

Ed McNally goes full circle to land in Aurora Sports Hall of Fame

By Jake Courtepatte

For his skills and achievements on the soccer pitch, Ed McNally has been chosen as one of two inductees for the 'athlete' category in the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's class of 2014.

Born in Glasgow, Scotland, McNally's family came to Canada when he was just eleven. Originally settling in Richmond Hill, McNally's move to Aurora in high school coincided with when he began to be recognized as the top of his field.

At the age of 16 he joined the Aurora Hearts, the local men's league team. It was with the Hearts that he was first scouted and recognized. The Hearts hosted an All-Star game against the Toronto Blizzard reserve squad of the National Soccer League in 1988. The following year, McNally was drafted by the Blizzard.

McNally's professional club career was a whirlwind experience.

'Back then there wasn't much security in a lot of the leagues, so leagues were constantly popping up and disappearing,' said McNally. 'I think I played in every professional league there was back then. But most of it is a great experience, to play the sport you love for a living. And getting the chance to represent your country obviously is, too.'

He got the opportunity a number of times after getting on the Canadian youth program, starting with Olympic Qualifiers at the age of 20.

'It was incredible. There's nothing better than wearing a Canada shirt and listening to your national anthem, no matter what sport it is. Any athlete can relate to that.'

McNally was fortunate enough to travel the world playing international soccer. Four years after turning pro, McNally saw Bermuda and Jamaica during Olympic Qualifiers. That same year, he received 'quite the thrill' when he was called to the 'A' squad to face his home country of Scotland. A year later, he spent two weeks with the Canadian 'B' squad in China in 1984, playing in what was called the Great Wall Championship. He then toured Central America with the World Cup squad in 1987.

Despite the distance, McNally felt it was important to hold on to hometown connections.

'They're your buddies, they played on the same team as you,' said McNally. 'It was a long and fun route, but I always kept in contact with what was going on here.'

Professional and international accolades didn't keep McNally from being humbled by the Hall of Fame induction. He said he was 'pretty shocked' to receive the phone call.

'I was very honoured,' said McNally. 'It's a great privilege, having grown up in the area. It was so many years ago, so you kind of forget what you did, so I started going back in my scrapbooks. Just to look back on all the people you've met throughout the years brings back a lot of memories.'

After his professional career, McNally's passion for soccer came what he called 'full circle'. He returned to the Aurora Soccer Club, taking on a player/coach role. Later he would play in the over-35's Newmarket District Soccer League, where it all began.

After a number of years with the Seniors Soccer Club, McNally's focus is now on his daughter's soccer career. After starting in Aurora, she has since been playing in Vaughan.

'When you've got kids, holy moley, it's like five days a week. And nowadays they travel a lot further than we did when I was in the minor system.'

As for the local minor soccer program, McNally says he believes there is a lot of talent left out there to be recognized.

?It's jumped leaps and bounds from when we used to play. There are so many more kids in it now. It's great to see, it gets the kids out, keeps them fit, and teaches them to be a team. Life lessons get learned from that.?

The induction ceremony will take place November 5 at The Mansion Events Centre in Aurora. More information can be found at www.aurorashof.ca.