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Celebrating BC Women in Sport Leaders & Legends

Debbie Brill — High Jump

An amateur athlete with the attitude of a pro and a uniquely individual flair, Debbie Brill has demonstrated a strong commitment to excellence throughout her high jumping career.

Brill burst onto the international track and field scene in 1970 at age 16 when she became the first North American woman to clear six feet. She revolutionized the sport with her reverse jumping style known as the "Brill Bend" and, by 1979, she had established herself as the top female high jumper in the world.

Brill got her start at tiny South Otter elementary school in Aldergrove, where there were not enough children to play team sports, so students were encouraged to participate in individual sports such as track and field.

Brill excelled at that level and, when she was 12 years old, Langley recreation director Pete Swenson recognized her talent and asked her to join their club. By the time she was 14, Brill had already set world records in her age category, a trend that has continued throughout her career.

Brill has won more than 65 national and international championships, and has been the recipient of many awards including being named B.C.'s Athlete of the Decade in 1980. In 1983, she became an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Her career highlights include two gold medals and one silver at three Commonwealth Games, appearances in three Olympics, the World Cup title in 1979 and a world indoor record of 1.99 metres in 1982.

Brill, now 49 and the mother of three active teens, is still leaping to record breaking heights, setting high jumping records in masters competitions. Her advice to young people is to find something you really love to do and stick with it, remembering that nothing comes easily or without a lot of hard work.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

- First North American woman to jump six feet, 1970
- Commonwealth Games gold medallist, 1970 Edinburgh, 1982 Brisbane

- Commonwealth Games silver medallist, 1978 Edmonton
- Three-time Olympian (1972 Munich, 1976 Montreal, 1984 Los Angeles)
- Pan American Games gold medallist, 1971 Cali
- Pan American Games bronze medallist, 1979 San Juan
- World Cup gold medallist, 1979 Montreal
- Set world indoor record, 1982
- Canadian Amateur Sports Hall of Fame, 1984
- Officer of the Order of Canada, 1983
- B.C. Master Athlete of the Year, 1997
- Named B.C. Athlete of the Decade, 1980
- B.C. Sports Hall of Fame, 1989

Debbie Brill is one of 31 women athletes or teams selected by a respected committee of leaders in B.C. sport. They represent the power, strength and determination of women in sport in British Columbia. Their accomplishments have made them part of history – and their dreams inspire the future.

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