

## **Alberta Champions: Putting a Face on Alberta's Past**

# **Joey Moss, an Albertan Champion Changemaker**

**By Larson J Painchaud**

Alberta has a wealth of citizens who, throughout their lifetime, have greatly contributed to the province and the communities within it. One of those people who has inspired me is Joey Moss. He was able to be accepted in his local community as well as within the communities of the NHL and NFL, as a hardworking and dedicated employee. He did this despite, or possibly because of, his having Down syndrome. Joey Moss changed mindsets and normalized people with Down syndrome and other disabilities working and holding jobs within society. This population within society, as well as employers, were able to see opportunities and possibilities they never saw before.

Joey Moss's initial introduction into the role with the Edmonton Oilers team was due to the inclusiveness of Wayne Gretzky, who saw the worth, value and employability of his friend. Moss's presence on the team went beyond a mere 'checking of the boxes' in order to fill a role. He was more than what the position required of assisting with equipment for the team on the bench and in the changeroom. It was more than his having a relationship with Wayne Gretzky. Moss brought love, happiness and acceptance to the spaces he worked and lived in with the team. Gretzky discussed Moss's influence as one who "brought a ray of sunshine and a lot of fond memories to all of us . . . but as I said to them, 'he made our lives better. It wasn't just us making his life better'. Without question, he made our lives better", (Clipperton, 2020). The Oilers, coaches, and the fans were gifted with a spirit they didn't know was missing until it filled the arena and the people within it.

During Moss's life, he was the recipient of numerous awards. On May 29, 2015, Joey Moss was inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame for his "contributions and dedication made to both the Edmonton Oilers, and as well as the Edmonton Eskimos" ([www.NHL.com](http://www.NHL.com)). In 2003, Gretzky presented Moss with the NHL Alumni Association's "Seventh Man Award", awarded to those alumni "whose behind-the-scenes efforts make a difference in the lives of others" ([www.NHL.com](http://www.NHL.com)). Joey Moss was a decorated Albertan through his work, advocacy and community efforts.

The legacy of Moss continues to grow awareness and acceptance of people with Down syndrome and developmental disabilities. Since his passing in 2020, a Joey Moss Memorial Fund has been created to continue his work "of advocating for employment and other meaningful opportunities for people with developmental disabilities", ([www.joeymoss.ca](http://www.joeymoss.ca)). In September of 2022, the Joey Moss School opened in Edmonton ([www.joeymoss.epsb.ca](http://www.joeymoss.epsb.ca)). The school website states, "Joey Moss captured the hearts of Edmontonians for decades. He became a household

name” ([www.joeymoss.epsb.ca](http://www.joeymoss.epsb.ca)). At the end of the annual tournament for the Oilers training cup, they present the Joey Moss Cup to the winning team (Edmonton Oilers, [www.NHL.com](http://www.NHL.com)). His name is used for many places, such as the outdoor viewing arena at Roger Place in Edmonton is informally known as ‘The Moss Pit’, and for an assisted-living residence for people with developmental disabilities (Edmonton Oilers, [www.NHL.com](http://www.NHL.com)).

I am inspired by what Joey Moss was able to accomplish in his life, and through his legacy since his passing. Because of him, I have can pursue opportunities of leadership, citizenship and strive for excellence within my community, province, country and world. I have hope for a future where I can be valued and respected. I can be employed by accepting and knowledgeable employers who are also members of the same community and society I contribute to. I have hope for purpose. For the changemaking Joey Moss created, I have possibilities. I am a strong Special Olympic athlete in floorball, basketball, golf and swimming. I play lacrosse with the Lacrossing Barriers team who partnered with the Calgary Roughnecks NLL team. I have many local restaurants and businesses asking me to work for them when I am ready. I won an MVP award from my brother’s hockey team a few years ago for consistently giving high fives at the gate as they entered and exited the ice. That year, they lost games I did not attend.

It is unknown, and would be impossible to trace, the effects that Joey Moss’s life has had on my life up to this point. The ability to change people’s minds, ways of thinking and to open their hearts, which in turn, opens doors for people like me. I feel fortunate to live my life after the ripple Joey Moss caused through society, the sports world, and into households. The support systems I have around me have hope and a vision to prepare me for now and into the future. Because of Joey Moss, a famous and honorable man from our landscape, we have been able to have optimism and set high goals knowing that dreams can come true. The advocacy work for people with Down syndrome and developmental disabilities is long from over. I am inspired to continue the wave, keeping the ripples going for myself and others.

In a time when families who had children with Down syndrome were still encouraged and expected to send their infant or child away to an institution, Joey Moss was entering into a position that would be a game changer for himself, his family, his community, his city, his province, his country, and the world he lived in. Tim Shipton, an executive on the Oilers Entertainment Group shared his perspective that “really became a huge fixture and role model for a fulfilling life for persons with disabilities and an icon in our city.” He said, “So, Joey to me is a part of the fabric which makes this organization special and he’s part of the fabric of the city of Edmonton and all of Northern Alberta. His legend continues to grow even in his passing. He’s someone that carries such a great legacy” (Van Dietze, 2024). Joey Moss is an Albertan Champion Changemaker.



Canadian Swim Coaches Association. He was part of the 1968 Mexico City and 1972 Munich Olympic coaching staff, was the Pan Am coach in 1971, and with the Canadian Tour Team that went to China in 1974.

professional football. His basketball teams won six City Championships. Gary started the St. Francis Invitational Boys Basketball Tournament; inviting teams from across Western Canada and the United States.



**Joey Moss**  
**2015 Achievement Award, Edmonton**

Joey Moss was an integral part of the Edmonton Oilers and Edmonton Eskimos organizations since the 1984-85 season, when Wayne Gretzky introduced him to the Oilers team. Born with Down syndrome, Joey's tireless work ethic and dedication to both clubs and the community continued for more than 30 years. Joey assisted the training staff with dressing room and equipment duties and provided encouragement to the players in the locker room and on the bench. Joey was awarded the NHL Alumni Association's "Seventh Man Award" in 2003, for those "whose behind-the-scenes efforts make a difference in the lives of others."

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