

## Hall of Famer Stemmler has skiing in his blood



**By Jeff Doner**

From 1988 to 1999, Aurora native Brian Stemmler carved an impressive career on the slopes as part of Canada's national alpine ski team.

Over those 14 years, Stemmler competed in four Olympics – Calgary in 1988, 1992 in Albertville, France; 1994 in Lillehammer, Norway; and 1998 in Nagano, Japan – and boasts a slew of top 10 finishes in major Canadian and North American competitions.

Stemmler, 47, now has a local achievement to add to his impressive resume after being elected to the Sport Aurora Hall of Fame as part of the first class.

‘It’s really cool,’ he said. ‘I’m honoured and flattered and didn’t expect it, so it’s something that’s pretty nice that you can reflect on in your career.’

When reflecting on a long career, Stemmler said just participating in those four Olympic Games was something he’ll never forget.

‘Being in four Olympics was something special, not many athletes, let alone skiers, have done that, so I’m pretty proud that I participated. It’s too bad that I didn’t win any medals, but when you look back after you retire it’s not so much about the medals, but what came along with it. Maybe just people with no medals say that, but that’s what I’m sticking to,’ he joked.

He also pointed to his first Games in Calgary as most likely his most memorable moment.

‘They were all different, but I think that one was the most special because it was in Canada and my family was there and friends and people cheering you on,’ he said.

‘Nagano was my best skiing memory because I almost won. I was three quarters of the way down winning and clipped an edge and missed a gate, so that one lives with me the most I think.’

But of course it wasn’t all easy for Stemmler, who had to fight adversity when he was severely injured in 1989, after catching an edge and breaking his pelvis. The damage led to internal bleeding and an infection that almost took his life.

‘I managed to come out of that, but I didn’t ski for another year and a half and then skied for another nine years after that,’ he said. ‘There were people who didn’t think I was going to walk again.’

Even though he no longer lives in Aurora (he moved to Toronto in 1993), he frequents the area to visit friends and fondly recalls his days as a young athlete at school.

‘The community was always really supportive,’ he said. ‘The teachers and principals at my schools were always behind me in what I wanted to pursue and they allowed me to follow my dreams. The community was always looking out for me and writing nice things in the paper, so it was a great place to grow up and I love the town.’

It was from home in Aurora that his family would take weekly trips up to Collingwood where he learned how to ski at the Georgian Peaks Ski Club.

‘My grandparents lived up there, so we stayed there on the weekend and my parents were both ski patrol and ski instructors when they were younger, so they brought my sister and I up there on the weekends to go skiing and learn how to do the sport they loved,’ he said.

Alpine skiing was a true family sport for the Stemmler's as Brian's sister Karen also competed for the Canadian national team in the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo.

Now, Stemmler has five-year-old twins of his own that he hopes to get out on the slopes for the first time this year.

In his retirement, he finds himself on the other side of the fence as a colour commentator on Sportsnet and also spends time as a motivational speaker.

Keeping a close eye on Canada's new crop of skiers, Stemmler gave today's athletes a huge vote of confidence.

‘We're always well represented by our Olympians on the medal podium and they're all just great people and great in their community,’ he said. ‘They do their sport because they love it and that's why I respect them so much.’