



Bruce Baumgartner's Olympic medals, Gold, '84; Silver, '88; Gold, '92, Bronze, '96.

Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame 32nd Annual Induction Ceremony Held

Contributing Writer

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If you started naming the local sporting legends at the 32nd annual Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony last Monday, you wouldn't be able to stop. Most in attendance could claim at least a moment of fame in the annals of Chautauqua sports achievement. Those not yet inducted into the CSHOF did mental calculus on how to get there someday, checking their bona fides against those fortunate and dedicated enough to fit the bill. *Did I win enough games? Score enough points? Have I contributed enough? Where do I fit in this illustrious collection?* The six inductees that night soaked up deserved ovations. Their bios are best handled by others, but here are a few highlights of what they had to say on their big night.

Dan Palmer has been the WDOE sports director for some 35 years. His speech at the ceremony, a silky radio-ready cadence, had the feel of play-by-play action as he gave a shout out to north-county coaches that helped make his career in broadcasting. He said his passion for sports started with a transistor radio listening to games. I'd wager a few donuts you'd hear a similar story from other sportscasters who've dedicated themselves to talking up the games of their lives.

Stateline and Eriez Speedway racing legend **Ron Blackmer** said, "You're gonna learn real quick here that I don't talk for a livin'." Maybe you should Ron. His 133 wins in the Sportsman division is almost three times more than his next competitor, and his simple homespun message of humility and honesty had the crowd in stitches at the ceremony.

Walt Thurnau's presentation was prepared, professional, passionate, and entirely genuine... just like the man. Two hundred ninety seven high school wins in 36 years, 19 national qualifiers at the junior collegiate level, and too many other honors in the sport of wrestling to count. I call Coach Thurnau "The Big Mirror" as he reflects greatness onto others, refusing to acknowledge recognition or glory. His presenter called him the total package as a coach and educator, and I agree.

Cal Cederquist took the dais and spoke with self-deprecating dignity. Cal's the legendary track coach at Chautauqua Central School who won three consecutive championships from 1979-1981. He learned responsibility and hard work growing up on a farm, and took those lessons to the tracks and fields of Chautauqua County. His stories of training athletes in fields and parking lots, high jumping onto foam torn from old car seats, and discus practice throwing onto the baseball field during games spoke to his ingenuity and overall body of coaching work.

The late **Jim Foti** was represented in quality fashion by his daughters. He started his playing career at JHS, moved on to John Carroll University and racked up 466 high school basketball wins coaching in West Virginia. His daughter was eloquent telling the gathering about his love for Jamestown and describing what a humble well-rounded man he was.

Jim Young is a Jamestown High legend on the hardwood, winning a section VI title, and setting scoring records at St. Lawrence University. He also played professionally in England. Now coaching high school basketball at Mendocino High in California he is in the thick of a successful coaching career. His speech was an

easy-to-follow stream of consciousness that drew the crowd in and made you feel like you're listening in on his thoughts.

Finally the keynote speaker, **Bruce Baumgartner** spoke. His is a casual, earthy presence for such a larger-than-life American icon. Randy Anderson, CSHOF president said, "Not only did he win a combined 13 Olympic and World medals, Bruce was also one of the most popular wrestlers in the history of the sport."

Baumgartner, regarded as the greatest freestyle heavyweight wrestler in American history, spoke of humble beginnings in wrestling, his desire to set goals and succeed and his experience as the US team flag-bearer in the opening ceremonies at the Atlanta games in 1996 (in classic stump speech humor, Mr. Baumgartner said his two thoughts were, "Don't trip, don't drop it... don't trip, don't drop it...").

The night was a triumph of sporting life from our area. The event is all Chautauqua County where jeans and suits mingle in spirit, and stories fall from the sky like snowflakes, melting in the mouths of the cognoscenti. Reach up and grab one before it falls and make it yours for the night... "I remember when"... "I was at that game"... "My dad played on the same team as his dad." In counties all over the country there are ceremonies just like this. But if you're a Chautauqua sportsman, you recognize this as something completely unique, and completely our own. Keep your Downtown Athletic Club, enjoy your Canton and your Cooperstown, go ahead and TiVo the ESPYS; but give me my Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame and these people that I know and remember and appreciate.

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