

Edmonton track coach to be honoured at Journal Games

Bob Shulko to receive Irv Barros award

BY NATHAN LIEWICKI, EDMONTON JOURNAL

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Bob Shulko is the recipient of the second Irv Barros coaching award. Bob works tirelessly with junior racers in Edmonton, Alta. March 15, 2011.

Photograph by: Brian J. Gavriloff , The Journal

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday lunch hour in the Michael Kostek Elementary School gymnasium, track coach Bob Shulko works with students like 11-year-old Izaak Farsovich to get them ready for the Edmonton Journal Indoor Games.

"We are always working on the baton exchange so that in a race you can speed up your time," said the Grade 6 student.

Farsovich is one of the school's 32 athletes anxiously awaiting the opportunity to run in The Journal Games Saturday at the Butterdome. And Shulko is doing everything he can to get them ready for the competition.

"He has told us to strive to be our best because if you're 0.5 seconds ahead of other racers at the end that can make a big difference," said Grade 6 student Amaan Makhani of his coach.

This is the 25th year Shulko will be bringing students, from Grades 3 to 9, to the annual event.

On Saturday evening, he will be recognized for the time he has invested into the lives of young athletes when he receives the second annual Irv Barros Edmonton Journal Coach's Award.

Shulko's daughter Karissa, herself a teacher and athletic coach, nominated her dad, who said he was overwhelmed by the honour.

"It was a shock to hear that I won the award, and at the same time I'm honoured to be considered among so many great coaches," Shulko said.

Irv Barros, who's been the meet director of The Journal Games since it began in 1979, sat in on one of Shulko's practices this past Wednesday. He said it was a real bonus for him to work alongside Shulko for four years at Centennial Elementary School and that Shulko was a deserving recipient.

"The award winner has got to have longevity and have supported The Journal Games for many years, and Bob has," Barros said. "His teams have been successful — not just the most ribbons. He and his kids have always demonstrated good

sportsmanship. The athletes also have to have expertise, which shows that they have been well coached, both technically and physically.”

Barros said Shulko has left his mark wherever he has coached, ensuring the track programs remain successful even after he has moved on.

“The mark of being successful is having a good succession plan and Bob has had that everywhere he has left,” Barros said.

For his part, Shulko says he has always looked up to Barros, and the opportunity to work with him at Centennial was a real treat.

“Twenty-five years ago he was my mentor, and he still is a mentor to me,” said Shulko.

It was 1979 when Shulko began working through the coaching ranks. A young teacher at Patricia Heights at the time, he was asked by the principal to take a group of kids to The Journal Games.

“That’s how it all began,” says Shulko.

Since then, he has taught and coached at several schools, and nearly every year has brought teams to compete at the annual event, which draws thousands of kids from across the capital region compete. More important than competing, however, is having fun, which is something Shulko stresses with his young athletes.

“The No. 1 thing we look at is that the kids go out there and have fun,” Shulko said.

“We have fairly high expectations, and the kids go out and do their best, but The Journal Games for us is our peak.

“Before every track meet, the kids set goals and when they come off the track they ask what their time was.”

His kids have even been known to do the Hokey Pokey a time or two just to stay loose before getting their opportunity on the track.

Including all of the qualifying rounds, Barros said more than 6,000 students, from elementary to high school, will take part in this year's event.

"You can just feel the excitement and positive energy from all the kids when you're at track level," Barros said.

Young Izaak Farsovich will be among them, and he expects greatness from himself and his team.

"My team is striving for first," he said enthusiastically.

Either way, Shulko will be one proud coach.

nliewicki@edmontonjournal.com