

Aurora Sports Hall of Fame recalls former national sport with induction



By Jake Courtepatte

Aurora's sporting community was reminded at the annual Hall of Fame induction dinner that neither hockey nor lacrosse was Canada's leading sport a century ago.

The Auroran touched last week on two new inductee's into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's hallowed halls, former NHLers Mike Palmateer and Bob Wall.

This week, cricket pioneer William Fleury, and Canadian swimming legend Dan Thompson, share the spotlight in rounding out the 2017 class of Aurora's most celebrated athletes and coaches.

David Fleury, the grandson of Mr. Fleury, acknowledged the long lineage of his grandfather and thanked the induction committee while donning the green sweater.

‘Billy Fleury, or W.J. as we called him, would be so honoured to be here,’ said David Fleury.

Mr. Fleury was nominated for the Hall by Shawna White, the curator and director of the Aurora museum, who saw in Mr. Fleury a pioneering athlete in what was then Canada's national sport.

‘It's so important to keep alive our shared history,’ said Fleury. ‘Aurora can be so proud of this Hall and the members in it and I'm incredibly proud for my grandfather to be one of them.’

Leading the Canadian national cricket team in multiple important matchups in Europe in the late 1880s and early 1900s, Mr. Fleury's legacy was cemented by his family and friends who attended the ceremony in his honour.

‘I stand here not as an athlete, but as a historian,’ said David Fleury. ‘I care about preserving history, I believe it enriches our presence, and the fact we're speaking about my grandfather while we bring something that was completely gone from Aurora's history?and suddenly here we are bringing something to life that was gone is great.’

Mr. Fleury finished his storied cricket career at 45, before settling down and having children.

‘This honour would completely astound my grandfather, though I never knew him.’

Yet from stories and history lessons David and the Fleury family have learned Mr. Fleury was ‘definitely a party animal,’ with David claiming if his grandfather was at the ceremony he would ‘be in a three-piece suit with spats on, a collar that attached to the back of his jacket, his hair would be immaculate, he'd have a pocket watch and he'd smell like pipe tobacco.’

‘He'd be the first to leap up here and take his adoration.’

With numerous Aurora landmarks bearing the Fleury name, Mr. Fleury is the first ASHoF inductee to have a background in the 1800s.

‘It's unbelievable that hockey was not our national sport,’ said David Fleury. ‘Aurora, Newmarket, Holland Landing, Richmond Hill, they all had cricket teams. Kids played cricket when they were little in school. It's partly our British heritage.’

Dan Thompson, the fourth and final inductee, also got the chance to represent the red and white on the Canadian national swim team, though his Olympic dreams were cut short by a boycott.

His athletic aspirations started at a late age, recalling coming off of a Toronto golf course one day at the age of sixteen and being

asked to swim some races.

'I came off the golf course, and was recruited to country club swimming,' said Mr. Thompson. 'That was how the journey began.'
'My dad simply said 'son, make sure you follow your passion'. And it was good advice. It just took a long time to figure out what my passion was.'

Thompson, with multiple gold medals from the Commonwealth Games as well as swimming records at various age levels, joined the Aurora Masters Ducks in 2007 and continues to push the limits to this day.

'If you want to learn how to swim in the Town of Aurora and in a fun environment, the Ducks are the place to be,' said Mr.

Thompson, acknowledging the 'gaggle of Ducks' at a table in the back of the room.

After thanking his family and friends, Mr. Thompson gave a special shout out to the Town of Aurora.

'It's a community that's so welcoming, and encouraging to athletes.'

