

Hayley is always proud to call Shaunavon her home

It would have taken a blind person not to recognize that Hayley Wickenheiser was a special talent when she played minor hockey in Shaunavon.

Playing with the boys, she was often the best player on the ice during a time when it was unusual to see girls playing the game.

But I'm not sure any of us who saw Hayley in those early days could have predicted the kind of success she ultimately enjoyed in the sport.

Who could have predicted world domination?

Hayley started playing minor hockey on outdoor rinks in her hometown when she was five years old and continued playing exclusively with the boys well into her teenage years.

Hayley and her family moved from Shaunavon to Calgary when she was about 13 years old, although throughout her career she always proudly called Shaunavon her "home."

In 1991, she represented Alberta at the 18-and-under Canada Winter Games. Alberta captured the gold medal in the tournament, with Hayley scoring the game-winning goal and being named the Most Valuable Player of the final game.

It was the first glimpse of Hayley's impact on the sport at a national level.

At 15, Hayley was chosen for the Canadian Women's National Team. She went on to lead the squad to six gold and one silver medal at the Women's World Hockey Championships.

As an Olympian, she earned a silver medal at the 1998 Winter Olympics and four Olympic gold medals in 2002, 2006, 2010 and most recently at the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics. Her performance at the 1998 Olympics impressed Men's Team Canada General Manager Bobby Clarke so much, that he invited her to participate in the Philadelphia Flyers rookie camps in 1998 and 1999.

She is one of only five athletes to win gold in four consecutive Winter Games, along with teammates Jayna Hefford and Caroline Ouellette.

At her retirement in 2017 she was the Olympic tournament's all-time leading scorer with 18 goals and 51 points.

She is also Canada's all-time leading scorer with 168 goals and 211 assists in 276 games.

Hayley took the athlete's oath in English at the 2010 Winter Olympics opening ceremony in Vancouver.

For the 2014 Sochi Olympics, Hayley was selected to be the flag bearer for the Canadian Olympic team in the Opening Ceremonies. During those same Olympics it was announced that she had been elected to the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Athletes Commission. Accompanying all that hardware, Hayley was one of the top point leaders for the Sochi Tournament. She was named the tournaments' most valuable player in the 2002 and 2006 victorious Olympic runs as well as in numerous Esso Women's Hockey Championships.

In January 2003, Hayley made hockey history when she became the first female hockey player to notch a point in a men's professional game with the Kirkkonummen Salamat of the Finnish second division. Wickenheiser also played in Eskilstuna, Sweden with a men's professional division-one hockey team for the 08-09 season.

Hayley Wickenheiser has proven to be an elite athlete time and time again. In 2008, Sports Illustrated named her number 20 of the Top 25 Toughest Athletes in the World. She is also a two-time finalist for the Women's Sports Foundation Team Athlete of The Year and was named several times among the Globe and Mail's "Power 50" influencers in sport. Most recently, QMI Agency named Hayley among the top 10 "Greatest Female Athletes in the History of Sports."

In the fall of 2011, Hayley was bestowed one the country's highest civilian honours when she was amongst 50 notable Canadians appointed to the Order of Canada "for her achievements as an athlete and for her contributions to the growth of women's hockey."

She was also inducted to Canada's Walk of Fame.

Along with hockey, Hayley has mastered a number of sports. An elite softball player, she participated in the 2000 Summer Olympics as a member of Team Canada and worked as a Softball Analyst with CBC's coverage of the 2008 Beijing Summer

Olympics.

Hayley's passion for sport is matched by her desire to give back to the community in her work with organizations such as JumpStart, KidSport, Project North, Right to Play, Ovarian Cancer Canada and many others. In 2007, she travelled to Rwanda with a team of Canadian Olympic athletes for Right to Play, an athlete-driven, global organization using the transformative power of play to educate and empower children and youth. In 2011, she returned to Africa on a similar goodwill mission to Ghana.

Putting her pursuit of a BSc at the University of Calgary to good use, Hayley has led numerous projects with the goal of raising the profile of women's hockey around the world. She is constantly working to provide mentoring opportunities for young athletes including her legacy project - The Wickenheiser World Female Hockey Festival (www.wickfest.com).

Saying it was finally time for her to go to Medical School - something she had delayed during hockey career - Hayley steps down as the country's most decorated hockey player at the international level.

Information for these stories was gathered from a variety of sources, including The Shaunavon Standard, Wikipedia, www.hayleywickenheiser.com, and Postmedia.



Hayley was presented with a key to the town by former mayor Sharon Dickie at a special event and exhibition game in 2002 shortly after the Winter Games.



Hayley on a tour of the new rink while it was still under construction with Sharon Dickie, Jean Scribner, lifelong friend Danielle (Mitchell) Greenberg and Lisa Schmit.



Ken Billington, a local hockey legend who was a big influence on Hayley's early development in the sport, presented a Shaunavon Badger's/I Love Shaunavon jersey during a special event in 2010.