



Hall of Fame

Sharon Frant Brooks

Lebanon, New Jersey

Inducted in 1991

Sharon began her involvement with wheelchair sports in 1972 as a student therapist in Philadelphia. She was a volunteer for regional and national wheelchair games, but in 1975 she was one of the founding organizers of a multi-sport program in the city of Philadelphia called the Delaware Valley Wheelchair Athletic Association and its sports teams named the Delaware Valley Spokesmen. At that time she was the track and field coach and coached the future track star, Sharon Rahn Hedrick, at the start of her Hall of Fame career. She also assumed responsibility for the small table tennis program both locally and at regional and national competitions. It was at a table tennis competition where Sharon met the outstanding player, Ken Brooks, a member of the table tennis powerhouse Bulova Team.



In 1976, while living with her sister, a Peace Corps volunteer in Fiji, Sharon got connected with the first Fiji Paralympic team and assisted that small group in their preparation for the 1976 Toronto Paralympics. Upon her return to New Jersey, Sharon connected with a wheelchair basketball player, Ted Kaplan, and together they created the NJ Blue Devils Wheelchair Team. In 1978, Sharon and her soon to be husband, Ken, created a Junior Wheelchair sports program, the NJ Rolling Raiders. Ultimately, the program joined with the Adult program, the NJ Blue Devils to become the NJ Wheelchair Athletic Association, which coordinated and financially supported a full range of wheelchair sports programming year round.

Sharon began the effort in 1979 to petition the National Wheelchair Athletic Association to create a Junior Division for youth specific competition. She continued to promote the idea while running the very first Masonic Junior Wheelchair Sports Meet in 1980, the first in the USA, plus an annual Adult and Junior division wheelchair meet first conducted in 1981. In 1984, the NWAA conducted its first National Junior Games, utilizing the events and classification system/age divisions first recommended by Sharon 5 years earlier.

While still coaching track and field, she and Ken put together a nationally recognized wheelchair table tennis program, Their program reached out to local rehab and children's hospitals where Ken became coach for an emerging star named Andre Scott. Also, coming to the Junior team practices was an 18 year old teen, a newly disabled young lady named Pam Stewart (Fontaine) who initially thought her sports days were over. In 1980, while Ken continued to coach, Sharon reached out and created a partnership with Rutgers University for the expanding adult program.

Sharon was selected by the NWAA to be the team leader of the USA Table Tennis Team at the Pan American Wheelchair Games held in Nova Scotia, which included some of the great players of the day. It was there she met a member of the powerhouse Jamaican Table Tennis Team, Jennifer Brown – now Johnson. In the fall of 1982, Sharon continued with her USA team responsibilities by becoming the USA Team leader for the wheelchair table tennis team that went to the World Wheelchair Table Tennis Championships held at Stoke Mandeville in England.

Athletes now competing in junior competition, table tennis tournaments and wheelchair sports in the tri-state area can thank Sharon Frant Brooks for blazing the trail that made that all possible.