

Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee a Canadian cricket icon



By Jake Courtepatte

The game of cricket has had its ups and downs in Canadian sporting culture, but it was perhaps at its prime when played by Aurora's own William Fleury.

Fleury, a pioneer in the sport in this country, is one of four new members of the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame in 2017, all heading in under the 'Athlete' category.

The Fleury name has been synonymous with Aurora history since his birth in 1865, born to Ann Hughes and Joseph Fleury, who emerged as one of the first successful businessmen in Aurora after a railway was built in the town in 1853.

Joseph Fleury, whose namesake has been immortalized around town in the form of Fleury Street and Fleury Park, made agricultural implements and helped Aurora flourish into an important business hub north of Toronto.

William Fleury, one of five kids in a busy household, grew up with his step-mother Sarah after his mother died when he was six and his father when he was fifteen.

It was while attending public school in Aurora and Bradford that Fleury first took up cricket, earning mentions in the local papers for his impressive play at such a young age. He made connections with the Toronto Cricket Club while attending Upper Canada College in Toronto during his senior year, which led to a nomination to join the 'Gentlemen of Canada', a touring squad who travelled the United States before visiting England in the summer of 1887.

The tour was historic in international sporting relations between the two countries, Fleury being the youngest on the squad while celebrating Queen Victoria's Jubilee year.

There he earned the nickname 'Rustic', and while although its origins are unknown, his grandson David said was 'perhaps good-natured teasing for his rural roots.'

'That tour took place 130 years ago this past July,' said David.

Described by David and the Fleury family as 'a decent utility player, a slow bowler, a solid batsman, and a very good fielder,' Fleury's play was good enough to land him on several national squads, something David said was 'central' to his nomination into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.

Among Fleury's other local accomplishments is as a Lieutenant in the 12th Battalion of Infantry of York Rangers in April of 1885, at the age of twenty. Fleury and his battalion mobilized four companies for active service to fight in the North-West Rebellion, at least one of which assembled in Aurora.

Still bowling in his forties, Fleury married at 37 in 1902, and managed a side in the 1900s called the Toronto Zingari.

'It's not clear when he started to coach and manage, but he took the Zingari to Philadelphia and in 1910 on a tour of the UK, a successful one, perhaps a 'last hurrah' for Canadian cricket,' said David Fleury.

?A side went over again in the 20s, but Canadian cricket was in a sad state by then. Although there has been a resurgence in the game in Canada, it's still unquestionably a fringe sport.?

Fleury's sporting prowess not only lives on in the ASHoF, but also the Canadian Cricket Archives and the Ontario Cricket Association.

Fleury has been inducted alongside Mike Palmateer, a prolific goaltender for the Toronto Maple Leafs, Dan Thompson, who represented Canada in the pool on many stages in the 1970s and 1980s, and Bob Wall, who was the first captain of the Los Angeles Kings in 1967.

Over the next few weeks, The Auroran will be highlighting each inductee.

Held annually at St. Andrew's College, the ASHoF Induction dinner is one of the most spectacular nights of the year in the Aurora sports community. This year's dinner will be held on November 8, and more information can be found at www.aurorashof.ca.