

## Grey Brett, Raymond Noble, and seven local sports clubs honored at Sport Aurora's 13th Annual Breakfast of Champions



Sport Aurora convened its 13th Annual Breakfast of Champions at Stonehaven Banquet Hall on Sunday morning.

Grey Brett and Ray Noble were honored as Athlete of the Year and Coach of the Year, respectively.

Seven local sports clubs were recognized with medals for both individual and team achievements at the provincial, national, or international levels, including the York Artistic Swim Club, Kids Super Gym, Master Ducks, Evolution Gymnastics, the Team Ontario Astros 14U Baseball Club, Spectrum Baton, and the Newmarket Redbirds Lacrosse team.

In a sun-drenched dining hall, Sport Aurora President Ron Weese welcomed 122 guests, including Mayor Tom Mrakas and MPP Michael Parsa (Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill), and introduced the event's Master of Ceremonies, Aurora Tigers' owner and former NHLer Jim Thomson.

The proprietor of JT Prospects, Thomson acknowledged Tigers veteran players Ryan Evenhuis and Peter Lopes who volunteered at the event, greeted guests, and assisted with announcements.

Both Evenhuis and Lopes were basking in the afterglow of a weekend sweep of the Haliburton Huskies and St. Michaels Buzzers to which Thomson made reference.

All winners were greeted cordially by Thomson and Sport Aurora officials as a parade of local athletes received their medals from various invitees and were feted by a sated and supportive post-breakfast audience.

Thomson, born in Edmonton, offered some good-natured barbs for the Leafs fans assembled and proceeded to introduce a compelling video montage prepared by Sport Aurora that highlighted the achievements of the honorees.

Mayor Tom Mrakas praised the athletes in attendance and the Town's considerable participation in sports.

"Aurora has a passionate and dedicated sports community. We're here today to recognize our athletes' hard work and dedication. We're so proud of your perseverance. Today, let's not only celebrate your victories, but your character and commitment. Continue to be fantastic competitors and get things done."

Greetings also came from MPP Parsa who thanked Sport Aurora and extended congratulations from the Premier and the Province to all the athletes and coaches in Aurora and the surrounding communities.

MPP Parsa also engaged in some good-natured verbal jousting with Jim Thomson for his earlier anti-Leafs remarks which lent a nice level of levity to the proceedings.

After the speeches by dignitaries, Thomson introduced the event's Keynote Speaker, Grey Brett, who was also honored as Sport

Aurora's Athlete of the Year.

In his dual capacity, Brett delineated his courageous and compelling comeback from a liver transplant, his subsequent swim across Lake Muskoka to raise awareness about the urgent need for organ donors in Ontario, and urged the athletes and coaches assembled to overcome adversity at every turn.

Brett, who achieved five world records, including a time of 2:26.42 in his 200 IM, shaving 3.5 seconds off his previous best at the World Transplant Games in Perth, Australia in April 2023, won five gold medals the last time the event was held in Perth and was awarded the Men's Outstanding Athlete Award. He has set a total of seven world records for transplant athletes.

The 45-year-old, who grew up in Stouffville, moved the assembly with both his inspirational story about the complications connected to his liver transplant as well as his anecdotes about international competitive success in the pool. He reminded the audience about the importance of resilience.

It's not about what has happened to us, but how we respond to what happens to us. We're champions because we can overcome.

Brett made a closing pitch and impassioned plea for organ donation and invited attendees to register with him after the ceremony: Only about 27 per cent of people in Ontario have registered to be organ donors and only 1-3 per cent of those will be suitable donors. We need to increase our donor rates in the province.

The inspirational swimmer and liver transplant survivor received a standing ovation from an appreciative audience.

2015 Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee Alan Dean introduced the 2023 Coach of the Year Raymond Noble, the legendary President of the Aurora Lawn Bowling Club, and its celebrated national competitor.

Noble was moved by the community's gesture in a post-ceremony interview.

It's nice to be recognized as a coach and teacher of the sport and for the love of the game. The charming and self-deprecatory bowling whiz noted this is nice to win while my heart is still beating and I'm still paying the taxes.

2018 Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee Paolina Allan introduced the 2023 Athlete of the Year Grey Brett.

In the Stonehaven lobby after registering organ donors, the inspirational international competitor reflected on the best part of being honored by Sport Aurora: Just the fact that there's recognition of a transplant athlete is one of the best parts of today.

It's a privilege to share the story of a transplant patient and to hopefully inspire athletes to overcome their own adversity. I couldn't resist the opportunity to raise awareness about the need for organ donation in the province and that's a big part of what I liked about today, too.

**By Jim Stewart**