

Swimmer, rugby coach, member of Jamaican bobsled team among Sports Hall of Fame's Class of 2024

Athletes and coaches in the areas of swimming, rugby, table tennis and track and field – one who was also a member of the iconic Jamaican bobsled team – are among the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame's Class of 2024.

Swimmer Marcel Gery and table tennis player Grace Wong are inductees in the Athlete category this year, as is track and field star Milton Hart, who made a splash in the bobsled at the Albertville Olympics. Rounding out the Class of 2024 is Sandy Townsend, who is honoured for his career as a rugby coach.

This year's inductees were announced by Aurora Sports Hall of Fame President Javed Khan at a presentation to Council on Tuesday night.

First up was Gery, an Olympic bronze medallist as a member of the 4x100 metre medley relay team, along with Jon Cleveland, Stephen Clark and Mark Tewksbury.

“Gery's skill and dedication were pivotal in securing this medal for Canada,” said the ASHOF in his citation. “Beyond the Olympics, Marcel has won several medals for Canada at the Pan Pacific Championships and the Commonwealth Games. His exceptional talent was further highlighted in 1990 when he set a short-course world record in the 100m butterfly in Leicester, England. This achievement cemented his status as one of the premier butterfly swimmers of his time. Marcel has been a proud resident of Aurora since 1996 and his long-standing commitment to the community has made him a well-known and respected figure in the area.

“Marcel's contributions extend beyond the pool. He has been an active member of the Aurora community, coaching his children's sports teams and dedicating his time to various charitable causes. His efforts in raising funds for Southlake Hospital, the Children's Miracle Network, and the Canadian Breast Cancer Society have made a significant difference, showcasing his commitment to giving back and supporting those in need. Through his athletic achievements and community involvement, Marcel has exemplified excellence, dedication, and generosity, making him a cherished member of the Aurora community.”

Next up is Milton Hart, an educator by day and founding member of the Aurora Black Caucus.

Hart is being lauded for being recognized as “one of the fastest men in Jamaica” which has served him well both there and in Canada.

“While competing in Track and Field at York University, Milton attained numerous accolades, solidifying his status as a top-tier athlete. His achievements include being named the 1996 Most Valuable Athlete, earning the title of Ontario University All-Star in three separate years, and securing three CIAU medals. These accomplishments highlight his dedication, skill, and exceptional performance on the track. Milton's commitment to service extended beyond athletics. He received his Queen's Commission to serve in the Canadian Military Reserves, where he held the rank of Lieutenant. This role exemplified his leadership and dedication to serving his country.

“For the past 20 years, Milton has been a resident of Aurora. During this time, he has served as the Vice President of the York Region District School Board, where his leadership and vision have positively impacted educational policies and practices. Additionally, as a part-time professor at Seneca College, he has shared his wealth of knowledge and experience with countless students. Milton's passion for athletics and mentorship continued as he became a coach in the Aurora community. He co-founded Basic Speed and Agility, a program that teaches the fundamentals of sprinting, helping young athletes develop their skills and achieve their potential. His commitment to fostering athletic talent and promoting physical fitness is unwavering.”

Townsend's 35 years of dedication to rugby is similarly unwavering – both here in Aurora with the Aurora Barbarians and internationally.

?In 2015, Sandy expanded his coaching influence by participating in the Ontario Provincial Competition at the Las Vegas 7s, further solidifying his reputation as a top-tier coach. His role extends beyond technical training; Sandy is a mentor who helps young athletes pursue their goals, maintain focus, and build confidence in themselves and their teammates. A resident of Aurora since 1997, Sandy has also been a dedicated educator at the Country Day School in King City, where he has taught rugby since his arrival. His commitment to the sport is evident in his success as both a coach and an athlete, with his induction into the Queen's University Rugby Hall of Fame highlighting his achievements on the field.

?Sandy's coaching experience spans multiple institutions and levels, including Lower Canada College, Country Day School, Seneca College, Toronto Rugby Union, Ontario Summer Games, and the Aurora Barbarians (since 2001). He is certified Level 3 by Rugby Canada, enabling him to teach other coaches and further promote the sport's development.?

Grace Wong's talent for table tennis has also seen her take on the world ? ever since picking up her first paddle at the age of seven. A resident of Aurora since 2008, she has never wavered in her love of the sport, says ASHOF.

?Grace's exceptional talent and commitment have led her to compete in singles, doubles, mixed doubles, and team categories, where she has achieved significant accolades in each. Her recent accomplishments highlight her continued excellence in the sport. In 2023, Grace won gold medals for Team Canada at the ITTF World Master Championships in Fort Lauderdale, USA, showcasing her prowess on the international stage. Additionally, she secured impressive victories at the 94th New Jersey State Championships. In January 2023, Grace emerged victorious in the Mixed Doubles category at the ITTF World Veteran Championships in Muscat, Oman, further solidifying her reputation as a top-tier table tennis player.

?Beyond her personal achievements, Grace has played a pivotal role in promoting table tennis within the community. She co-founded the Canada Panda Cup in the Greater Toronto Area, a tournament recognized at the national level. Her commitment to the sport extends to her volunteer work, where she advocates for women's equality, diversity, and inclusivity in sporting opportunities. Grace's contributions to table tennis and her efforts to foster a more inclusive sporting environment reflect her deep dedication to both the game and the community.?

Gery, Hart, Townsend and Wong will be celebrated at the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame's induction ceremony on Thursday, November 7, which will be held for the very first time at Aurora Town Square.

By Brock Weir