

Aurora Sports Hall of Fame welcomes class of 2015



By Jake Courtepatte

Add four more names to the growing list of Aurora's best and brightest in sport.

The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame (ASHoF) welcomed their third class of inductees at a special dinner ceremony on Wednesday, set in the heart of St. Andrew's College's Cole Hall.

A sold-out crowd of family, friends, and well-wishers were on hand to celebrate the induction of Mark Heese, Ken Sinclair, Alan Dean, and Lowell McClenny into the sporting community's hallowed halls.

Mr. Heese enters the ASHoF as the class of 2015's solo inductee into the 'Athlete' category, and the second with a background in volleyball, following in the footsteps of 2014 inductee Bruce Stafford.

He opened the night's speeches with some lighthearted self-deprecating humour, in reference to his playing partner John Child's warm remarks in his tribute video.

'I'm shocked,' joked Mr. Heese. 'I'm sure I heard (Child) compliment me in that video. I'm sure you had to edit out all the other stuff he said about me.'

But the duo's accomplishments are no laughing matter. Together, Mr. Heese and Mr. Child represented Canada in three Olympic Games, earning a bronze medal in 1996.

He concedes that when he first began playing men's hockey in Aurora over a decade ago, which he proclaimed a 'hockey town', there were those that were in the dark about men's beach volleyball.

And while Mr. Heese says his favourite sport at the age of 46 is now hockey, volleyball is still his 'passion'.

'It's taught me so much, and there have been a lot of good things that have been said about me and my career this evening, but I want to bring up a pretty important moment in my career when things weren't going so well.'

Mr. Heese recounted the story of his first Olympic experience in Atlanta, and the nerves he was experiencing before his first match.

'Sure enough, my first serve against Spain I served right into the bottom of the net.'

He followed that up with three more consecutive errors.

?Before I knew it, my dream of playing in the Olympics was quickly becoming my worst nightmare.?

Mr. Heese and Child lost the game by a score of 15 ? 1.

But after a healthy dose of family and coaching, the duo turned their game around.

?We went from playing our worst to playing our best volleyball, rattling off win after win. We even beat the Spanish team that had beaten us.?

When Mr. Heese reached the part of the story where the two won Canada's first ever medal in beach volleyball, the crowd in the hall erupted in cheers.

He thanked his family and coaches for the support over the years, including his wife, Janet, and children Mitchell, Michaela, Marcus, and Maddie.

Mr. Sinclair, inducted into the ?Builders? category of the ASHoF, is no stranger to such a ceremony. He was previously inducted into the Tennis Canada Hall of Fame, also as a builder, in 1996.

Due to illness, he was represented onstage by his daughter Kelly.

?Tonight, there are many people in the audience that know my father. For several of you, he inspired you in one way or another.?

Mr. Sinclair, who along with his wife, Betty, were the key contributors to the building of Aurora's Timberlane Tennis Club, was a ?get-things-done, motivating kind of guy,? said Kelly.

?He would play tennis with anyone who asked, no matter the level of age. His thought was that if he could improve anyone's level of tennis, or their love of the game, that was a win for him and a win for that person.?

Along with partner Lorne Main, Mr. Sinclair holds the record for most men's national doubles titles, having won eleven championships together since 1990, a winning attitude that Kelly says is ?well known?.

?His winning attitude gave him the confidence to think on a larger scale?he could combine his love of sports, competition, and winning attitude with his business side.?

It was this combination that led Mr. Sinclair to the title of director of special events for Tennis Canada, as well as chairman of the Canadian Open.

?Whenever he would return from anywhere, he would be so full of new ideas it would be difficult to keep up with him.?

The event marked the first year at the new setting on the St. Andrew's campus, having previously been held at the Mansion Events Centre across town. Sport Aurora past President Ron Weese praised the new venue for its elegance and accessibility.

?It's a beautiful setting, the campus is a wonderful part of Aurora's history,? said Weese.

Also new to the event was a live fantasy auction, with prizes ranging from a trip to the Preakness Stakes in Baltimore, to a meet-and-greet with lessons from Maple Leaf great Wendel Clark, and a day of skiing with 2013 inductee and former Olympian Brian Stemmler.

Next week, The Auroran will focus on Mr. Dean and Mr. McClenny.