

Father/son hockey duo, gymnast champion land in Hall of Fame

For the Gardners, Dave and Ryan, hockey is a family affair.

So, it was only fitting that the two took to the stage at St. Andrew's College for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame induction dinner together, each donning their green jackets as two of the newest members of the hallowed hall.

“Grandfathers, fathers, sons, brothers,” said emcee Rod Black when recounting the Gardner connection to the game. “You talk about generational hockey players, how about our own three generation hockey team?”

With thousands of professional hockey games under their belts, father Dave in North American leagues and son Ryan a household name across the Swiss hockey landscape, each took the time to thank those who have helped them reach the latest stage in their careers.

“I think the thing was, we had the opportunity,” said Dave, reminiscing about his own father, Cal's, time with the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs and Boston Bruins. “The opportunity was there for kids to play the game. When I look around here, I see the same thing. We have five arenas here.”

“There's baseball diamonds, there's soccer courts, there's just everything for them to be able to get involved in sports. I think that's important.”

He recounted his parents' insistence that hockey not be the only sport he partook in, akin to the philosophies of hockey greats like Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux; in the summers, his days were often spent outside of the rink on the diamond, or on a golf course.

“We played as much sports as we could. And I think that was the key,” said Dave, who added “Oh, and I forgot one more thing—your education.”

A graduate of St. Michael's College in Toronto, Dave thanked those at the school and at York University who helped him along in his journey, including a former St. Mike's teacher who was in attendance at the dinner.

For son Ryan, whose career spanned two decades in the Swiss league, he credited “growing up in a rink” as the motivator to following in both his father's and grandfather's footsteps.

“It just came naturally,” said Ryan. “I

was very lucky to have my grandfather and my dad, and other people in Aurora who were always around, talking about the game, it was the way it was.?

Echoing his dad's sentiments, Ryan was quick to acknowledge the abundance of ice opportunities around town.

?There was a good pond on Bathurst, we used to shovel it off, and my buddies and I would go and just skate?my dad and I would just drive around looking for ponds to go skate, and I'm lucky I had a coach like this guy here.?

Romagnoli, who now resides in Chicago with his family, brought his own kids to Aurora to celebrate the big night, a culmination of a gymnastic career that brought him to the height of the NCAA honours.

The Cardinal Carter high school graduate took in the moment while acknowledging his fellow inductees.

?Ryan and I went to school together,? said Mr. Romagnoli. ?We didn't know each other, I'm two years older?but the people you meet along the way, it's always really cool.?

He thanked Lowell McClenny, a fellow honoured member and anchor of the former Sportsbeat Aurora, for the initial nomination.

?Lowell is a longtime family friend, he knew all of the athletes in Aurora. He basically documented Aurora's sports history, so it was very cool to be nominated by Lowell.?

He also made sure to acknowledge his wife, Jenna, and three children for helping him along his path.

?You don't usually get an opportunity like this to thank all of the people who made you who you are, and continue to define who you are. And my people are here with me tonight.?

The Gardners and Mr. Romagnoli join longtime golf volunteer Jim Clark as well as Aurora Ducks founder Reg Chappell as this year's inducted class into the hall of fame.

By Jake Courtepatte