

## Davidson Overcomes Loss To Advance to 2008 Summer Olympics

Despite being viewed as one of Canada's top international officials, Mitch Davidson nearly retired from refereeing volleyball in 2005. 48-years old at the time, Davidson had been officiating volleyball for 30 years and had yet to be invited to his sport's ultimate stage, the Olympics. And when he felt as though that chance had passed him by, he faced personal tragedy.

While away in Spain officiating a tournament, Davidson's father passed away. "I took a break after he passed," said Davidson. "I considered retiring, but it was because of him that I didn't. My dad used to live vicariously through me. I used to come home and tell him stories and he loved that."

After returning to officiating, Davidson was able to live the dream when he was invited to the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. "When I was invited, I had given up that I'd ever get invited. It was a shock. You're part of the top 22 officials in the world."



Officiating is an interesting role in sport because it's an essential part, but one that should go relatively unnoticed if performed correctly. Due to increased attention in the form of larger crowds, television audiences, and cameras from all angles, it's hard to imagine anything can go unnoticed at the Olympics. Mitch Davidson receives 2008 Official of the Year from Jeff Hnatiuk, CEO of Sport Manitoba [Click here to see video of Mitch's acceptance speech](#)

So throughout the Olympics when all 22 officials were being graded and evaluated, Davidson was commended by his peers for his calmness. Rarely making any mistakes, Davidson attributed his performance at the Olympics to his attitude about officiating. "I just go out and referee and I have fun," said Davidson. "I don't do it as a job, it's a hobby. It's my mentality every time I'm on the stand. I'm not doing anything special."

Even after the surreal experience of officiating at the Olympics, Davidson maintains that his favourite memories in volleyball are the unique friendships. "Volleyball is very social. When I step off the stand, I can connect with the players and coaches unlike referees in other sports. And through the travelling that I do, it's always great to re-connect with people that I don't get to see for years at a time."

The volleyball officiating fraternity is a close knit one, especially in Winnipeg where Davidson boasts many of Canada's top officials are from. "Canada has 20 international officials and nine of them are from Winnipeg," Davidson said. He also pointed out that there is a higher quality of volleyball in Winnipeg because of the level of officiating. "A well called volleyball game forces players to play better and to know the game better. I think every level of volleyball in Winnipeg is more competitive because of it."

It was especially an honour for Davidson then, when he was honoured as Sport Manitoba's Official of the Year for 2008. He was recognized by Sport Manitoba as not only the top official in his sport but in all sports. "That was special. As a referee, you never want to be the center of attention so being recognized like that was a little different for me."



Not bad for a guy who said his inspiration to begin officiating volleyball was that he could cheat. To clarify; "It wasn't cheating, but if I knew the rules better than anyone else I could use them to my advantage."

Story by Kalen Qually