



Sports Hall of Fame

2026 SHOF INDUCTION

Presented by the Nanaimo Museum

**AS PART OF THE NANAIMO SPORT
ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS GALA
Friday, February 20, 2026
Coast Bastion Hotel**

A Message from the Manager

Founded in 2008 the Nanaimo Sports Hall of Fame is housed in the Nanaimo Museum in downtown Nanaimo. In 2026 we are proud to induct three more honorees, who will join over 50 other athletes, builders, trailblazers, teams and media personalities already celebrated in our Hall. These inductees have represented leadership, talent, and sportsmanship in Nanaimo and elsewhere, leaving lasting legacies in their respective areas of expertise. They represent the spirit and heart of Nanaimo's sports heritage and we are grateful to be able to recognize their significant contributions with a celebration and an ongoing exhibit the public can enjoy.

We would like to thank the City of Nanaimo for their continued support of the Nanaimo Sports Hall of Fame and of the Nanaimo Museum. We are deeply grateful for the time and expertise of our volunteer Selection Committee and for the leadership and commitment of Ian Thorpe to the Hall. Special thanks to Marilyn Sullivan and the Nanaimo Sports Achievement Awards for their partnership and for joining with us in honouring the accomplishments of these incredible inductees.

Many thanks to the nominators, interviewees, family and friends, and all of those who have supported the nominees through this process. Thank you also to the donors who provided packages for the Silent Auction that supports scholarships for local athletes, your support and generosity are invaluable.

Congratulation to this years inductees, we are honoured to share your stories and we invite everyone to come by the museum to visit their exhibit and to learn more about their work and legacies.



Sophia Maher
Nanaimo Museum
General Manager



Hadi Abassi

Builder

Born in Iran in 1965, Hadi Abassi lived in Nanaimo from approximately 1990 to 2020. He worked tirelessly to establish the Vancouver Island Raiders Junior Football program.

In 2005 after countless meetings with the BC Junior and Canadian Football Leagues, the former Abbotsford Air Force program franchise was secured and relocated to Nanaimo. As president, Hadi Abassi was the principal driver of the team's first decade of unprecedented success with three national championships in 2006, 2008, 2009, and six consecutive BC titles.

Hadi laid the framework for the team's success through a strong mission statement that encouraged players to develop life skills and a large community network and to strive for success, discipline, challenge and learn how to compete on and off the field.

Hadi Abassi's core belief was that players should come first, and he focused on helping youth become positive members of the global community. Because of his emphasis on community, the VI Raiders have a reputation in the Canadian Junior Football League as the most community-active team. He also mentored players and helped the VI Raiders become the first football team in Canada to create a scholarship program, in partnership with Vancouver Island University.

A longtime supporter of minor sports he also coached children's teams during the 1990s and provided vital sponsorships of local teams through his successful businesses Atlas Truss and Atlas Engineered Products. Hadi Abassi holds a mechanical engineering degree from Swindon Technical College in England. Hadi's support for the broader sports community in his hometown was evident when he co-founded the Nanaimo Senior A Timbermen lacrosse team.

His leadership in sport and the community has been recognized with the 2005 Ken Smith Award, 2005 Canadian Junior Football League Executive of the Year, Nanaimo Citizen of the Year, as a 2010 Olympic torch bearer, and with his induction into the BC Football Hall of Fame in 2020.

The VI Raiders are one of the premier junior football teams in Canada - putting Nanaimo on the map in the Canadian Junior Football League - a legacy of Hadi Abassi's efforts and support. His relationship with players has inspired many alumni to continue in football as both players and coaches. Today, Hadi Abassi lives in Vancouver but keeps his hometown community connections strong.



Larry Brown

Media

Almost every adult sports fan in Canada has seen Larry Brown's expertise in action while cheering on live coverage of their favorite teams and athletes. He worked as a live television director to bring sports to life on network television including Sportsnet, TSN and CBC.

Larry Brown was born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan in 1941 but attended schools on Vancouver Island before he began his career in television in Victoria in 1957. He moved to Winnipeg in 1966 to work at CBC as a music producer and a few years later worked on

live sports events. His big break came in 1976 with the Montreal Olympic Games, which opened doors at the NHL's Hockey Night in Canada for Larry to cover games between the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames.

Larry left CBC in 1980 and worked as a freelance producer with more flexibility and better pay. "I did all that hockey with CBC's Hockey Night in Canada [as a director] and then with TSN and Sportsnet. There was no end of stuff to do. I've done Blue Jays baseball, Expos baseball, the NBA for CTV and the Raptors and the Grizzlies in Vancouver when they started."

In 1997, Larry moved to Nanaimo. He worked as Television Director for the Vancouver Canucks play-by-play from 1998-2006. A typical workday in 2004 for Larry saw him take the HarbourLink Ferry from Nanaimo to downtown Vancouver bound for GM Place (now Rogers Arena), home of the Vancouver Canucks. Larry directed a team of 12 camera operators set up around the rink. He also directed national television coverage of curling events in the 1970s-1980s, and detailed coverage of the Olympics Games in 1976, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1994 and 2010.

"Larry not only directed some of the biggest sporting events in Canada, he had a significant impact on the way sports have been covered on television for several generations. As a young producer, he took me under his wing to help me come up with new ways to cover hockey and other sports. He brought his extensive experience to the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, which was CTV's first ever summer games. He mentored many young producers and directors who went on to become leaders in their field as well." ~ Scott Moore, Former Executive Director of CBC Sports, and President of Rogers Communications Sportsnet and NHL Properties.

Larry Brown has been described as a talented and amazing individual who loves calling Nanaimo his home. Larry's service to his community continues as a volunteer at the Nanaimo Hospital Thrift Shop.



Yvonne Visser

Athlete - Biathlon

Born in Calgary, Alberta in 1965, Yvonne Visser has always been connected to sport. The two-time Olympic biathlete went on to harness her experiences among the ranks of elite athletes to a career in sport therapy as a massage therapist.

Yvonne Visser was on the Canadian National Biathlon team for 12 years and competed in the Olympic Winter Games in 1992 and 1994, and in multiple World Championships (1986, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1994). Biathlon

is a demanding winter sport that combines cross-country skiing and rifle shooting.

After graduating from the University of Calgary in 1996 with a Bachelor of Physical Education, she earned a Massage Therapy certification in Alberta and became a Certification Candidate in Sports Massage. Yvonne Visser moved to Nanaimo in 2000.

Visser's abilities and experiences opened the door for her as a team Massage Therapist to accompany Canadian athletes to the Pan Am Junior Games, World Cups, World Championships, and Olympic Games medical teams in Torino 2006, Beijing 2008, London 2012 with the ParaTrack and Field team, and Vancouver 2010 and Sochi 2014 with the biathletes, and Korea 2018.

Her strong skill set, professional attitude and expansive sport experiences have impacted many Canadian National team athletes, from bobsleigh/skeleton to biathlon and track and field. Her commitment and passion for her work have benefitted Canadian athletes all skill and performance levels.

Her efforts in mentoring emerging athletes were recognized when she was named Female Coach of the Year by Biathlon Canada for the 1998–1999 season. Yvonne Visser has been honoured for her achievements and contributions to sport with the Augustana College Distinguished Alumni Award at the University of Calgary in 2009.

Today, Yvonne owns Vancouver Island Integrated Sport Performance Center in Nanaimo and is a practicing Sport Massage Therapist. Her commitment and passion for her work and the athletes of Canada continues, and she volunteers with the Vancouver Island Youth Biathlon team at Mt. Washington.

Sports Hall of Fame Induction Gala

ORDER OF EVENTS:

5:30pm - Inductees & Representatives arrive & meet in lobby. Flowers marking Inductees are pinned.

5:30pm - 6:00pm Families and Supporters start to arrive & be seated at assigned seats. Inductees line up to walk to Inductee table together.

6:00pm - All guests take their seats. Inductees & Representatives are piped in to the room. Nanaimo Sport Achievement Awards begin.

Awards, Silent Auction open, Dinner Served.

Nanaimo SHOF presentation begins - Ian Thorpe MC

INDUCTEE

Hadi Abassi

Larry Brown

Yvonne Visser

ACCEPTING

Hadi Abassi

Larry Brown

Yvonne Visser

In lieu of speeches, each Inductee will have a short video played, followed by presentation of the keeper plaques.

Inductee Group photo following the presentations.

Continuation of the NSAA awards, Silent Auction winners.

**Congratulations to the
2026 SHOF Inductees!**

PAST INDUCTEES

1914 Northfield Violets Pioneer – Soccer
1923 Nanaimo FC Wanderers Pioneer – Soccer
1956 IWA Nanaimo Timbermen Team – Lacrosse
Gerald Kazanowski Olympian 1984 & 1988
Athlete – Basketball
Phil Olsen Olympian 1976 Athlete – Javelin
Brenda Taylor Olympian 1988 & 1992
Athlete – Rowing
Larry Thomas - Media
Hugh (Red) Thomson Olympian 1936
Pioneer – Mile Runner
F. Elwood Wylie - Builder
Harry R. Wipper - Builder
Angie Dobie (Radonovich) Athlete - Basketball
Michael Edgson Athlete - Swimming
Bill English - Builder
Lloyd Gilmour - Builder
Don MacRae Rink Team - Curling
John Sandland - Pioneer (Athlete)
Ray Telford Athlete - Soccer
Douglas White Athlete - Lacrosse, Football
Angela Chalmers Athlete - Track & Field
Michael Rhode - Media
Frank Crane - Builder
Leo Margolis - Builder
Red Carr - Builder
Barry Pederson Athlete - Hockey

Nanaimo SHOF Representatives

Sophia Maher, Becka MacDonald, Jordan Johns, Adam Kveton, Aimee Greenaway, Kasie Moore.

PAST INDUCTEES Continued

1983 Malaspina Mariners Team - Soccer
Ernest Edmunds Athlete - Soccer
Michelle Stilwell Paralympian 2000-2008
Athlete - Basketball & Racing
Alan Hill Athlete - Hockey
Larry McNabb - Builder
Don Ashbee Athlete - Lacrosse
Allison Forsyth Athlete - Skiing
Jim Gold - Builder
Mary Thomasson (Frizzell) Pioneer
Gene Carr Athlete - Hockey
Susan Reid Athlete - Field Hockey
Margaret Fuller Rink - Team
Les Varro - Builder
Wayne Bianchin Athlete - Hockey
Fred Fulla Athlete - Lacrosse
Dr. Ed Johnson - Builder
Harry Manson Pioneer - Soccer
Aaron Guiel Athlete - Baseball
Richie Nichol Pioneer - Basketball
Steve Smith Athlete - Downhill MTB
2009 VI Raiders Team - Football
Leo Beier - Builder
Robert (Bob) Gold - Builder
Sandy Harper Athlete - Golf
Lauren van Oosten Olympian 2004
Athlete - Swimming

Nanaimo SHOF Selection Panel

Deryck Cowling, Les Malbon, Sue Reid, Donn Sherry, Ian Thorpe, Michel Woolner



NANAIMO MUSEUM

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