

A Tribute to Denys Martin

Good evening, Friends of Badminton!

My name is Michel Beausoleil. I'm a former elite badminton player, member of the Québec and Canadian teams, ex-professional with Johanne Falardeau at the Club Lebourgneuf in Québec City, and former coach at Cégep de Sainte-Foy. This all happened from the early 1970s to 1985, when my career as a radio journalist took me away from Québec City to Montmagny, and then to Portneuf where I am today.

Tonight we honor an individual whom I've known since the age of 15...I'm 55 now ... and he'll be turning 60 on June 22, 2014 (Denys hates getting older). I knew Denys Martin as a player in the early 70s and we've been friends ever since ...

On the other hand, I'm not sure after this tribute he'll still consider me his friend!

In 1973, Denys Martin became the first francophone player to excel in the Canadian junior men's singles. In that same competition, Denys had lost in the mixed doubles final with Hélène Bilodeau (beautiful 1970's Hélène....!). And in the men's doubles he finished third with Jean-Claude Cloutier (our delinquent hero!). Incidentally, Hélène and Denys started dating officially in December 1972 and were married in 1978. They are both here tonight with their two children, Anne and Vincent.

After the Canadian junior win, Denys Martin became an icon and role model in badminton, especially in Québec – the King, as he would laughingly describe himself, to intimidate his opponents before a match.

I must say that his brilliant performance in 1973 contributed significantly to the growth of badminton among young people in the Québec City region, and made it easier to promote our sport in schools and recreation milieus.

I remember one day at a tournament in Québec City how eager I was to see THE Canadian junior champion in action; we were lucky to have him in Québec City. As a young player, he was the man I aspired to beat one day ... or at least to reach his caliber.

I'd be comfortably seated among the spectators, and would analyze his technique, his movements, his strategies (his returns of serves and half-court shots), his demeanor, his passion Then the situation gets a little more difficult for him, and he lets out a "Tabanak" that resonates throughout the gym. All heads and eyes fixate on the source of the profanity and we watch our champion take his racket to the wall with all his might, and it rebounds without breaking. Doubly frustrated, he decides to jump on his racket, with both feet, to finish it off once and for all.

I must confess that I witnessed this behavior more than once. It was also one of Denys' motivations for selling badminton rackets; it would ultimately be a money-saver for him!

Apparently he hasn't changed – just ask Jean-Philippe Goyette, who to this day still plays with Denys once a week.

Did you know that a few months before the Canadian Junior Championships, where he won the singles in 1973, he fractured a few bones in his right hand after smacking a column on his way down to the locker room following a loss at a match at a Niagara Falls tournament!!!

We have to acknowledge that Denys' strength has always been, and still is, his character, his fighting spirit and relentless desire to win. His greatest quality has always been strategy: every shot counts, every exchange and each point leads to victory; we must never give up. We readjust after every missed shot.

As a result, in 1981, the Denys and Denyse duo won the Canadian mixed doubles against the previous year's champions in 1980, the powerful Paul Johnson and the talented Claire Backhouse.

Denyse Julien wrote me an email about this match, one that left a mark on her badminton years. She said, and I quote *"It was Denys who introduced me to my first senior national title and who gave me the taste of victory. He taught me that you should never quit and always give 100%."*

I never imagined we could beat the famous Paul Johnson and the great Claire Backhouse at that Canadian championship, but Denys never stopped fighting, he believed in it firmly and his enthusiasm had the same effect on me.

I don't know if he realized this, but I was so afraid of playing against them and terribly nervous. He was able to reassure me throughout the match, giving me looks of fierce determination and encouragement.

I had never jumped into the arms of my partner before then.

It was absolutely fantastic! He taught me so much early in my career. I was fortunate to have him as a partner and I respected him tremendously", unquote.

It's true that Denys was very focused on the court, focused on strategy, on ways to defeat his rivals, to fine tune; but to Denys, "concentration" also means "distraction". Denys could be as focused

as he could be distracted, such that at the Calgary airport after a national championship, he managed to board the wrong plane to return to Québec – he was with Linda Cloutier at the time – and no one noticed anything was wrong, not even the flight attendants. At one point, Denys felt the aircraft was flying too high over the Québec City area and he notified the flight attendants. Denys and Linda finally arrived in Québec City, via a stopover in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Denys was very involved in Québec City with the Rouge et Or Club and the Badminton Association. His legendary absentmindedness made him (or others obliged him to) get an agenda to keep track of appointments and meetings, just ask Paul Bélanger about this one! It was a waste of time – he still managed to mix up the week or month, or forget his agenda altogether.

Despite these minor flaws and transgressions, Denys is an extremely sensitive person. He gets very attached, and his children can confirm that. When Denys bought a first-generation Mac computer, his children called him “Mr. La Pomme” (“Mr. Apple”), because he couldn’t tear himself away from his computer. Today, his favorite “blankie”, which he drags around with him everywhere, is still his laptop!

You cannot talk about Denys Martin without mentioning his generosity, positivism and “tongue-in-cheek” attitude.

Roland Drolet was a coach at Cégep de Sainte-Foy, and he had this to say:

While a student-athlete with the Cégep de Sainte-Foy Dynamiques, Denys was a role model for his team as much through his work at training sessions as through his conduct and performance at regional, provincial and national (collegiate national champion) competitions. Denys led by example for his team, through his generosity and by

helping his playing and training partners; he never complained, always stayed positive, funny, inspiring and witty. He was a godsend for developing teams composed of athletes very different from one another ... in short, Denys Martin is a proud competitor, an engaged and bighearted businessman who spared nothing for the development of the sport that he loves and who left behind the mark of the gentleman that he is, wherever he went; unquote.

I've seen Denys cringe on the court, looking like it was game over, but no, he always bounces back like a rubber ball. As a player, I had the privilege of being equipped by Denys and Yonex, and we shared many crazy, memorable laughs, discussing badminton over a few beers after practice or a tournament. I even teamed up with him at some tournaments in Québec City, like the Jean-Claude Cloutiers, Luc Gosselins François Landrys, Alain Mcnicolls and Tom Muirs, among others.

In conclusion, I am preparing a conference that I hope to launch next fall and have chosen the theme of “**Emulation: How to Become Better**”. It will be directed at athletes (beginners or elite players), workers, business people or the general public.

Emulation is the sentiment that compels one to surpass or become like someone else. At school, in competition, at work, in business or in life in general, we always meet people who are better than us.

*Someone who **emulates** is inspired by the best to learn and to excel.*

The best use their victories as much as their defeats to become better.

The best will always be our ally, we need him to become stronger.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us welcome and induct, as we should, as our **“2013 Foremost Person to Emulate”** into the Quebec Badminton Hall of Fame..... **Denys Martin.**

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