

Sports Celebrity Dinner

Speedskater Cindy Klassen inspires at Spirit & Sport



The opportunity to chat with a Canadian sports legend, to hold an Olympic gold medal, and to hear Olympic and World speedskating champion Cindy Klassen describe how her faith shapes her life, made for an amazing and inspiring evening for the 400 guests at the September 23 Spirit and Sport Christian Celebrity Dinner in Hamilton.

This year's event marked the tenth anniversary of the Spirit and Sport dinner and auction, which began in support of rebuilding earthquake-damaged homes in El Salvador, and has been carried on by The Carpenteros and Friends to raise more than \$600,000 over the past 10 years for community development and micro-finance cooperatives in El Salvador and Honduras.

Special guest Cindy Klassen, a six-time Olympic medal winner, including an unprecedented five medals at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games (Turin, Italy), was joined by an impressive lineup of current and past Christian athletes, including football greats Tracy Ham, Chuck Ealey, Orlando Bowen, Jerome Dennis, Clifford Ivory, Simeon Rottier, Jude St. John and Bruce Smith.

Other legendary sports guests included boxer Marvis Frazier, son of boxing legend 'Smokin' Joe Frazier, and former Toronto Maple Leafs' goaltender Johnny Bower. In honour of Johnny Bower, who is a two-time winner of the Vezina Trophy as the NHL's top goaltender, the actual trophy was on display courtesy of the Hockey Hall of Fame.

The evening's highlight was when master of ceremonies Elaine Seth from Sports Celebrity Marketing, was joined on the stage by Cindy Klassen for a conversation about Cindy's skating career and her faith journey.

Cindy spoke about the Bible text that has special meaning for her – 'Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.' (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

"This text reminds me that there is much more to my life than just skating, and that even in defeat or injury, God is in control. The Bible also shows how we grow from the trials we face in life," said Cindy.

The Olympic champion also spoke openly about the crisis her family faced in 2008, when Cindy's sister Lisa was involved in a terrible auto accident – and was submerged in icy water for five minutes before being rescued.

“I was training in Germany when I got the call that Lisa had been in an accident. We didn't know if she was going to make it. I left for home right away, but didn't know if she would still be alive when I got there. I remember spending that night, on my knees, in prayer. God gave our family peace and strength and the comfort of knowing that all we need is Him – and God performed a miracle; Lisa is 100% healed today.”

Reflecting on some of the highlights in her skating career, Cindy particularly spoke of the tremendous support that all Canadian athletes were shown at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver. “Every time a Canadian stepped onto the ice, the crowd erupted. The first time I stepped on the ice, the response was so incredible that I cried.”

She also shared what was going through her mind in Turin, when she won Gold in the 1500m speedskating event at the 2006 Winter Olympics. “When you are standing on the podium, you just feel so proud to be Canadian, to see the flag going up and the anthem being played. It really is like your whole life is flashing before you, and you are thinking about all the people who helped you get there – family, friends, coaches – and especially God, because without Him none of this would be possible.”

Cindy's appearance at the Spirit and Sport Dinner was arranged through the ministry she has chosen to support, cbm Canada (Christian Blind Mission).

“They look out for the forgotten children – the ones with disabilities, who are often hidden within their communities. As Christians, we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ, and after my skating career is over I would love to work in some area of ministry.”

Guests at the dinner also heard about the ongoing work The Carpenters and Friends to support community development, education, health, sanitation, nutrition, and micro-finance cooperatives in Honduras, including the most recent project to import 6,000 pounds of direct trade Honduran coffee to Canada.

The Spirit and Sport Christian Celebrity Dinner is hosted each year by The Carpenters and Friends, a Hamilton-area group involved in community development work in Honduras through the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. The annual event also features an extensive silent auction, a live auction conducted by professional auctioneer Jim McCartney, and the opportunity for guests to meet and chat with current and past professional athletes. ■