

COLORADO

expression

ARLENE HIRSCHFELD

COLORADO SPORTS
Hall of Fame
DENVER ART MUSEUM
A Place
Under the Sun

Colorado SPORTS Hall of Fame

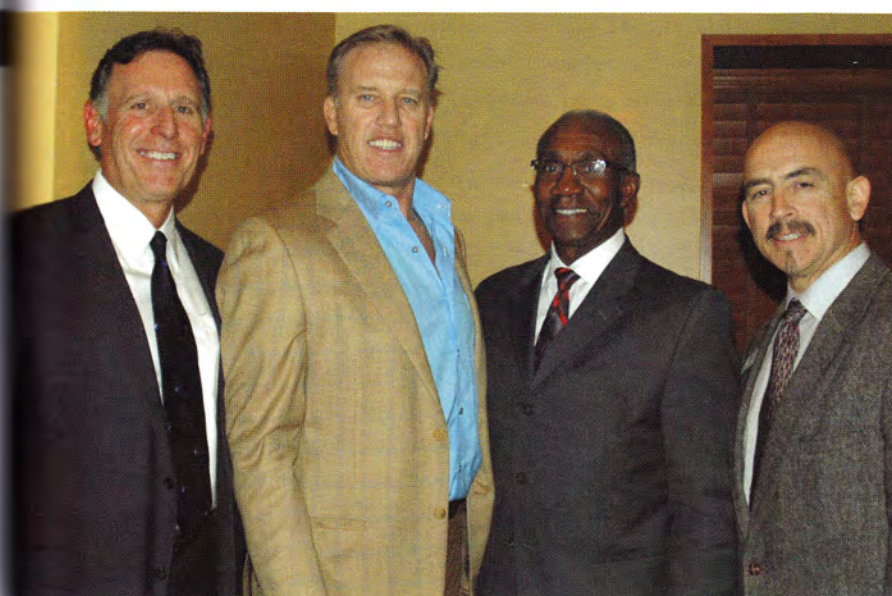
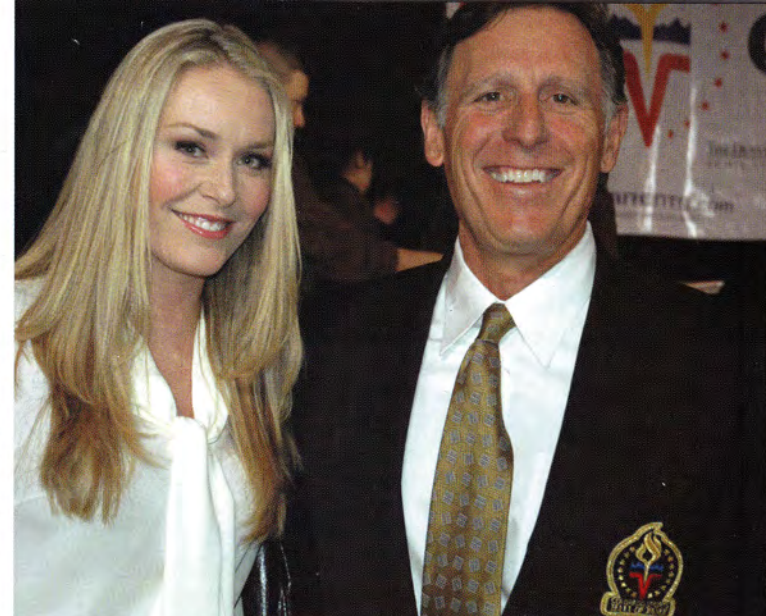
By Brad Smith

UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF TOM LAWRENCE, THE COLORADO SPORTS HALL OF FAME HONORS, AND HELPS, COLORADO ATHLETES IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE ANY COLORADO resident who has not heard of John Elway, a name synonymous in the state with football greatness. Not as well known is Jim Toupal, although the two share the same sports plateau. Both are members of the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame. With six more names added this year, there are now 246 sports figures in the hall. Former Denver Broncos quarterback Elway was elected to the hall in 1999, five years before he was named to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Toupal, inducted into the hall this year, had a 32-year basketball coaching career that registered a 678-333 record, coaching 12 All-Americans at Trinidad State Junior College before retiring in 2004. Toupal's teams never lost a home game in the 1980s, winning a record 132 straight.

CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: HALL OF FAMER AND SPORTSWOMEN OF COLORADO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOANIE BIRKLAND; TOM LAWRENCE AND 2010 ATHLETE OF THE YEAR, LINDSEY VONN; 2015 INDUCTEE JOHN GAGLIARDI AND EMCEE DAVE LOGAN; INTERIOR OF COLORADO SPORTS HALL OF FAME; TOM LAWRENCE, 1999 INDUCTEE JOHN ELWAY, BOARD MEMBER THEO GREGORY AND COLORADO LT. GOVERNOR JOE GARCIA



PHOTOS: LEFT, GABRIEL CHRISTUS; RIGHT, KRISTIN RUCKER



PHOTOS: LEFT, KRISTIN RUCKER; RIGHT, GABRIEL CHRISTUS; BELOW, JON W. DENKER



Others in the 2016 Hall of Fame class include former Colorado Rockies star Vinny Castilla, Avalanche standout Milan Hejduk, Denver Rockets/Nuggets honoree Ralph Simpson, plus Aurora coach and administrator Rhonda Blanford-Green and record-setting Eaton High School baseball coach Jim Danley. The Colorado Sports Hall of Fame, created in 1964, has had a physical presence since 2001 with a museum at Sports Authority Field at Mile High. The hall, under the leadership of President and CEO Tom Lawrence since 2003, has now become more than a way to honor elite sports figures from Colorado. Lawrence has taken the hall out of its financial doldrums into a tool to help sports across the state.

Roots in Colorado

Lawrence knows Colorado and the state's sports intimately. He grew up in Aurora and played on a basketball scholarship at the University of Colorado in Boulder, graduating in 1977 with dual bachelor degrees. After college, he worked with a number of sports organizations, including the Denver Nuggets and the sports marketing and consulting firm Bonham Group.

The Colorado Sports Hall of Fame (CSHOF) was a money-losing organization when Lawrence came on board, with about \$250,000 in debt and steadily losing money. He's proud he was able to turn that around—now with \$500,000 in reserves—but perhaps is proudest about the hall's financial ability to help other organizations and individuals. "I went to the board and told them that it is great to honor these athletes but I wanted to take it further," he says. "I wanted to help kids. Let's also honor disabled athletes; that encompasses what sports is all about."

Lawrence built relationships with corporate and organizational sponsors. Now, with corporate partners like Gatorade, King Soopers/City Market, Denver Broncos Football Club, Sports Authority, Wells Fargo, CenturyLink and El Pomar Foundation, the CSHOF has donated more than \$1 million to youth sports programs, including \$650,000 to the Colorado High School Activities Association. The hall donated \$200,000 this year alone. "We're a nonprofit, so we don't have to donate money," Lawrence says. "But it's something that I'm convinced is the right thing to do. We can reach out and make a difference. It's something we're extremely proud of."

Lawrence says the Colorado hall is *unusual, and perhaps unique, in raising and donating funds to help*

community sports organizations. Colorado Expression contacted some other state sports halls of fame about their efforts. Some, like that in Oregon, have awarded small scholarships to individual student-athletes, and others, like Kansas, don't raise funds specifically to donate to community groups but have donated money from fundraisers to groups like Girls on the Run in Sedgwick County, Kan. None apparently do it on the level that the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame does. In addition to corporate sponsorships, the hall raises funds through events like the annual induction and awards banquet, which will be held April 19 at the Denver Marriott City Center, the Championship Saturday 5A and 4A high school championship games, and an annual CSHOF Golf Classic tournament. It also handles tours of Sports Authority Field, which includes a visit to the hall's museum itself.

The entrance to the museum, which sees 40,000 visitors annually, is located just inside Gate 1 on the west side of the stadium. As you walk inside its glass doors, you'll see two pillars displaying plaques for the inductees. Between them is a display honoring, on a recent visit, former Colorado A&M and Detroit Lions football player Thurman "Fum" McGraw. Similar displays are set up for about two dozen other inductees; the displays rotate periodically, and also include areas celebrating women in sports, the Broncos, a Colorado sports history panel showing important dates back to 1862, a Kids' Zone with jerseys and equipment, and panels for the Colorado Golf Association,

Colorado Sports Hall of Fame Induction & Awards Banquet

WHEN April 19, 2016

WHERE Denver Marriott City Center,
1701 California St., Denver

DETAILS Tickets are \$200 each and sponsor tables start at \$2,500. The 2016 inductees are: Vinny Castilla, Jim Danley, Rhonda Blanford Green, Milan Hejduk, Ralph Simpson and Jim Toupal. The banquet is the signature event of the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame, held every year to celebrate that year's induction class and recognize those who have had an impact in Colorado sports. The event normally sells out with around 900 guests.

INFORMATION www.coloradosports.org;
720-258-3535

Special Olympics Colorado, Gold Crown Foundation, and the National Sports Center for the Disabled, among others.

In a hallway between the museum and the stadium suites is a wall with additional plaques and panels. At 2,500-square feet, Lawrence says the museum is the right size. "Brick and mortar can be expensive," he says. "Our overhead is about 17 percent, which is a lot lower than other museums." Lawrence says the hall's main purpose is still the preservation of Colorado's sports history, what he calls "managing a public trust. Our primary job is to make sure that this organization continues to honor the great athletes for years to come."

Hall of Fame Induction

To be inducted into the hall, an athlete is chosen by an independent selection committee, composed of some 28 sports media people. Inductees are selected based on accomplishments in sports in Colorado. In addition to the inductees, the CSHOF annually selected the best high school, college, amateur and professional sports individuals and teams, plus an "Athletes with Disabilities" winner from the Special Olympics Colorado or National Sports Center for the Disabled. The initial inductees, in 1965, were football star and former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Byron "Whizzer" White, world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey, and multi-sport standout Earl "Dutch" Clark. The selection committee meets every October to select the following year's inductees from nominations from its members and the public. In January it names the athletes of the year for the previous year.

The 2015 professional and amateur athletes, honored this April, are Colorado Rockies third baseman Nolan Arenado and Stanford running back Christian McCaffrey. Collegiate standouts are Denver University lacrosse player Wesley Berg and Colorado State University volleyball player Adrianna Culbert. High school honorees are Lyons cross country runner Paul Roberts and Mountain Vista soccer player Mallory Pugh. Nikia Davenport, a Denver powerlifter from Special Olympics Colorado, was the Athlete with Disabilities award-winner.

David Hunt, who chairs the selection committee, says there are about 100 nominees to consider every year. Committee members have information on all the nominees and have time in the October meeting to voice their opinions. Some selections are "no-brainers," Hunt says, because their accomplishments are



PHOTO: KRISTIN RUCKER



PHOTO: JON W. DENKER

widely recognized. A series of votes are taken to winnow the number down to the four-to-six chosen as inductees. To make sure that "old-timers" are not forgotten, a subcommittee is charged with selecting nominees from the 1960s and 1970s. "Usually we have a wealth of great athletes," Hunt says. "We send out preparation packets ahead of time so people are well-versed when they come to the meeting."

Other than the annual inductees and athlete honorees, don't expect the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame to alter its course, Lawrence says. He and the hall's board have discussed adding another fundraising event but he says there are no current plans in place. "Right now," Lawrence says, "we're doing things at a very high level and we want to keep doing that." **CE**

Brad Smith is a long-time Colorado journalist and freelance writer whose work has appeared in many local and national publications.