



## NWBA Hall of Fame

### A Brief History

In 1973, the recently created NWBA Hall of Fame honored its first inductees, individuals responsible for outstanding contributions to the great sport of wheelchair basketball. Dr. Tim Nugent, who, in 1948, united a group of World War II veterans who had been playing wheelchair basketball in VA hospitals since 1946, thereby founding the NWBA, was the first to be inducted in the non-competitors category. In the same year, Bill Johnson, the great basketball magician from Los Angeles, an early day Dave Kiley, was the first competitor to receive the NWBA's highest honor. At that time, the NWBA office served as the Hall of Fame's home.

This year, 2010, four competitors and two non-competitors, will be inducted into the Hall of Fame, a Hall of Fame that is now located in the basketball shrine known as the Naismith Hall of Fame, located in Springfield, Massachusetts. 2010's six inductees will not only share the Hall of Fame with Casa Colina's great Kiley and his outstanding teammate Curtis Bell, not only share this great honor with the Detroit Sparks' Bud Ruple and Mo Phillips and the University of Illinois's great Sharon Rahn Hedrick, among many other NWBA greats, but they will also find a home alongside Larry Bird and Magic Johnson.

Yes, thanks in great part to the initial efforts of former NWBA Commissioner and Hall of Famer Stan Labanowich and the monumental negotiating efforts of former Brooklyn player and Hall of Famer, Saul Welger, the Naismith is now home to the NWBA Hall of Fame and this year's six inductees. In the competitors category, the 2010 NWBA Hall of Famers are Pam Fontaine, Tony Levis, Joe Manni and Randy Snow. And in the non-competitors or contributors category, the Naismith and the NWBA will honor Leroy Ransom and Tim Stout.

### **Pam Fontaine, Competitor**

Pam has been rostered on an athletic team since she has been in third grade. She hasn't missed a year participating in sports ever since then. Injured in June 1981, she was introduced to wheelchair sports later that year and has not looked back.

Pam grew up in New Jersey. She started her career in wheelchair sports as a teenager, playing table tennis in 1982. As a senior in high school, she joined a men's team, the New Jersey Blue Devils. In 1983, Pam entered college, specifically at Wright State in Ohio. At Wright State, she was instrumental in recruiting players to assist with the development and competitiveness of the women's wheelchair basketball team. The Lady Raiders participated in the National Tournament for the first time in 1985. Pam was the first player to remain eligible for intercollegiate competition for all four years.

She then was recruited and moved to Texas in 1989 to start her graduate studies and complete her M.S. in Adapted Physical Education. She graduated in 1994. She has been the heart of the Lady Texans team since its inception.

Pamela has been elected to the National all-tournament teams at least 13 times. Pam competed at two National tournaments while she was pregnant! She ranks among the most intelligent players in wheelchair basketball and probably was the first Class-1 woman to shoot and score one-handed set shots from the foul line and beyond.

Pam has been selected to the USA Team 5 times: 1986, 1988, 1990, 1994, 1996 Her international awards include the 1988 Gold Medal Paralympic team (the first US women's team to bring home the gold medal) and the 1990 world championship team. She was an important member of US's silver-medal team at the world championships in 1994 and the bronze-medal team at the 1996 Paralympics.

While Pam has been elected to the NWBA Hall of Fame as a competitor, she has made significant contributions as an organizer, coach and teacher, especially of children.

### **TONY LEVIS, Competitor**

During his career, particularly from 1972 to 1986, which started with the Bulova (New York) Watchmakers in the 1969, Tony Levis, a Class-2 player, was a perennial leading scorer and all-star at the conference level. He was known and respected for his deadly mid-range shooting, especially from the wings, shots that he launched successfully from behind constant and effective screens set by power-forward Joe Manni, who is also being inducted this year. Following an initial period with Bulova, he played with the Philadelphia Paronauts until he formed the Bordentown Elks, a team also located in Pennsylvania.

Tony was the player-coach of the Bordentown Elks (briefly called the Allentown Jets) from its inception in 1972 until it stopped competing in 1992. Led by the productive duo consisting of Tony and Joe Manni, the Elks won 15 consecutive Mid-Atlantic Conference championships from 1972 through 1986. In 1976 and 1977 he and Joe Manni led the Elks to the Final Four tournament, the last truly northeastern team to reach the Final Four. The Elks finished fourth in 1976, and third in 1977, earning a victory over Music City, a perennial powerhouse of that era. The Elks led at halftime of the first round game in the 1977 Final Four, but Tony and Joe Manni fouled out during the second half; their loss resulted in defeat at the hands of the eventual champions, the great and dynastic Detroit Sparks.

Selected to US teams with the best players in the NWBA, his career at the international level would make many envious. He earned a gold medal at the 1968, 1972 and 1976 Paralympics, and a bronze medal in 1980. He was also selected to play for the 1975 US team that earned a silver medal in the World Championships. Please keep in mind that he was simultaneously winning gold medals in track and field events while he was participating on medal-winning US basketball teams. His success in track field led Tony to his first Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

Tony recently received the following endorsement from another Hall of Famer, the great Gary Odorowski of the Detroit Sparks: "I played with Tony on the Paralympic teams and against him several times; every time he was a fierce competitor. I was glad to have him on my side on the Paralympic team. I had to watch him like a hawk on the defensive side when we were opponents. In my humble opinion, I think it is long overdue for him to join our Hall of Fame."

### **JOE MANNI, Competitor**

Joe Manni, a Class-2 player, was a great rebounder, defender and prolific scorer in the Mid-Atlantic conference. His career began in 1966, and by 1974, he had become a heavily recruited player, a status which remained a reality through 1998. During that time span, he competed for the New Jersey Blue Devils, the EPVA Chargers, the Charlotte Hornets and the Philadelphia 76ers.

A power forward, Joe carved his reputation as an outstanding player during his 15 years (1974-1989) with Pennsylvania's many-time conference champions, the Bordentown Elks. With the Elks, he filled the role of Mr. Inside to Tony Levis' Mr. Outside. These two great players worked the screen and mid-range shot, or its alternative, the screen and roll with great efficiency. As a result, Joe often maneuvered himself in classic fashion, then rolled to the basket and scored from short range following a pin-point pass from Tony Levis. He scored just as often after pulling down offensive rebounds. Joe earned the conference MVP award on 5 occasions. In 1991, he was selected MVP of the Eastern regional tournament. He led Bordentown to the NWBA's Final Four tournament in 1976 (4th place) and 1977 (3rd). He was selected to the all-tournament team in 1977. From 1974 through 1990, he was selected on 8 all-tournament teams, including the prestigious Detroit and Music City invitationals.

Joe's outstanding performances initially caught the attention of the NWBA's international selection committee in 1978 when he was identified as an alternate for the US team that would compete in the World Championships. In 1981, he competed for the US select team that went undefeated in Japan. In 1986, he played on the starting five of the US team that won the World Championship in Australia, then again started for the gold-medal winners at the 1988 Paralympics. In 1990, he completed his admirable international career, winning a silver medal at the World Championships.

### **RANDY SNOW, Competitor**

Randy Snow, a Class-2 wheelchair basketball player, may be known for his track and tennis accomplishments, but his first love was basketball. As a youth in Texas, he would spend his Saturdays shooting hoops at a makeshift basket over his grandparents garage. At the age of 16, a farm accident would lead to paraplegia and to stardom as a wheelchair basketball player.

Randy Snow began his wheelchair basketball career in 1979. After seeing a picture of wheelchair basketball on the cover of *Sports N' Spokes*, he and other local athletes formed a team in Austin, Texas. Later, playing for this University of Texas High Rollers, he found himself competing against the lightning-quick Ron Labar and the University of Texas/Arlington. His team lost the game but Randy scored 26 big points prompting Ron Labar to tell Randy he was the first player he ever saw who could shoot the ball while his chair was moving so fast. Speed and shooting on the move would become Randy's trademark contribution to the game of wheelchair basketball. He also became a master of the bank shot and a very creative passer.

Randy was selected to no less than six US teams and undoubtedly would have been selected to more US team had it not been for his mutual interest in tennis. In basketball, he won gold in 1982 at the Pan American Games, in the World Championships in 1983, and a bronze medal at the 1996 Paralympics in Atlanta.

In the NWBA, Randy played an instrumental on eight elite teams from the Dallas Mavericks to the Fresno Red Rollers. As a player, his big year came in 1995 at the NWBT in Philadelphia. Playing for the Fresno Red Rollers, Randy become only the second player in NWBA history to win the BIG FOUR:

1. A National Championship
2. The NWBT MVP award
3. The NWBT Captain Ure Sportsmanship Award
4. Selected to the NWBT 1<sup>st</sup> Team All-Tournament

Randy's awards in basketball were numerous:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Team All Tourney 1989 NWBT (Birmingham), D-II (Austin Wreckers)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Team All-Tourney 1990 NWBT (Chicago), D-II (Austin Wreckers)
- MVP, Captain Ure Sportsmanship Award, 1995 NWBT (Philadelphia)
- MVP, 1996 NWBT (Portland), Fresno Red Rollers
- In 2004 in Chicago, Randy became the first Paralympian inducted into the US Olympic Hall of Fame. The induction video included Randy's performance in the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic wheelchair basketball game against Australia. In that game Randy shot 70% from the field, a 7 for 10 shooting performance. Randy led the US Team in scoring with 14 points as the Aussies upset the US team and ultimately won the gold medal.

Randy's contributions to the development of wheelchair basketball were also Hall of Fame material. We cite just a few:

- 1986 Featured player in NWBA's first instruction basketball video
- Staff member PVA/NWBA Wheelchair Basketball Camps (1989-2004)
- As a member of Team Quickie, he made countless wheelchair sports presentations that included the sport of wheelchair basketball.
- During his 3-year tenure at the Lakeshore Foundation, Randy allowed his athletic accomplishments in basketball and tennis to be promoted; that led to the development of the \$25 million Paralympic Training Center in Birmingham, the world's largest training center for athletes with disabilities.

### **Leroy Ransom, Contributor**

Leroy, the wheelchair basketball coach and all-around contributor to our sport, began coaching basketball in 1964. He recruited and coached many players in Southern California. During his NWBA coaching career, he would eventually coach,

☞ The Widney High Kodiaks, which won 4 Junior Championship, 1984-1987

☞ The Culver City Stars

- The Los Angeles Stars, to multiple championships; plus 2 Final Fours, in 1977 & 1989, in addition to winning many prestigious tournaments in Canada, Mexico and the US

☞ Served as a coaching consultant to the Southern California Sunrise which won four national championships (1981, 1982, 1984 & 85) in the Women's Division.

☞ Coached the Amateur Sports America team at the World Expo in 1988

☞ Coached the US Select Team at the 1990 Stoke Mandeville Games which won gold

☞ Served as assistant coach to a US team that toured Italy, winning numerous tournaments

- From 1994 to 2001, he was a member of the Selection Committee for US teams that competed in the Paralympics, the World Championships and other international tournaments.

During many years, he served honorably as,

- The Pacific Coast Conference President, late 1980s through mid 1990s

- The Pacific Coast Conference Commissioner, mid 1990s through early 2000s

- The NWBA Ethics Committee

- Selected by NWBA commissioner to identify sites for post-season playoffs

Leroy has provided support to local, national and international teams. In fact, in that vein and as proof of his complete devotion to wheelchair basketball, he traveled at his expense to the Paralympic tournament in 1972, 1980, 1992 and 1996; and to World Championships in 1982, 1990 and 1994, as well as to the Pan American Games in 1990 and 2002. Like the international tournaments, Leroy was an ever-present attendee and behind-the-scenes supporter at the NWBT and Kentucky Blue Grass tournaments. Leroy Ransom stands proudly as one of the contributors who introduced many players to our great sport. He will serve as a symbol for others who will devote themselves equally to the NWBA's growth.

### **Tim Stout, Contributor**

Tim Stout is one of the many NWBA contributors who have been elected to the NWBA Hall of Fame as a result of their hard work, devotion and exceptional organizational skills. Tim began his career as a player in 1960. He then became a player-coach, compiling a 142-110 record during twelve years.

During twenty-two years he devoted himself totally to organizing, motivating, recruiting for, and officially representing the following NWBA teams: the Quint City Roughriders, 1984-1994; Heart of Illinois Hiwaymen, 1995-1998; the Rockford Chariots, 1994-2006.

Tim proved to be a low-key, yet highly effective contributor to the NWBA's governance. He served the NWBA's Division-3 Committee from 1966 to the present and, in 2001, he assumed its leadership in the role of Chairman. He filled many other roles, always with the same devotion and effectiveness, for example, the All-Tournament Selection Committee for the National Wheelchair Basketball Tournament, as well as the NWBA Classification Committee from 2000 to the present, a Committee which often seeks to resolve some of the most controversial issues that surface in the NWBA. He even became an approbated official in 1995 and remains active in the Officials Association,

Recognizing the importance of his work, the NWBA honored him with NWBA Spirit Award in 2005. The NWBA has now chosen to honor his tireless efforts, both at the local and the national level, by awarding him its highest honor - induction into its Hall of Fame.

Tip Thiboutot, Co-chair  
NWBA Hall of Fame