

Local athletes honoured at annual Breakfast of Champions



By Jake Courtepatte

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Aurora has become a hotbed for minor and amateur athletes in recent years, and Sport Aurora's Breakfast of Champions event is a testament to that.

The Breakfast recently paid tribute to these local sports organizations who took provincial and national championships by storm over the 2013-2014 season. The successful local athletes gathered at King's Riding Golf Club for a hot breakfast, followed by a morning of recognition, praise, and wise words.

This year marked the event's third anniversary, one that Ron Weese, President of Sport Aurora, said might be "the best they've had".

Around 170 athletes were recognized over a large variety of sports, a number that Weese says is a huge success for the organization.

"One of the main missions of Sport Aurora is to produce excellence, and that's just what happened," he said. "I'm proud of the way our sport organizations work, and how they develop athletes, both the recreational side and the competitive side.

"It's a real testament to our programs."

Those recognized included provincial champions U18 Aurora Barbarians Rugby, Central York Girls Hockey, Everest Academy U19 men's field lacrosse, Spectrum North Baton Club, Evolution Gymnastics Aurora, U13 Lady Redbirds lacrosse, U13 boy's Redbirds lacrosse, Ducks Swimming, U14 girl's Storm Volleyball, and national champions U15 girl's Storm Volleyball.

Ex-NHLer Jim Thomson served as emcee for the occasion, accompanied by a keynote speech from Brad Marsh, also a former NHLer.

The two recounted inspirational stories from their past, humbled by the notion that "success is often fleeting".

"Both of them had interesting pathways to their lives and success," said Weese. "Their stories inspired a lot of people to work hard towards their personal goals, but also keep in mind that championships aren't the only thing that are important."

While former athletes, Thomson and Marsh did not pigeonhole themselves and their message. Both speakers made it clear that athletes must not only develop themselves as sports people, but also as individuals in the community.

"That was a really good message. It's something that needs to be told to young people," said Weese.

Ironically, both Thomson and Marsh remarked that professionally, they were never on championship teams, and hadn't been since their days of local minor hockey.

?If they knew how difficult championships were to come by, they would have enjoyed them more back then,? joked Weese. ?But championships don't really measure you on your sports ability, dedication, and commitment to sports.?

Now a motivational speaker, Thomson played 115 games in the NHL.

Marsh's 15-year NHL career included stints in Calgary, Philadelphia, Toronto, Detroit, and Ottawa.

Each one of the athletes were presented with medals by Sport Aurora committee chairperson Doug LeGallais, along with a plate recognizing the achievements of the team.

According to LeGallais, the awards signified the dedication, hard work, and commitment put forth by the athletes.

?It's quite a thing to see so many provincial and national champions from this one town,? said Weese. ?It's really quite astounding, and good to see them get recognized.?

And recognized they were. Along with coaches, family and friends, members of the community also showed up to praise the young athletes, including Mayor Geoff Dawe.

Weese said it is this community involvement that sets amateur sport in Aurora apart, and without the dedication of parents and volunteers these championships would not be attainable.

Next up on Sport Aurora's schedule is the annual Volunteer Recognition event, taking place at East Side Mario's on Bayview Avenue next Sunday.

Members of Sport Aurora nominate annually a volunteer they would like to see recognized publically, who has gone above and beyond the call of duty for the organization.

Weese said volunteers, families, and members of the public are invited to the luncheon.

?It's a great way to celebrate excellence in volunteers. We're really looking forward to it.?
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