

## Edward (Ted) Byrne-Athlete



It was at St. Bon's in Aula Maxima's gym classes that Ted Byrne was first introduced to the game of basketball. He can still remember doing layups lined up behind traffic cones in Grade 5, a left handed lap-up at the time was impossible!! The catalyst for Ted was the mini-basketball

intramural program at St. Bon's started by Chris Murphy and Brother Duff. It was unknown to him at the time but it was the beginning of a very extraordinary journey.

With this journey came many accomplishments and many memories from his basketball days, too many to share with you tonight but I hope I can portray to you the player he was. Was it the Nike Legends, the rivalries between St. Bon's, St. Pat's and Holy Cross, his first b-ball trophy (most improved in Grade 5), shooting hoops in the early am before class started, that gave Ted the edge to want to be more than just average?

Basketball was definitely becoming an important focus of Ted's life during this period. When he was in Grade 9 at St. Bon's he used to go to Rice and watch Brother Reynold's Senior Celtic teams play in the evening (Sparrow, Dawe, Dalton, Smythe, Fowler, Blake, etc...). He couldn't wait to go to Rice and be a part of that basketball environment. However.....he did not make the senior team at Bro Rice in Grade 10 which was devastating for him at the time - but in retrospect it was one of the best things that happened to him from a hoops perspective. He

played a lot more under Gerry Whitten in Grade 10 on the junior team and improved a great deal. In Grade 11 when Ted did make the senior team he was able to make an immediate impact, where they won back to back 4-A championships under Bro Flood.

Ted's first memories of Provincial basketball were the player identification camps that Coach Wakeham ran out at the Torbay Rec center, with tryouts for the provincial team to go to Brandon for Junior Nat's in 1984. Ted remembers that place being a sauna in the summer but he loved playing there. It was his first exposure to the best players in the province. He was coming out of Grade 10 at the time and was named an alternate. Again, this was a hard pill to swallow... however, in August '84 he went to a basketball camp in Corner Brook run by Glenn Taylor and Peter "Doc" Ryan, who at the time was the coach of the Dalhousie Tigers Men's Team in the AUAA. Doc asked Ted if he'd be interested in going to Dal to play basketball. When he returned from that camp he realized that he could actually have a career in basketball past high school and even outside of NL. It was a turning point in his approach to dedication and training.

Coach Wakeham's dedication to the '87 Games program was very contagious and the entire team felt that he would do anything to give them the chance to improve and play. Simultaneously playing in the high school league and men's city league was physically demanding, but it was very good for them. It was a stark contrast - winning every game in the high school league and getting killed in the men's league twice a week. They lost a lot of games in the D1 league but Ted can still remember the feeling of finally winning their first game. They were definitively improving.

Coach Wakeham organized trips to Halifax and Montreal during the winters and to the junior nationals in the summer. He was always looking to find the best competition. According to Ted, "it was simply fantastic – we were a solid group that truly loved and lived basketball and Tony was the tireless motor behind it all." Hosting the junior national tournament in St. John's in '86 was an incredible experience - a very high caliber and gave Ted a taste of the CIAU level, since so many college guys were still playing that year.

Of course, the Canada Games in '87 was the pinnacle of the "3-year-plan" with Tony – the team placed 5<sup>th</sup>. Ted says "it was years later did I realize that it was a solid achievement to be very proud of."

Ted credits the Acadia program under Dave Nutbrown for preparing him for the next level of physical national and international basketball. It was a huge step-up in competitiveness and intensity for him. "I worked very hard on my game at Acadia, and I was definitely pushed to my potential by my coach and teammates. We had roughly 100 2-hour practices and 30 games per season from October to March, and I can count on one hand the number of practices I missed due to injury in 5 years, and I don't think I missed any games." Doing individual skill sessions with Coach Nutbrown pre- and post-season was also a key element. "He taught me how to really focus on improving specific fundamental skill sets, and to practice intensely and efficiently by myself."

The hard work certainly paid off at Acadia, where during Ted's tenure of 5 years the team advanced to the CIAU Final 8 tournament for 4 consecutive years. The Axemen made it to the national semi-finals 3 of 4 years, including advancing to the Championship game in 1988 where they fell to Brandon University 81-66. "Playing against Brandon in the CIAU National Championship Game is very memorable but somewhat bittersweet, since we lost to a team that we had beaten that year and taken to overtime on another occasion. However, it was also a very valuable learning experience. I was in my second year in 1988, and that CIAU Final 8 tournament for me was essential to the success we would have over the next few years. Through experience, we were able learn to focus, handle pressure and play well in big games."

Ted's fondest basketball memory may be the last minute of the championship game of the AUAA in 1990 in the Halifax Forum. St. FX were heavily favored and Acadia had upset UPEI the day before in the semifinal. They were definitely underdogs. It was an incredibly scrappy, physical, low-scoring game and Ted had to hold All-Star center Richard Bella off the boards or they'd have a very hard time winning the game. In the end, Acadia played very disciplined offensively and were very tough defensively. With about a minute left, they were up by about 10 and trading free throws with X. Ted said "at one point with the clock stopped with about 30 seconds to go, and about 4000 fans going crazy, it sank in that after 4 years of almost daily practice and dedication, we were about to realize our primary goal of an AUAA championship. It's one of those frozen-in-time moments when your entire sports career flashes before you. I was very emotional and when

the buzzer sounded, the AUAA fans stormed the floor I was swept away in the moment. The following year we repeated in similar circumstances - but the '90 championship game will always be special."

Putting on a Canadian uniform for the first time was obviously a once-in-a-lifetime thrill, another huge accomplishment for Byrne. Coaches are looking for players that can thrive through the schedule of international tournaments - often 4-5 games in 1 week. They saw that in Ted, who withstood the grueling 3 week National Team Tryout and didn't fade as the days proceeded. **"When you start with 30 of the best players in the country and after 3 weeks you're still in the final group of 16 it can be pretty stressful knowing 4 more guys have to go. Getting the final nod from the Coach Guy Vetrie in '90 – that I was on the final traveling squad going to the NBA summer league, – was absolutely... euphoric."** The next year Ted once again made the cut and won the right to represent Canada at the '91 FISU games and the '91 Pan Am Games. Winning the Silver medal at the World FISU games in England was definitely a highlight. In the final they played against a very tough US team that included a lot of future NBA players, but coming away with a silver medal was still a significant accomplishment.

Ted was the first Newfoundlander to play professional basketball and the first Newfoundlander to play for the Canadian National Men's Team.

When evaluating his professional environment, he feels that overall level of the Swiss league when he played was not as high or intense as the AUAA late in the season. Nevertheless, as the only pro on his team there was always pressure to perform and to out-perform the pro on the other team. Ted was constantly leading by example, in practice and in games. Ted had a short, but solid professional career, with back injuries forcing him to rethink his priorities in 1997. In 1998 he retired from playing and enrolled in the University of New Brunswick where he completed an Engineering degree before moving back to Switzerland in 2002. Looking back on his professional experience, he observes "it opened an entirely new world for me from a cultural standpoint and changed my life in immeasurable ways that are completely unrelated to basketball."