. "Moonlight Serenade", "Tuxedo Junction", and "Caravan" were golden oldies that, if played well, could hardly fail to please.

One interesting item, a tribute to the past, appeared in the form of a letter to the magazine Drum Corps News. In the July 5th edition, someone had written asking for a list of D.C.I. Corps, so that they could boycott them. Not everybody, it seems, was in favour of D.C.I.



1972: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE)

Ogdensburg & Kingston, NY

July 29th saw the Corps in Ogdensburg, N.Y., and the following day in Kingston, N.Y. The latter was the Annual POW WOW of Junior Champions, a top-notch show and notable for various reasons. The Anaheim Kingsmen, firmly establishing the presence of California Corps on the scene, won it. This is borne out by the fact that the second and third place Corps were Blue Rock of Wilmington, Delaware, and Blessed Sacrament.

The Optimists placed fifth, twelve points out of first place, defeating two rivals in the process, the Magnificent Yankees of Utica, N.Y. and the current Canadian Champion, La Salle Cadets. Following this, competition came thick and fast, mostly, but not all of it, in Canada.

Overtime in Marion, OH

Dates in London, Ontario, and Scarborough served as good preparation for one of the year's big contests, the U.S. Open in Marion, Ohio, on August 12th. Entering a field of good quality, mixed American and Canadian Corps, the Optimists were really primed for this one. Possibly hoping to pull off the upset they were after this year. Unfortunately this eagerness and preparation backfired, and all hopes were shattered, at least for now.

During the prelims, the Corps was so fired up that the pace they set caused them to come in under time. Penalized for this, they ended in thirteenth place, 0.25 behind Auburn Purple Lancers. Since only the first twelve Corps made the finals, this result effectively put the

Optimists out of the show. Without the penalty, they would have placed eleventh. General opinion was that they had given the most exciting performance of the day. This was helped, no doubt, by the pace set; however, it was small consolation. De La Salle were tenth at the prelims, and ninth in the finals. Not good, for them, gauged by the last couple of years, but still giving them a comfortable three point margin over the Optimists. This late in the year, it appeared there would be no major upset. Or would there?

In fact, it was a rather dull season in Canada. There had not been that many contests and, since the beginning, the Junior "A" standings had remained unchanged: first, De La Salle; second, the Optimists and third, the La Salle Cadets

This was reminiscent of the old days of Optimist supremacy when the question was "Who would come second?" At least, for the Optimists, this was an improvement over the previous two years. Events in the immediate future would cause on one to alter their opinion of the outcome of this year.



1972: La Salle Cadets (Hamilton)



1972: Toronto Optimists Tymps (CNE)

Windsor

The day after the Marion disaster, in Windsor, Ontario, the Optimists defeated an improving Seneca Princemen, by only six points. A contest in Scarborough was won by De La Salle. They were still in the driver's seat although, for some reason, not as firmly as expected.

Again, the now familiar line-up appeared.

- 1st De La Salle
- 2nd The Optimists
- 3rd La Salle Cadets

Apart from one minor detail, it appeared as if this situation would continue until the season was over.

The minor detail was the scores. At this show, only 2.90 separated the first and third place Corps. This left the Optimists in the middle, second, 1.75 from the top. It was only two weeks before Nationals. Could things change in such a short time? It had happened before, but not often. General predictions were that De La Salle would regain the title.

Before the major showdown of the championship, which really is the one everybody wants to win, the Optimists had two good contests. Information is lacking regarding the first, in Titusville, Pennsylvania¹⁷. The Corps had been doing this one as long as anyone could remember. They were popular there, and probably could have become the town band, had the town wanted one. This affair, though, was but a prelude to what was to be one of the most exciting weekends in Canadian Junior Drum Corps since 1969.

The Big 10

The Canadian counterpart of D.C.I., Drum Corps Canada, had scheduled its first Annual Championship to be held in Hamilton, Ontario, on September 2nd. This was only one day before the Canadian National Championship, to be held in Toronto. It could almost be considered a preview of the Nationals because fifteen of Canada's top Junior Corps would participate. Of this fifteen, only ten would reach the finals. This is why it was called the "Big 10" Championship.

It was running in conflict with another show, the Central Canada Circuit Championship,



1972: Toronto Optimists (Big 10, Hamilton)

¹⁷. Editor's note: De La Salle won with 75.75; Optimists were second with 73.05

held on the same day. No matter, the Big 10 must have attracted the most attention. All the perennial rivals were in it and, although no major changes in standings had yet occurred, there was always a possibility.

This weekend was Labour Day weekend in Canada, a big public holiday. It could just as well have been called Drum Corps day weekend. The shows being held would effectively close the Junior Drum Corps season for 1972, in Canada.

As already noted, these were:

- ▶ The Central Canada Circuit Championship
- ▶ The Big 10, or Drum Corps Canada Championship
- ▶ The Canadian Championship, or Nationals

Number two and three are what concern us here. It was not generally expected, nor was there reason to expect, that any major upsets would occur.

September 2nd dawned and Mother Nature smiled, as the weather proved no impediment to having a contest. She must have known it was an important one. It was!

Having ten Corps in the finals, out of eighteen eligible, and fifteen competing, meant, of course, that there had to be preliminaries.

Preliminaries are often not well attended by spectators. Also, they often do not entail the playing of a complete show by the participants. This leaves room for speculation as to the outcome of the finals.



1972: Seneca Princemen Colour Guard (Hamilton)

Whatever, people who attended the prelims were to witness Canadian Drum Corps history.

This had been the case before now. On that momentous afternoon, the Optimists defeated De La Salle for the first time since the end of 1968. The first time in almost four years! It was by the merest of margins but that was enough.

The results were:

1st	The Optimists.....	79.50
2nd	De La Salle.....	79.30
3rd	La Salle Cadets.....	77.65
4th	Etobicoke Crusaders. . . .	68.90
5th	Seneca Princemen.	68.70

This was a major upset. During the year, this had seemed possible, but not probable. Now it had happened, setting the stage for suspense filled finals in the evening.

At the evening finals, events repeated themselves, with some changes.

The Optimists did it again, widening the margin of victory. They were now the top Drum Corps Canada Champions, by a margin of 1.10.

The actual scores were:

1st	The Optimists.....	79.10
2nd	De La Salle.....	78.00
3rd	La Salle Cadets	75.55
4th	Seneca Princemen.	65.90
5th	Etobicoke Crusaders.	65.00

By comparing these results with earlier ones, we can see that all the Corps slipped from the afternoon to the evening. The odd thing was that all the others slipped further than the Optimists, thus widening their margin at the top of the heap.

Canadian National Championship

So, with that contest over, and the very next day being the Canadian National Championship, the scene was set. Set for the most suspense filled, unpredictable Nationals that Canadian Junior Drum Corps had seen for some time.

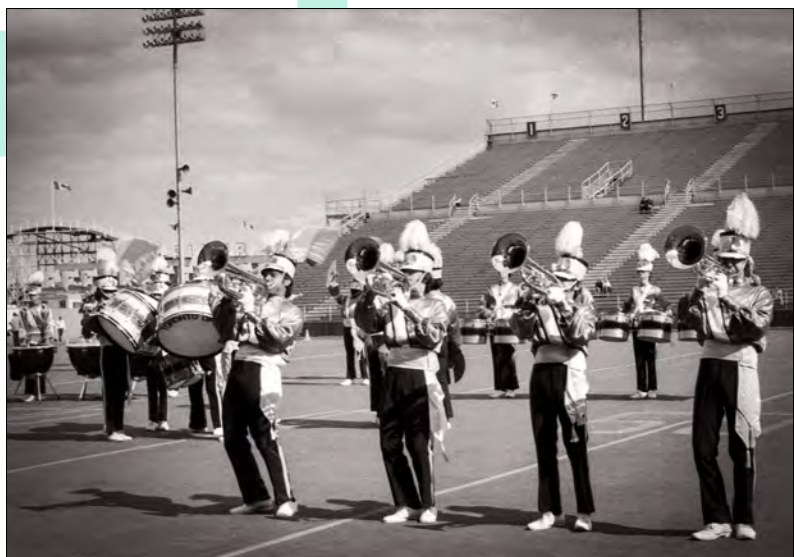
At the CNE Stadium, the next day, the promise of the previous paragraph was fulfilled as if it had been planned that way. For the Corps involved, it was nerve-wracking. For the fans, it was unprecedented suspense, ranging from euphoria to disappointment. The thrill of victory, the agony of defeat. What everybody got that day, certainly, was full value for their money.

In the Junior standstill division, the finals of which were held in the morning, the Optimist Lancers took top place. Eight points ahead, at 75.0, of second place. The Optimist organization had scored once again.

Junior "B" saw the Etobicoke Crusaders surge into first place with a score of 68.60. This was a Corps with promise. They had done well in the Big 10 the day before, being in it because it was "open". Anyone could enter. Adding lustre to their win was the fact that they had not won the prelims.

Back to the afternoon, and the onset of the duel that was to provide the most suspense.

Based on results throughout the year, and those of the previous week, no one could safely make a sure prediction. No doubt, though, some tried.



1972: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE)

There were five entrants in the Junior “A” division; De La Salle, La Salle Cadets, Optimists, Seneca Princemen, and Midlanders. All valid entrants. This, now, was the Junior prelims, the results of which served to further muddy the waters.

1st	De La Salle.....	81.35
2nd	La Salle Cadets.....	81.10
3rd	Optimists.....	80.25
4th	Seneca Princemen. . .	71.15
5th	Midlanders.	56.60



1972: Drum majors on Retreat (Nationals)

From the previous night, the Optimists had fallen from first to third, leaving Del and La Salle to move into first and second, respectively.

Now what? Where would all this end?

Among the top three, there was no huge gap in scores, nothing that could not be overcome. The margin from first to third was only 1.20. As we can recall, preliminary contests have not always been a reliable indication of what can occur later in the day. In fact, in the past, the Optimists had, more than once, been the ones to overturn results from prelims to finals. That, though, had been when they were perennial champions. What could this new, unchristened group do?

Whether they were aware of it or not, there was a weight of tradition and precedent behind them. They probably were. T.A.S. night would have seen to that.



1972: Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE)

Came the evening. The crowd was large, Drum Corps, and abrim with anticipation. They were not to be disappointed.

All of the finalists put on sparkling shows. At this time of year, this is to be expected, but here, tonight, the stakes added impetus to their efforts. When the final note had sounded, the last tenth added, the last Corps in place for the retreat, here is how things stood.

1st	Optimists.....	81.40
2nd	De La Salle.....	81.30
3rd	La Salle Cadets.....	81.25

Everyone was within 0.15! A crackerjack outcome.

The Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps were, for the twelfth time, Canadian Junior “A” National Champions. The fact that it was four years between number eleven and number twelve is only negative in that the consecutive streak was interrupted. Most of the lads that won this one were new to this status, and for them it was a big thing. Deservedly so!

They had, literally, bled for it. Even years later, there were comments, from people who had been in a position to know, that these people had been pushed, hard. That is possible. Had any, though, been asked that evening, probably none, if any, would have admitted it. It was over! They had done it! The Corps was, again, Canadian Champions. They had rescued, and re-established, the reputation. If they were proud of it, they had a right to be.



1972: Toronto Optimists with trophy for their 12th National title



1972: Toronto Optimists 12 Nationals Button