

## Volleyball coach Bruce Stafford storms into Aurora Sports Hall of Fame



**By Jake Courtepatte**

Bruce Stafford can be found at the helm of an organization bringing the sport of volleyball to hundreds of young athletes across Aurora.

His efforts and dedication to volleyball have led him into the 2014 class of inductees to the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.

Stafford played high school volleyball throughout his teens in North York, as a self-proclaimed "sports nut who paid more attention to athletics than academics."

His transition to coaching came in the early 1970's, when a work-to-rule strike hit the local schools.

"There were a few years there when we as athletes had to find a way to keep our sports teams going," said Stafford. "So we had to cover these roles."

In his grade twelve year, Stafford took on the head coaching position of the senior women's volleyball team. He also became a player/coach of the senior men's team.

In 1979, Stafford took over the Ryerson University women's volleyball team while getting his education. He held the position for seven seasons, once bringing the underdog team to the OUA playoffs.

After resigning to focus on his family, Stafford continued to be involved with various club teams throughout Ontario. In 1992, he coached a team at the Ontario Summer Games.

"I was still really enjoying the coaching aspect of it," said Stafford. "So when my kids got to an age where they started getting involved in school, they said "dad, didn't you use to coach? We should start a club!"

Stafford and his oldest daughter recruited some of her friends and athletes from the local elementary school. In September of 1998, The Storm was born.

?I just thought, here's a great opportunity to provide kids the education and learning of this great sport that anyone can play.?

The Storm originally consisted of two girls' teams, one for each of Stafford's daughters born seventeen months apart.

By word of mouth, the Storm expanded to five teams the following year.

?When the next tryouts came the following September, there were just too many kids there to send home,? said Stafford. ?I thought, why not just keep everybody??

What began as a two-team operation has since grown to an expansive program covering all different ages and skill sets, including Rep, Select, Beach, and the in-house ?Storm League?.

As for being inducted into the ASHoF, Stafford said he was ?literally dumbfounded.?

?I was totally blown away. I try to be in the background most of the time. When I'm working with the kids I'm in my element, I'd rather just watch the kids and see how they're being successful.?

Stafford recalled the moment that he realized the impact he had on the local athletic community, when he was told that regardless of what he has done, he ?provided an opportunity that was not there.?

The Storm's website has the message ?Providing Opportunities? across the home page, which Stafford says is the organization's main goal for young athletes.

Concerning the future of the Aurora Storm, Stafford hopes to pass the reigns onto some of his graduating classes from the sixteen years of team history.

?We've got kids starting to cycle back,? said Stafford. ?They're finished university, some of them are moving home, or getting jobs in the area. Some of them want to get involved.?

?I think if I can split it up and teach the right people, the organization can continue on for years to come.?