

# 'I owe so much to so many people': Lewis inducted into Ontario Sports Hall of Fame

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Bryan Lewis. | Supplied photo

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You don't go into officiating if you're looking for accolades. Most times you're just happy to make it out of the arena parking lot with all your tires still inflated.

During almost 20 years as an NHL referee, Bryan Lewis heard it all – everything from death threats to organists playing 'Three Blind Mice' to criticisms of his work that even made him chuckle. And while he took it in stride, it was a major factor in his parents never attending the games he was working.

His dad didn't see a single one of his NHL games; his mom saw one. The lone exception was his mom coming to the Montreal Forum to see his 1,000th game as a referee, when he became just the third referee to reach that milestone.

"They didn't need to hear someone yelling 'Lewis, you're a bum,'" he said. "They would have taken that very personally."

So when Lewis got the news earlier this year that he had been elected to the Ontario Sports Hall of Fame, it came as a shock. And in the days following, when he did a little digging into the group of people he was joining, it really started to hit home.

Lewis realized he was just the first person inducted solely as an official, in any sport. The only other official in the Hall is former NHL referee Red Storey, who was enshrined as much for his career with the Toronto Argonauts.

"I was taken aback. You see that and you start to understand the magnitude of it," Lewis said. "At the end of the day, you hope it opens the door for officials in other sports to be considered."

It was a good thing Lewis' mom saw that game in Montreal, because her son would only referee 30 more games. Scotty Morrison offered him a job as a supervisor in the league office, and though Lewis felt he had a few good years left on the ice, he was told the opportunity might not be there in a few years.

Lewis took the job as a supervisor under NHL director of officiating and fellow Georgetown resident John McCauley.

"John and I talked daily. He was always so open and candid," Lewis said. "He shared with me how he functioned in his role."



*Bryan Lewis speaks during last night's induction ceremony at The Carlu in Toronto. Supplied photo*



*Bryan Lewis (centre) at the Ontario Hockey Hall of Fame induction ceremony. Supplied photo*

That guidance would prove to be invaluable. When McCauley died suddenly in 1989, Lewis was asked to take over as director of officiating. Lewis said he couldn't have done it without all the knowledge he'd gained from McCauley, including personal touches like meeting with new officials and their spouses just to be sure they were aware of the travel, the time away from home and the demands of the job.

Lewis stayed in the role for 11 years, ushering in video review for determining goals and the two-referee system. But even after 'retiring' two decades ago, Lewis has continued to work to improve the game by helping officials, whether it's supervising university or minor league officials or simply offering an encouraging word and a piece of advice to a minor hockey official.

Lewis does it because he knows how many people helped him in his career. And as he prepared his speech for Thursday's induction ceremony, his biggest challenge was somehow finding a way to recognize everyone who helped him succeed.

"I've got a 35-minute speech that I have to get down to five minutes,"

he said. "I owe so much to so many people."

And while for once it will be an official getting the applause, Lewis knows he didn't do it alone.