

## **Tachikara Achievement Awards**

### **16U Male Athlete**

**Ben Saxton**

**Canuck Crunch**

Ben Saxton has proven to be a strong leader on and off the court for a group of boys who have competed for the Canuck Stuff club for the past 5 years.

Playing in the 16U age category this year, Canuck Crunch set lofty goals for themselves at the start of the season. Their goals included winning a Provincial Championship and then following that up with a National Championship at the Canadian Open in May.

Ben led his team to very consistent results throughout the Premier series of tournaments including 2 - first place and 1 - 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish. At the Provincial Championships Ben and his teammates achieved their first goal by winning the 16U Gold Medal and Ben was selected as an all-star for his outstanding play.

With one pre-season goal achieved they set about preparing for the Canadian Open. Crunch continued its strong play at Nationals with Ben elevating his game to help his team make the final. A disappointing loss to the Winnipeg Strike in 3 sets ended their run for the year. The best result in 5 years for an Alberta 16U team at the Canadian Open was a very impressive end to a tremendous season for this group.

Ben was again awarded an All-Star for his play at Nationals and it was clear to all who watched him play this season that he was not only an outstanding athlete and player but that he led his team by his hard work, dedication and the ability to come through for his teammates when they needed him the most.

### **16U Female Athlete**

**Jackie Gagnon**

**Wolves Red**

Jackie is a member of the Grande Prairie Wolves Red team that won Gold at Provincials and finished 4<sup>th</sup> at Nationals. Jackie's strength's as a player include a tremendous passion for the game with the willingness to give her all whether in games or practice. She has been a tremendous captain for the team leading by example with intensity in practice and matches. Jackie is a very coach able athlete and has an easy-going personality that makes her a joy to be with. Jackie leads in a quiet non confrontational way but when challenged to take initiative as a leader is more than willing to do so.

### **18U Female Athlete**

**Lauren Perry**

**LVC Blue**

Lauren Perry is a second year club player from the Lethbridge Volleyball Club who attends St. Mary's Catholic High School in Taber, Alberta. Lauren led her High School team to a silver medal at the 2A Provincial Championships this past November. She was also recognized as the MVP on her senior women's team for the past 3 seasons and was named the female athlete of year at her school in 2003 and 2004.

In addition to her success at the high school level, Lauren has played on Team Alberta for the past 3 years and was recently selected to the 2004 Provincial Team in April. Playing middle, Lauren has led her teams to some excellent results these past few years including a Gold medal at the 2002 Western Elite Championships, a silver medal at last summer's Western Canada Summer Games and a Gold medal at the NTCC National Championships. At the NTCC's, Team Alberta defeated the Team Canada Junior team twice to bring the gold medal home to Alberta.

In the 2004 club season, Lauren led her LVC Blue team to some excellent results including two 1<sup>st</sup> place finishes and a third in the Premier series. LVC Blue continued their strong play throughout the year and they capped it off by winning the silver medal at the 18U Provincial Championships in Calgary.

Lauren's leadership both on and off the court, combined with her work ethic and positive attitude brings out the best in her teammates. Her ability to make the clutch hit or block when the game is on the line has been the key ingredient to her team's success. Her teammates have come to rely on her consistency and ability to elevate her game when it's needed.

Lauren graduates from St. Mary's this month and will then join Team Alberta as they prepare for the 2005 Canada Games. This fall Lauren will continue her studies and volleyball at the University of Calgary where we see a bright future for her as she elevates her game to play at the next level.

### **Grace Scott Tachikara 16U Female Coach of the Year**

In the last 8 seasons Grace's 16U girl's teams have won five Provincial Gold medals and one Silver. This past season the Wolves finished all three Premier tournaments in first place as well as winning gold at the Provincial championships. Grace obviously has found the formula for success at this level. Grace Started coaching the 16U girl's team in 1997 and with only one season off in over the last 7 years has shown dedication to the program and the city of Grande Prairie. She is very organized and well prepared and has a great relationship with players and parents while developing the skills of players as well as contributing to their growth as people. Grace is a great coach and person.

### **Art O' Dwyer Tachikara 16U Female Coach of the Year**

Art has brought the enthusiasm he had as a player with the U of C Dinos to his coaching style of the 16U Canuck Crunch team. As mentioned before the Canuck Crunch team won the 16U Provincial title and won a silver medal at the 16U Canadian Open National Championships. Art brings a positive attitude to the gym everyday that his team feeds off of to motivate and prepare for training and matches. Along with motivating his athletes he is also open to try new ideas that will benefit the team.

**18U Male Team Coach**  
**Tyson Watters**  
**Rhinos**

Tyson Watters is now in his second year of coaching the Bonnyville Rhinos 18U men's team. Tyson's playing experience and his passion for the sport have helped him build a highly competitive program in a relatively short period of time.

Tyson's first year coaching was 2003 and the Rhinos played in 4 of the AVA Premier events. They showed tremendous grit and heart and their results ranged from a 7<sup>th</sup> to an 11<sup>th</sup> place finish over the course of the season. The team played with consistency for such a young group and they continued to improve over the course of the club season. With many of the athletes returning, the team was excited about the prospects for 2004.

In 2004 the Rhinos made the commitment to attend all 5 AVA Premier events and attend the 2004 Canadian Open Nationals in Moncton, NB. The team started off strong at the first few events with a 4<sup>th</sup> place finish in Red Deer, 6<sup>th</sup> place in Lethbridge and a 2<sup>nd</sup> place in Grande Prairie. They finished off the year at the 2004 Provincial Championships in Calgary where the Rhinos lost in the quarter finals, placing them 5<sup>th</sup> place for the year.

In Moncton for the 18U Canadian Open Nationals the Rhinos showed that they belonged playing with the best teams in the country and knocking off teams from BC and Ontario in the process. This placed them in the top tier of the playoffs where their tremendous run came to an end on the Sunday. A loss in their first playoff match placed them 9<sup>th</sup> at the Nationals, the highest finish amongst all the 18U men's team representing Alberta.

Tyson's desire to learn and improve as a coach coupled with his passion and ability to teach and lead young athletes has produced a tremendous achievement in only the Rhinos second year of competition. The future looks bright for the Bonnyville Volleyball Club and at the same time we'll keep our eye on a rising star in our coaching ranks.

**18U Women's Team Coach**  
**Linda Merrick**  
**NAVC Gold**

Linda Merrick has been involved as a coach and mentor in the sport of volleyball at many levels including high school, club, provincial team, and university. The experience and knowledge of the game that she provides her athletes has had a tremendous impact on their performance as well as their development as volleyball players.

Linda led the Sturgeon Composite High School team to three Edmonton Metro League City Championships during her six year coaching stint with the Spirits. She was also involved with the 16U provincial teams in 1997 and 2002, winning the 16U Western Elite Championship. Linda was an Assistant Coach with the U of A Pandas from 2000-2002; during this time she also volunteered with the Northern Alberta Volleyball Club (NAVC) as a resource coach.

Linda has been affiliated with NAVC since 1994 and up until 2001 she coached the 16U women's program that was consistently one of the top teams in the province. In 2000

and 2001 her teams finished with a Provincial Gold and Bronze medal respectively. The past two years, Linda has been coaching at the 18U level where once again her teams performed up to her high standard of excellence. In 2004 Linda's NAVC Gold team captured the Gold medal at the Provincial Championships and narrowly missed the medal podium, finishing fourth at the National Championships in Moncton.

Linda has the utmost respect from her players and the parents of the team. She treats her athletes with respect, honesty and fair play, and expects the same from them both on and off the court. All of the athletes on the NAVC Gold team will be continuing their volleyball careers at the post-secondary level; this alone is testament to her dedication and excellence in coaching.

**Official of the Year**  
**Glenn Johnston**

Glenn has been instrumental in providing the Alberta Volleyball Officials Association (AVOA) with his technical expertise in several areas. He has completely designed and developed the AVOA website and spends countless hours maintaining the site with updates, current news, and bulletins regarding association functions.

By far, Glenn's most outstanding contribution has been the development of a power point presentation for the Volleyball Canada score sheet. This program is recognized nationally and is being used as a teaching tool for officials across Canada, an ingenious presentation that Glenn designed on his own time.

Glenn is very committed to the sport of volleyball and volunteers his time to ensure positions within the AVOA are filled and tasks are being completed. He currently is the treasurer in the local Edmonton association and runs numerous clinics in the zone to ensure young officials are being certified. Glenn is highly respected by his peers and is very active with the development of officials in Alberta.

This past season Glenn received his Level 4 (National) Badge, a result of his dedication to improving his skills on the stand. He interacts extremely well with coaches and athletes, always willing to help educate young participants with the rules and protocols of our sport. Glenn continues to be one of the most involved officials in Alberta and his dedicated work ethic is greatly appreciated by the volleyball community and a major reason why he is being recognized as the Official of the Year.

**Volunteer of the Year**  
**John Findlay**  
**Northern Alberta Volleyball Club**

John has been a major contributor to the sport of volleyball in the Edmonton area, starting the Northern Alberta Volleyball Club (NAVC) in 1994 and becoming their first Treasurer. The following season he took on the role of President, leading the club in that position for the next 8 years. He has been a tremendous advocate for coaching development within NAVC and the volleyball community.

As President, John developed one of the most successful clubs in Western Canada. The NAVC 18U boys teams are six time Provincial and National Champions. The 18U girl's teams have been Provincial silver finalists and National bronze medalists. While the 16U and 14U boys and girls teams have won several Provincial medals in all categories, with the 16U boy's team winning the Canadian Midget Open in 1998.

During the summer, current and former NAVC players and coaches can be found with Team Alberta and the Junior Men's and Women's National teams. Many of the club's athletes have played on Alberta Summer Games and Canada Summer Games squads. You can find several NAVC alumni also playing for college, university, and professional teams throughout Canada, the U.S. and Europe.

John has volunteered thousands of hours of his time to ensure the club continues to be the benchmark by which all other clubs are measured. He spent countless evenings on the phone recruiting talented coaches to ensure the highest level of instruction for the athletes. For many years he also performed the daunting task of scheduling gyms for 15 teams. John also found volunteers for positions with the NAVC executive board. John has a true passion for volleyball and it shows in his attention to detail and tireless commitment to volleyball in the province of Alberta.