

Aurora Sports Hall of Fame welcomes first team in Class of 2026



After more than 13 years honouring individual homegrown sports excellence displayed on the local and international stages, the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame is welcoming its first-ever team as part of the Class of 2026. The Aurora Sports Hall of Fame formally announced this year's inductees at Council on Tuesday night. Among the honoured members making their way into the Hall at an induction ceremony and dinner to be held this November are former Aurora Minor Hockey Association (AMHA) President Joe Bentolila, ultra-marathon runner George Biondic, Paralympian (hockey) Paul Rosen, NHL champ Shayne Stevenson, and the inaugural team – the Aurora Church Dodgers.

“The stories of this year's inductees remind us that greatness takes many forms,” said Aurora Sports Hall of Fame President Javed S. Khan. “Some achieved success at the highest levels of sport, while others dedicated decades to building opportunities for future generations. Together, they represent the very best of Aurora's sporting spirit and community leadership.”

AURORA CHURCH DODGERS (TEAM)

“The Aurora Church Dodgers occupy a unique place in both Aurora's sporting history and Canada's old-timers hockey movement,” reads their citation. “Founded in 1967 following the opening of the new arena on Aurora Heights Drive, the Church Dodgers became Aurora's first old-timers hockey team and only the second such team established in Ontario. Their memorable name originated from the Sunday morning ice time assigned to the group – from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. – while much of the community was attending church services.

“Over the next three decades, the Church Dodgers became ambassadors for both hockey and community services. They helped establish and grow old-timers hockey throughout the Region and became a founding team of the York Oldtimers Hockey League in 1975. The team's influence extended internationally in 1974 when they travelled to Sweden to represent Canada in a world hockey tournament during a period when Canada had withdrawn from international hockey competition. The Dodgers also played an important role in strengthening Aurora's relationship with Leksand, Sweden, contributing to the twinning relationship between the two communities.

“Throughout their history, the Church Dodgers organized and participated in numerous charitable tournaments, fundraising initiatives and community events, demonstrating that hockey could be a powerful force for bringing people together and giving back.”

JOE BENTOLILA (BUILDER – HOCKEY)

“Few individuals have had a greater impact on the growth and development of hockey in Aurora than Joe Bentolila. For 23 years,

Bentolila served as President of the AMHA, helping guide one of the community's largest and most influential youth sports organizations. During his tenure, he became known as a passionate advocate for player development, innovation, and creating opportunities for young athletes. Among his many contributions, Bentolila played a key role in introducing the highly successful Battle of Yonge Street rivalry, providing new opportunities for young children to enter the game of hockey.

His commitment to player development was perhaps best illustrated when he advocated for a highly-talented seven-year-old player named Connor McDavid to compete alongside nine-year-olds, recognizing exceptional ability long before the future NHL superstar became a household name. Bentolila's influence extended beyond Aurora through his five-year term as President of the York Simcoe Minor Hockey Association. Throughout his career, he organized numerous charitable and community-focused initiatives, earning some of the sport's highest volunteer honours, including the Key to the Town of Aurora, the Aurora 25-Year Volunteer Award, the OMHA Award, the OHF Award, the Bill Dinsmore Award, and the Sport Aurora Volunteer Award.

GEORGE BIONDIC ? ATHLETE ? ULTRA MARATHON

George Biondic has spent a lifetime proving that endurance is about far more than physical ability. An accomplished ultra-marathon athlete, Biondic has competed in some of the world's most demanding endurance events, including races lasting anywhere from 48 hours to an astonishing 10 days. Since making Aurora his home in 2004, he has become known not only for his athletic achievements but also for his unwavering commitment to community service and volunteerism.

In 2013, Biondic received Aurora's Community Recognition Award, acknowledging his ongoing efforts to strengthen and support local organizations. His dedication to giving back was perhaps best demonstrated when he celebrated his 70th birthday by walking from Lake Ontario to Barrie, raising \$16,000 for the Aurora Food Pantry. Beyond his own accomplishments, Biondic has served as a mentor and coach to numerous athletes, including fellow Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee Erlinda Biondic. He remains actively involved in community organizations including St. Andrew's College, the ASC Men's Shed, and the Aurora Seniors Centre.

PAUL ROSEN ? ATHLETE ? HOCKEY

Paul Rosen's achievements on the ice are remarkable. His journey away from the rink may be even more inspiring. After losing his leg at age 39 due to complications arising from a hockey injury, Rosen refused to let adversity define his future. Instead, he transformed one of life's greatest challenges into a story of perseverance, determination, and hope. Rosen went on to represent Canada at three Paralympic Winter Games in 2002, 2006, and 2010. As a member of Canada's National Para Ice Hockey Team, he helped lead the country to a gold medal at the 2006 Paralympic Games and became widely respected as the emotional and spiritual leader of Team Canada.

His impact extends far beyond international competition. Rosen has become one of Canada's leading advocates for resilience and mental wellness through motivational speaking, community engagement, and his published autobiography, *Never Give Up*. Today, he continues to inspire audiences across the country, including members of the Canadian Forces, where he shares powerful lessons about overcoming adversity, leadership, and perseverance. Rosen has also become a familiar voice to Canadian sports fans through his work as a commentator for TSN and CBC's coverage of Para Ice Hockey.

SHAYNE STEVENSON ? ATHLETE ? HOCKEY

From local arenas in Aurora to the bright lights of the National Hockey League, Shayne Stevenson's hockey journey stands as a testament to determination and perseverance. A resident of Aurora for more than two decades, Stevenson played Single-A minor hockey locally during an era when most elite players emerged from Triple-A programs. Despite the odds, his talent earned him recognition and eventually led to a first-round selection by the Boston Bruins in the NHL Entry Draft. Stevenson played four seasons in the NHL between 1989 and 1992 and was a member of the inaugural Tampa Bay Lightning team during the franchise's first season.

Before reaching the professional ranks, he established himself as one of the Ontario Hockey League's most dynamic offensive

players. While competing for both the London Knights and Kitchener Rangers, Stevenson led the OHL playoffs in scoring in 1989 and captured the Memorial Cup scoring title. His story also carries important cultural significance. Stevenson became just the seventh Mohawk player in NHL history, helping pave the way for future Indigenous athletes. He remains committed to supporting Indigenous youth through his involvement with the Little Native Hockey League and continues mentoring young people through hockey and outdoor programs, including initiatives developed alongside York Regional Police.?

The Class of 2026 will be celebrated at the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's 13th annual Induction Celebration Evening set for Thursday, November 25, at the Royal Venetian Mansion.

For more information, visit aurorashof.ca.

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