

# Ex-Central gymnast Stoldt receives silver honor from NCAA

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As University of Illinois graduate Dave Stoldt prepared to attend the Fighting Illini's NCAA men's basketball championship game against North Carolina, he reflected how the sport contributed to his becoming a standout gymnast at Hinsdale Central.

"The only reason I went out for gymnastics was because I threw up bricks for three days in basketball. I got cut from freshman basketball," Stoldt said. "I was still like, 'I want to do a sport,' and I thought, 'Gymnastics looks OK to me.'"

Stoldt not only went on to become an all-stater and part of the Red Devils' 1976 state championship team his senior year, but also went on to become an NCAA pommel horse champion for the Illini in 1980.

Stoldt's collegiate accomplishments were remembered Jan. 9 as he joined five other former NCAA student-athletes who received the 2005 Silver Anniversary Award at the annual NCAA convention in Dallas. The award recognizes former student-athletes who completed successful collegiate careers 25 years ago and also have distinguished themselves professionally.

Athletes were nominated by their schools and chosen by the NCAA Honors Committee, which is comprised of administrators at member institutions and former prominent student-athletes. Stoldt, who



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joined Dick Butkus as the only Illinois alumni to receive the award, was honored along with 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey player Mark Johnson, 1984 Olympic women's marathon champion Joan Benoit Samuelson and former NFL quarterback Paul McDonald.

Stoldt, who now lives in Hopkinton, Mass., is founder of Commonwealth Pacific Ventures, which helps other companies establish funding, and has been chief financial officer for nAscent BioSciences Inc. since 2004.

"It was a great group and it was nice to be recognized for something not just completely in the past, but also for as an adult and what we're doing on an ongoing basis," Stoldt said.

"It's funny when you spend all of the time watching big-time NCAA football and basketball that you forget that there are 360,000 student-athletes in the NCAA and 99 percent of them turn pro in an academic area. That's really what college athletics are all about, pushing yourself, learning self-discipline, making friends. That's what really came out."

Hinsdale Central freshman coach Harrison Bull thought Stoldt's tall, skinny frame was best suited for pommel horse. By the time he was a senior in Neil Krupicka's second year as head coach, the 6-foot-3 Stoldt was second at state on horse.

As a freshman at Illinois, Stoldt missed qualifying for nationals by one spot. In 1978,

Stoldt was second in the Big Ten Conference Championships and second at nationals to Northern Illinois' Mike Burke, ending a streak of eight years in which four Hinsdale Central grads — Russ Hoffman, Ed Slezak, Ted Marcy and Chuck Walter — won or shared the NCAA horse title.

Stoldt won the Big Ten title and was the top-ranked horseman most of his junior year. However, he failed to qualify for nationals.

"I was a little sick and a little off. I almost felt like the judges were doing everything they could to help me out and it still wasn't enough," Stoldt said.

Everything clicked senior year. The team captain defended his Big Ten title and won the NCAA Nationals.

It's a finish he's proud of but one he doesn't relive often. As the sign on his office door states, "What have you done lately?"

"I truly treasure all of my memories, but every day is a new challenge," Stoldt said. "When I speak to young athletes, it's based on a little cliché — don't let your accomplishments define who you are but let what you've accomplished define who you are going to be. You should look back because looking back allows you to look forward. (Winning NCAA nationals is) a great memory and if I hadn't done it, I might have had regrets, so I'm glad I hadn't had those regrets."

Stoldt and his wife, Connie, have two sons and a daughter, who all are involved in sports but not gymnastics. Still, Stoldt is connected to the sport.

He attended Monday's game with three former Illinois teammates. He's also looking forward to a retirement party in June for Krupicka after 31 seasons as coach.

"That's the best thing about high school and college sports. These guys became extended family," Stoldt said. "One of my best friends is a pommel horse guy from (Southern Illinois University). I'm involved with a lot of my U of I friends and they've adopted him as one of their own. It gives you connections to the different years in your life."