

Aurora Sports Hall of Fame 2024: Milton Hart enters hall as Olympic Bobsledder, Sprint Champion, and inspirational community leader

It's evident that Olympic bobsledder, OUAA gold medalist, and Canadian Masters Sprint Champion Milton Hart is savoring his Tim Hortons coffee as we chat at their John West Way location.

Hart acknowledges whimsically that 'whoever invented caffeine was a genius' as he relaxes between education gigs on a radiant Monday afternoon. In addition to being caffeine-powered, Hart must be solar-powered, too. Hart's sunny disposition manifests itself in our discussion about his completed Vice Principal duties at Middlefield Collegiate in Markham that afternoon and his upcoming lesson plans for 19 on-line Communications students enrolled in his first-year mandatory English course at Seneca Polytechnic on Monday evening.

Hart, a 20-year resident of Aurora, takes time from his busy schedule as High School Administrator, Communications Professor, Co-Owner of and Sprint Instructor at Basic Speed and Agility, and dynamic Chair of the Aurora Black Caucus, to discuss the challenges of the education system, training today's athletes, his own athletic legacy, and, more immediately, his upcoming induction into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame on November 7.

The multisport athlete expressed his gratitude at being enshrined next month at the induction ceremony set for Aurora Town Square.

'Any recognition of my athletic career? I am grateful for. I was used to being overlooked at so many athletic levels, especially in Jamaica, and succeeded because I'm a hard worker. I'm grateful for the accolades and I appreciate being recognized.'

His self-effacing humor and modesty are evident when he remarks, 'You might think when you read my dossier that I'm often overlooked. Even when I won four gold medals at a major track meet, I didn't win the meet's most valuable athlete award and the winner only won two golds. But when I've been overlooked, it just makes me work harder.'

The competitive fire is evident in Hart who has retained his explosive speed on the track. He is an avowed 'life-long learner and hard worker as a model to the students I administer to and teach. I want my pedagogy to be relevant to them. I want to build trust in this generation of students by doing what I say I am going to do. If I want cohesion, I have to be a collaborator.'

Hart's exemplary dedication to life-long learning and the virtues of diligence and perseverance also manifest themselves in his recent track successes as a Master Division athlete. At the Canadian championships in Langley, BC, Hart's victory in the marquee 100-metre event is the best contemporary example of his dedication to performance. Hart acknowledges that he is a better runner technically in the 2020s than he was in the 1990s because 'he has been teaching track techniques since 2013 at Basic Speed and Agility.'

Hart admitted his track career suffered initially from a series of setbacks on his high school track team in Jamaica.

'I was asked to leave my high school team because the coach referred to me as 'useless' - too slow, but in my head, I was winning. I watched their practices after I was cut from the team and knew I would have to work twice as hard. If they practiced once, I would practice twice. Two years later, I was sprinting faster than any of those high school athletes and the Jamaican national track team was within reach. Fast forward and I had joined the Jamaican military where I was their 100-meter champion. The Jamaican bobsled team started holding tryouts at the military base where I was stationed and in 1989, I was drafted on to the team. Suddenly, I was in Innsbruck, Austria, training for the Olympics as part of the Jamaican bobsled team that inspired the movie Cool Runnings. My best memory at the Olympics was the realization that having the right work ethic had everything to do with my success as well as outworking anyone that came along.'

Hart's military discipline is evident in his anecdotes and he moved seamlessly from the Jamaican military to the Canadian Armed Forces where he 'served as a Lieutenant and embraced change and my duties. I enjoyed the esprit de corps that we would

experience after completing missions.?

It's also evident that Hart's prior military experiences set him up for success in Canadian University Track and Field.

The international sprinter noted that he reaped the benefits of military service? and Hart experienced the highlight of his early track career when he won four gold medals at the 1996 OUAA championships. He captured the 60-meter and 200-meter championships and, with his York University teammates, the Yeomen won the 4 x 200 and the 4 x 400 events, too. The gold medal haul earned Hart the 1996 Most Valuable Athlete at York, he was selected as an Ontario University All-Star for three years, and won three medals at the CIAU championships. He summarized succinctly the root of his successes on the track in the 1990's : ?Wonderful things happened to me in Track and Field as a university athlete. They only happened because I put the work in. I doubled down on my training to succeed.?

Hart has also doubled down on caring for his students during his career with the York Region District School Board.

?I love my job because I can be that change that I want to see. I have leverage to know my constituents and serve them. As an administrator, I see education from a different perspective than I had as a teacher?especially being in charge of a school and its students. It's so important to provide a kind word here or there for students. How can we achieve student success without looking after them? Who are we to bombard our students with language exercises when they haven't had breakfast or aren't sure where they will be sleeping tonight? Serving the needs of our students and building trust should be at the heart of what we do as educators.?

These factors are at the heart of Hart's coaching approaches at Basic Speed and Agility.

?When we started the program, we had a 16-year old autistic athlete. He was a sponge for training detail?he absorbed our techniques and was so good that he taught the wide receivers at Huron Heights Secondary School the proper way to sprint in one of the best football programs in Canada. We've had over 1,000 athletes through our program since 2013 and we never make cuts. We encourage all our athletes to work twice as hard?I know the pain of being cut from a team and being called ?useless'. Kids in elite athletic programs need the right tools to succeed. Every single thing can be taught and our instructors have to be life-long learners. When we demonstrate sprinting, we have to model what we want them to do and this has made me a better runner and sprint coach over the years.?

It's evident that Milton Hart's dedication to life-long learning and hard work has reaped rewards for him on provincial, national, and international athletic stages as well as in high school and community college classrooms across the GTA.

All these successes will be celebrated on November 7 in Aurora when Hart is inducted into the Town's Sports Hall of Fame.

By Jim Stewart