

GARY LONGHI

INDUCTED 2017



The Canadian Cycling Hall of Fame is pleased to welcome Gary Longhi as its first para-cyclist as an inductee for 2017. Given that Gary was the most successful para-cyclist in the period from 1988 to 2000 it is appropriate that he is 'first across the line' into the Hall of Fame.

His story is as unique as his character. Longhi, who speaks French, English and Italian, became involved in elite-level sport as part of a rehabilitation program following a 1983 motorcycle accident at the age of 19 that nearly took his life. He spent three months in a coma. When he emerged from the deep sleep, Longhi could do little but open his eyes and breathe on his own.

During his recovery period he noted; "My memory was OK, and so was my sense of humor, I had to re-learn everything else."

Longhi competed in the cerebral palsy category because he suffered a head trauma injury. His intelligence was intact, but the body's motors were not communicating.

It was on a trip to Cuba in 1986 that Gary started training -- his father bought him a folding bicycle for the trip - and one year later his friend Sylvie Sauvé got him involved cross-training and speed racing. That's when he really took off. "I fell in love with the sport," Longhi said; "I like the competition, but that's not what drives me to compete. It's the people and the camaraderie. It really helps me not just in my rehabilitation, but for

my self-pride and confidence."

Gary's Paralympic record is a testimony to both his ability and durability as he rode in four Paralympic Games beginning in Seoul in 1988 where he had 4th and 6th place finishes in two road racing events. A great start to his Paralympic career!

In 1992 at the Barcelona Paralympic Games he had an incredible performance winning a silver medal in the time trial. It was in 1996 in Atlanta that Gary had his finest Paralympics. He competed in two road racing events winning gold in the time trial and a bronze in the 20km Open category race.

Based on his history of achievement and his outstanding attitude he was selected by the Canadian Paralympic Committee to be Canada's flag bearer for the 2000 Paralympic Games in Sydney, Australia.

"He symbolizes the Paralympic spirit," said Louis Barbeau, Canada's assistant chef de mission for the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games who is also the Director General of the Quebec Cycling Federation. "You'll never hear him say a negative word about anyone."

In that 4th appearance at the Paralympic Games in Sydney in 2000, he had to settle for 9th place due to respiratory problems. His persistent problems forced him to retire at the end of 2001.

Gary Longhi was a dominant figure in his category (cerebral palsy – CP4) throughout his career, earning many titles and medals at national as well as international competitions.

He was awarded the "Prize for Sportsmanship" at the 1991 Forester Canadian Games and was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Quebec Cycling Sport Federation in 2004.

Longhi said cycling on the Canadian team made him feel like he's part of something. He said, for a person in his situation, nothing beats the camaraderie. "Sometimes in society I feel like an outsider," he said. "On the bike I'm normal. Everything is smooth, not as harsh as usual. It's freedom for me."

What distinguishes Gary Longhi from all other athletes, Olympian or Paralympian, is his unique sense of humor. Add to that his great joviality and kindness, and it is not surprising that all who know him find him remarkable and appreciate his efforts.

Gary Longhi you are now an honoured member of the Canadian Cycling Hall of Fame.