

Anthony (Tony) Wakeham-Athlete/Builder



Tony is a very prominent figure in Newfoundland and Labrador Basketball community. He's career encompasses many years and many different roles. He began his playing career as a junior varsity athlete with Memorial University. He went on to play with the

Memorial University Men's Varsity team and then on to the Senior Men's League. His success in basketball didn't end there, he began coaching in 1980 and coached at the high school, provincial and University levels. His leadership prowess lead him to an executive role with the NLBA (president 1986-1990) and then on to Basketball Canada where he held roles as Vice President (1990-1993) and President (1994-1997).

Tony was first introduced to the game of basketball at Laval in Placentia under Mike Campbell in 1972. His real taste for the game came when attended Memorial University. He played from 1973-1979 with MUN and was coached by Frank Butler. After graduating Memorial with his Economics Degree, Tony wasn't ready to hang up his sneakers just yet!!! He then played with Molson's/Nova Physio in the Senior Men's League that were the powerhouse of the league from 1979-1986. In his years as a player, he was known as a tenacious pick and roll player, great rebounder and was a true team player. This made him invaluable to any team he played with and also brought him 8 St. John's Senior Men's Championships and 7 Provincial Championships.

Towards the end of Tony's playing days his basketball career took a shift from being a player to becoming a coach. Tony was a dedicated and passionate coach who paved the road for many NL players to go on to higher level of basketball. From 1983-1987 he coached the Provincial Men's Basketball Team preparing the squad for the 1987 Canada Games. Wakeham, guided the 1987 Provincial Canada Games Men's Basketball Team to a fifth-place finish at the 1987 Canada Games in Cape Breton. It was the best showing for the province in basketball at the Games.

Being an effective coach is not only about technical prowess and knowing your X's and O's. It's also about providing the conditions for your players/team to develop and get to the next level... this is precisely why Tony was so good for Newfoundland Labrador Basketball and absolutely deserves to be in the NL Hall of Fame.

Many of Tony's players would not have gotten the attention of AUAA coaches coming out of high school if it were not for Tony and the '87 Games ramp-up program. He was the key to getting so many NL players off the island. Unfortunately if you wanted to go further in hoops in the 80's then you needed to move to the mainland.

Innumerable hours were put in by Tony looking for sponsors, supporters, scheduling, practices, trips, etc. Indeed, he was tireless in this respect. Of course, all of this went on behind the scenes as his players were completely oblivious to all this effort. There were plenty of other Newfoundland players before this era that were capable, high-level AUAA players but Tony's efforts brought the level and visibility of NL basketball on par with that of the other provinces. The 5th place finish in Cape Breton for the '87 Games was the summit. Sure, as players they worked hard for this, but the motor behind them all along was Tony.

To go one step further... his efforts - given the fact that Ted Byrne, Jeff White, Blair White, Chris Mesher, (and more were to come) were starting to leave the island to play AUAA, 10 of the 12 players on the 1987 team went on to play at the AUAA or higher in their careers. This may have also been the catalyst that brought MUN back into the AUAA. As a result, since then (1990), both the men's and women's programs at MUN have been instrumental in raising the visibility and awareness of the game in NL, as well as the development of several very good

teams and players along the way. This has all been good for NL basketball as a whole and can be at least partially credited to Tony's vision in 1984 to assemble a competitive team for the '87 Games. For his efforts Tony was awarded the Chris Griffin Memorial Award as coach of the year.

Tony's coaching career led him to Memorial University where he coached from Men's Varsity Teams from 1988-1990.

Tony's involvement in the sport didn't end with his coaching endeavors. With his leadership expertise and dedication to the sport he went on to become NLBA (president 1986-1990). One of his main objectives was to get more involvement from all areas of the province in basketball and to improve the sport at the minor levels. During his term there was an expansion of the minor tournament system. The minor tournament committee developed rules, regulations and procedures for the minor system that would be put in place so we could see our young basketball players develop in our province. A lot of this was possible with Browning Harvey coming on board as the major sponsor for the minor program.

Tony didn't stop there, he had his sights set on making changes on the Basketball Canada front. He held the position of Vice President (1990-1993) and President (1994-1997). One of the biggest achievements the association accomplished with Tony at the helm was bringing together the NBA, Canadian Wheelchair Basketball Association, Canadian Inter-University Athletic Union, Canadian Colleges Athletic Association, Canadian Schools Sports Federation, Coaches' Association and athlete representatives on the board. By coming together, it gave the sport one community with all different aspects covered. Tony was also a part of creating the Canadian Basketball alliance between Basketball Canada and Canada's two NBA teams-the Toronto Raptors and Vancouver Grizzlies. Under this alliance, the inaugural Naismith Cup an annual pre-season game between the Raptors and Grizzlies honoring the inventor of basketball Dr. James Naismith, and in support of Basketball Canada and its programs was played. Two more major accomplishments as President was hosting World Championship in Toronto in 1994 and going to Olympics as head of delegation with the woman's national team in Atlanta in 1996. For his accomplishment, Tony was selected Investors Group Executive of The Year in 1995.