



In Memory Of
DON STEEN

May 28, 1935 – July 25, 2022

It is with great sadness, but also incredible admiration and respect, that we acknowledge the loss of Don Steen, a man recognized for his talents as an athlete, coach and builder of BC's and Canada's sport community. Don passed away peacefully at home with his wife Courtney at his side on the morning of July 25th, 2022. A consummate planner, Don somehow managed to schedule his departure from this world the day after the closing of the World Athletics Championships held at Hayward Field at his alma mater, the University of Oregon. He was 87 years young.

A lifelong resident of BC, Don grew up in Vancouver, but has been a resident of Burnaby since he was 17. In high school, Don was a standout track and field, rugby and basketball player, claiming he hid his schoolbooks in the family's washing machine so he could tell his parents he had no homework and spend more time doing sports. He snuck into UBC's War Memorial gym to practise shooting hoops so often the janitors finally gave up on telling him he wasn't supposed to be there. That fierce commitment to excellence and persistence would be a lifelong trait of Don's and more than a few people have heard him say "Don't tell me why we can't. I want to know how we can."

Don helped Burnaby South win the 1953 High School Championships and was named a tournament MVP. Don turned down a basketball scholarship to the University of Washington to accept a track and field scholarship at the University of Oregon as a decathlete. Coached by Bill Bowerman and a teammate of Phil Knight, the co-founders of Nike, Don achieved All-American status and remained a proud Duck throughout his life.

In 1956, Don qualified for the Melbourne Olympic Games, but was unable to attend when Canada decided to only send four sprinters who could compete in both individual and relay events. In 1972, Don attended the Munich Olympic Games as one of three track and field coaches for Canada.

After completing his degree, Don returned to Burnaby South as a science and PE teacher, but his true passion was coaching wrestling and track and field. Deciding his high school track team needed a way to take advantage of summer training and competitions, he founded the Burnaby Striders Track and Field Club in 1958 and acted as the club's head coach for the next twenty years. During this time, the club averaged more than 100 athletes per year and was Canada's strongest club for athletes aged 16-18.

Under Don's direction, Burnaby Striders produced numerous provincial, national and international competitors including Olympians Ian Gordon (400m) and David Steen Junior (decathlon), Commonwealth Games medallists, Allan Kane (pole vault) and David Steen Senior (shot put). Other notable Striders athletes that went to contribute to sport were individuals such as sport medicine doctor Jack Taunton and Burnaby Central teacher/track and field coach Ken Taylor who went on to be the province's winningest high school track and field coach.

In 1967, Don accepted the position of inaugural head coach for track and field at Simon Fraser University. During his tenure, he developed and conducted the first two BC high school provincial track and field championships as a recruiting strategy and to demonstrate SFU's province-wide interest in athletics. He also initiated and developed SFU summer sports camps as a community service intended to provide camp opportunities for children interested in sport and recreation. As a professor in the School of Education, Don also initiated, developed and conducted an approved university-level track and field course.

In 1978, Don became the executive director of BC School Sports where he expanded both the reach and calibre of high school sports by increasing the number regional associations and sport commissions, bringing more high school sport competitions, including provincial championships, to more areas of the province. From 1980 to 1986, he also sat on the Sport Medicine Council of BC board of directors as the representative of high school sports. During his tenure, Don inspired the idea of developing a cohesive sport medicine centre, leading to the creation of the Allan McGavin Sports Medicine Centre.

After leaving BC School Sports in 1988, Don created the BC Athlete Career Centre as a place for high performance athletes to develop job search skills and network with employers. Don also developed the Centre's Athletes Motivating Excellence (AME) program where athletes could be booked to speak in school and corporate settings to speak about their athletic careers to inspire others.

Between 1992 and 2012, Don continued to coach athletes from the high school to Paralympic and Olympic level. He was named a Team Canada coach for athletics at four Paralympic Games (1992,

1996, 2000 and 2004) as well as multiple World Championships and Pan Am Games teams. Notable Paralympic athletes coached by Don include Jason Delesalle (javelin, discus, pentathlon), Courtney Steen (née Knight, discus, shot put, pentathlon), Dustin Walsh (200m, 400m) and Blair Miller (800m, 1500m), all of whom were medal winners at major international events. In 2012, Curtis Moss, an athlete Don started coaching while Curtis was still in early high school, finished 12th at the London Olympic Games in the men's javelin.

Don was a board/committee member for groups too many to list, but included Athletics Canada, BC Athletics, Canada Games, BC Games, Sport Medicine Council of BC and Burnaby Sports Hall of Fame. During the mid-1960s, Don was a member of Canada's national rugby team and spearheaded the committee that built the Burnaby Lake Rugby Clubhouse at Burnaby Lake.

You would be hard pressed to find anyone who has been more passionate about sport than Don. Don always loved to support athlete development at all levels, whether it be through facilities or program development, increasing competitive opportunities or coaching future and current elite athletes. Don was also a trailblazer by pushing for inclusion of BC's athletes with disabilities into mainstream track and field competitions, helping BC become a leader in para-athletics.

Don was still actively coaching, albeit at a more casual level, up until a stroke sidelined him in 2017, but prior to the pandemic, Don still enjoyed going to local track meets to give athletes technical pointers to improve their performance. Don did not care how much talent an athlete or coach had, he only cared about how committed they were to being better. If you were willing to work hard, Don was willing to mentor. Many athletes coached by Don will likely recall him saying, "You can't train a racehorse on Coke and doughnuts" or "Last rep and it's back to the barn!" and "We are going to go there to chew bubble gum and to kick butt, but by the time we arrive, we'll be all out of bubble gum so we'll just have to kick butt."

If you were to ask Don what his life motto was, he would quote George Bernard Shaw and say "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing." Don took that quote to heart so when he was not at the track coaching, he would be out fishing, cycling, skiing, golfing or spending time at Secret Cove on the Sunshine Coast. And because he could never have too much sport in his life, he enjoyed watching track, basketball, rugby and football on TV and cheered on the Seattle Seahawks, the University of Oregon and any team playing Oregon State. He also enjoyed spending time with friends and family and was often the life of the party.

With his magnetic personality, Don will be dearly missed by both friends and family too numerous to count. He is remembered by his brother David, sons Mark and David, daughter Sheri, grandchildren Kory, Jordie, Jacey, Jack, Darra, Jamie, Michelle, Josh, Matt and Sydney as well as his wife Courtney, his life partner and soulmate for more than 24 years. Don will also be deeply missed by Honey who brought many moments of joy to Don's life over the past two years while helping care for him with unparalleled kindness.

A celebration of life will be held at a later date to allow word of Don's passing to travel far and wide as there are people around the world who know Don Steen. On more than one occasion, Don has been approached in an airport, bus, train or on a track thousands of miles from home by someone who says

“Well, if it isn’t Don Steen”. In lieu of flowers, please make a donation to BC Athletics, KidSport or a sport organization of your choice.