

Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inducts Class of 2014



By Jake Courtepatte

The bright light of community sports shone down on The Mansion Events Centre in Aurora last week when the second class of athletes, coaches and builders were inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.

This year's class included ex-NHLer Greg Hotham and Canadian national soccer player Ed McNally in the 'athletes' category, and volleyball coach and Aurora Storm founder Bruce Stafford in the 'coaches' category.

Three inductees joined Class of 2013's Frank Stronach in the 'builders' category - Alex Ansell for his work with the Optimist Club and Oldtimers hockey, Peter Miller, who was instrumental in the building of the Aurora Community Centre, and Ben Steenhorst, who has been a key driver in Aurora soccer as it is today.

Under the wit and humour of Master of Ceremonies ,TSN's James Duthie, each inductee shared their story with the hundreds of attendees last Wednesday.

'We [honour] six unbelievable contributors to the sports community - a hockey hero who started here and rose to the pinnacle of his sport, a soccer player who did the same, a volleyball player who turned into a magnificent coach who runs one of the great volleyball programs of this country - and I know that because girls on my daughter's soccer team leave to play volleyball, so I am a little bitter! - and three builders who [exemplify] developing this community in sports, soccer, hockey and softball who made it what it is today,' said Mr. Duthie.

Mr. Hotham began his time on stage with what a night of speeches cannot go without; a Seinfeld reference.

He recounted an episode where the character Kramer is sent off to a 'fantasy camp'.

'My wife Janine said to me, 'well your whole life is a fantasy camp too. And while in some ways it was, really what it was was a dream. I lived the Canadian dream.'

Mr. Hotham, who played sixty games with his hometown Toronto Maple Leafs, didn't leave many dry eyes in the room when he told the story of his first professional trip to Maple Leaf Gardens.

'Here I was, a small town kid from Aurora, coming out onto Maple Leaf Gardens ice and you look up and there's 16,000 people looking at you.'

Choked up, he finished, 'I've never had a feeling playing hockey like that in my life.'

Unlike Mr. Hotham, Mr. McNally was not born in Canada, but in fact emigrated from Scotland at the age of eleven. He took care to

thank the Hall of Fame, saying the past few months have been "a joyful and emotional ride through the past."

Mr. McNally not only played alongside fellow inductee Mr. Steenhorst, but was coached by him as well. Mr. McNally acknowledged the bond in his speech.

"Well done, Benny. I'm glad that we could share this special moment."

He recalled the beginning of his playing career, including his first "contract."

"I should have known I was going to become a professional soccer player when my first agent—my mother—negotiated my first contract—we'll not really a contract, but anyways—with the Aurora Hearts over a drink at the Legion on a Friday night.

"By the way, I didn't get that signing bonus."

All jokes aside, Mr. McNally thanked his wife Rebecca and his best friend Pat for all the hard work they put into both his nomination and induction.

"They talked to my old teammates, earned support, found photos in my old scrapbooks—even photos I didn't know still existed. Without both of you, this honour would not have happened tonight."

After spending a number of years with his hometown Seniors Soccer Club, Mr. McNally and Rebecca now put their athletic efforts into their daughter's soccer career.

"Together, our proudest moment was the day our daughter was born. Now we get to relive the joy of soccer through her. Soccer has brought so much good into my life—I am deeply humbled by this honour."

Facing out into the crowd dressed to the nines, Mr. Stafford admitted he was still a little humbled and overwhelmed by all the attention.

"I even have twelve of my neighbours here celebrating with me tonight," said Mr. Stafford, which was met by applause from a raucous fan club.

Now in his seventeenth year coaching Storm Volleyball, he said that he could not have done it without the support of his family. He had the pleasure of coaching his two daughters during the organization's early years, and was able to retire twelve years ago with the suggestion and help of his wife Sharon.

"Sharon worked while I volunteered. She knew how happy I was when I was in a gym, teaching young people the sport of volleyball. Sharon, I love you, and I thank you.

"When I started Storm Volleyball, I had no idea we'd be at where we are today. I'm truly grateful."

Next week, The Auroran will focus on Mr. Ansell, Mr. Miller, and Mr. Steenhorst.