

Brenda Irving

April 19, 1960 -

For decades, her broadcasting career has taken her around the world, but she still considers Cambridge home.

Growing up in Preston, Brenda Irving grew up in an athletic community — she fondly recalls the Preston Jesters hockey club — which was good preparation for what would come later.

"Sports has always been a huge part of my life," she says. One of her fondest memories came early, when she was named graduating athlete of the year in Grade 8 at William G. Davis Senior Public School. There were other athletes who were better, she says, but she worked hard and made the most of what she had.

"Realizing how outworking the next guy can pay dividends certainly helped me find success in my broadcasting career," she says.

Even though sports were an important part of her growing up years — ringette, figure skating, basketball and volleyball — they became even more instrumental in her adult life.



At PHS she played basketball and volleyball. "We had a great basketball team in high school (Mrs. Buckley was our coach) — advancing one year all the way to the Ontario Championships."

As a 12-year-old, she wrote a song about her hockey idol, NHL goalie Eddie Giacomin. Not long afterwards she found herself sitting near the Ranger bench at Maple Leaf Gardens for a game, and Bobby Rousseau, Giacomin's teammate

heard of the song from Brenda's friend; Rousseau fetched Giacomin to meet his young fan and would-be songwriter. But when the player approached her she was overtaken with emotion, and began crying with joy. She couldn't say a word — she could barely look at him — let alone sing her tribute song.

She had early dreams of wanting to be a phys. ed. teacher and coach like Mrs. Lacey and Mrs. Buckley, but her girlfriend, who shared her love of hockey, told her about the broadcasting program at Conestoga College.

"Then you can work for Hockey Night in Canada one day," she said. It was almost prophetic.

"In the early 1980's there weren't many female sports reporters — so I decided to spend the first nine years of my career working as a news anchor/reporter in smaller radio and television stations across the country (including four years at CKCO TV). Near the end of the decade I noticed doors were opening for women in sports and decided I should finally try to pursue a career in sports broadcasting."

Soon came assignments in Montreal, Ottawa, Regina and finally, by 1994, at CBC Toronto. She's been there ever since.

Today, she is known as a veteran CBC broadcaster who has covered most of the big events, ranging from the Olympics, to the Stanley Cup, along with the Grey Cup and the Queen's Plate.

For several years she hosted CBC's Sports Weekend, covering the wide world of amateur sport with a professional acumen that has been recognized by award nominations.

Irving, to date, has covered eight Olympic Games for CBC.

This includes her role as a member of the figure skating broadcast team during the Sochi 2014 Olympics.

During her career she has covered a wide variety of sports including tennis, Nordic Combined, snowboarding, skiing, judo, Grey Cup championships and Stanley Cup Finals.

In 2002 she became the first female Hockey Night in Canada rinkside re-



Preston High School graduate and longtime CBC Sports broadcaster Brenda Irving, above and left, second from the right on the CBC set. She was the first female rinkside reporter for Hockey Night in Canada.

porter. She has also reported on Canadian football and major league baseball.

It's a broad spectrum, demanding the skills of a versatile broadcaster.

"Covering Olympic sport is now my passion," she says. "There are far too few journalists telling the stories of our amateur athletes. We hear so much about pro sports and far too little about those who toil away in relative obscurity. So going out with a cameraman, interviewing these athletes and finding out what makes them tick is what still motivates me."

After the Atlanta Olympics she was inspired to become a marathon runner and later, a six-time Ironman finisher.

In the summer of 2016 she will cover her eighth Olympics, reporting on gymnastics.

Irving also travelled to Brazil as an on-site reporter for CBC's coverage of 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil™.

She survived the CBC layoffs in 2014 when federal budget cuts hit the network hard.

Irving is a three-time Canadian Screen Academy nominee (Canada's Emmys) for best sports program, best writing for TV series and best sports reportage, in addition to a Hall of Fame member at PHS, Conestoga College and Conestoga's Broadcast Program.

In 2014, while she was reporting the news, she made the news. It happened in England when she was trying to give a report to CBC Sports and an unknown fan decided to make his move — much to the delight of the watching public as he kissed her on air. As she described the scene and how there were 5,000 England supporters at the match but 20,000 Uruguayans, the frisky fan leaned in and kissed her on the cheek.

Irving was a trailblazer, at times, and has excelled in a male-dominated profession. She's also been a role model for aspiring broadcasters everywhere.

Inducted 2015