

Sport Hall of Fame welcomes the Class of 2013



By Brock Weir

There was laughter, appreciation, and a few tears as seven of the brightest lights in Aurora's sport history were honoured last week in the inaugural induction to the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame.

This year's honourees included top ranked tennis champion and educator Robert Bedard, Olympic basketball player Carolin ?Cal? Bouchard, noted equestrian Jim Elder, Stanley Cup winner Hap Holmes, Olympic skier Brian Stemmler, Magna founder Frank Stronach, who was honoured as a ?builder? for his support of local sports and recreation, and softball coach Norm Stunden.



Olympic skier Brian Stemmler laughs as he recalls an earlier tribute from Aurora. Over 200 friends, family, and sports fans filled The Mansion for an evening of tributes.

?Many of you have been the recipients of many honours in the course of your lives, but some honours have more meaning than others,? said Mr. Bedard, a long-time headmaster at St. Andrew's College. ?For me, this one summarizes 41 great years of living in Aurora.?

Mr. Bedard recounted memories of playing regular house league hockey games at the Aurora Community Centre, ?playing with the aptly named Church Dodgers? on Sunday, playing fastball on Wells Street, and playing with his children and grandchildren, also on local teams.

?I have often been asked whether I regretted the choice of a tennis career over baseball or hockey, and here's my answer,? he continued, recalling one of his first major tennis matches outside of his native Quebec. ?My opponent served the ball, which I considered outside by quite a margin. Even though my English skills were at the embryonic stage, I was on my way to the stand when this beautiful girl of 15, a ball girl at the net, approached me to say, ?Here in Nova Scotia, we never argue with the referee.?

?Seven years later, over hundreds of letters and meeting each other some two weeks a year at tennis tournaments, that beautiful girl became my wife and we set out on the Queen Mary for a three month tennis honeymoon through Europe, culminating in Wimbledon where we played mixed doubles. That was 56 years ago.?

Citing the unifying nature of sport, Canada's one-time (and long-time) top-ranked tennis champion, who prides himself beating numerous players internationally, top-ranked in their own country, said he had no doubt that the ?upward trajectory? of his career can be attributed to skills learned through sport: discipline, concentration, willpower, and consistency.

?I believe that an athlete's character is more important than anything else,? he said. ?Every athlete knows what many never will ? that nothing can be learned without discipline and faith in one's self.?

While Mr. Bedard initially hailed from Quebec, Cal Bouchard came to Aurora from the west, moving from Winnipeg where she soon made a name for herself at Aurora High School where her name quickly came to precede her on high school basketball courts around York Region, and then provincially, nationally, and internationally.

?I am still amazed by the hundreds of miles my parents drove me around Ontario to all the different tournaments, the miles they travelled to see my games in the United States, and the thousands of miles they spent travelling around the world to see me play at the Olympics every step of the way,? said Ms. Bouchard, a Pan Am Games champ who lead the Canadian Women's Basketball Team at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

She recalled home games at AHS, training at St. Andrew's, as well as training hard with weights and in the pool at the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, but particularly a small park with just one basketball hoop near her Kennedy Street Home.

?I was probably an annoying high school kid calling up the Parks Department every time the hoop and the net would come off, which was often,? she said with a laugh. ?I had the number memorised and would call them up and say, 'Hey, it's down again. You better come back and put up some twine or something.' I know I was probably annoying and I hope that everyone knows I kind of did something with that and made something of myself!?

Humour also played a part in Brian Stemmler's induction. The alpine skier, who represented Canada in the 1988, 1992, 1994, and 1998 Winter Olympics, was feted for his meteoric rise in the game, his multiple medals, and his remarkable recovery from a 1989 crash which not only nearly ended his career, but also his life.

He was emotional when he looked out in the room to see so many friends he doesn't get a chance to see as often as he would like, and even some people since passed who should have been there.

?I went to Aurora High School after growing up in King City and Kettleby and then moved to Aurora,? he said. ?[Then Mayor] George Timpson asked Council if they would name a street after me. They agreed, I went out [and found it and it was so nice ? right along the railroad tracks. It could have been a ravine, a golf course, but no! I looked up and there it was ?Stemmler', spelled completely wrong. What an honour!

?I am so proud of this honour today. I am so proud to be representing my hometown and I will always consider myself an Auroran, and a person who grew up here loving the community and loving the people.?

Next week, The Auroran will focus on Mr. Elder, Mr. Stronach, and Mr. Stunden.