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# NEIGHBOURS

*of Mississauga Road*

An exclusive magazine serving the communities of Mississauga Road, Sherwood Forrest, Erindale At UTM, Sawmill Valley and Indian Road

*John "Coach" Petrushchak*

An Ontario Sports Legend and Beloved Mentor



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Cover photo by Ivy Cahigas, Fable Studios



# An Ontario Sports Legend and Beloved Mentor

## John "Coach" Petrushchak

It is believed that John has more wins than any other high school coach in Ontario history!

By Annette Torchia

Photos by Ivy Cahigas, Fable Studios

John "Coach" Petrushchak is a legend when it comes to high school basketball, and since moving to Mississauga's Chartwell Regency Retirement Residence this past spring, he has gained the respect and admiration of his fellow residents and Chartwell staff for his wonderful disposition and contribution to sports. In fact, it is believed that he has more wins than any other high school coach in Ontario history! Now that's something!

John attended the University of Toronto for Physical Education/Teaching and began a teaching career at George Harvey Collegiate in 1965 where he coached football and basketball. In 1973, John transferred to Runnymede Collegiate as the Head of the Physical Education Department and coached the Senior Boys Basketball team.

In 1976, John made Mississauga his home. He would spend the next 45 years at Burnhamthorpe and Ponytrail and become involved in the Forest Glen Girls Softball League. For 15 years, John coached his daughters' rep team, and later took over as President of the league. "I have had many friends and great neighbours in that community over the 45 years that I lived there," John recalls. "Many became like family."

John is beloved by his wonderful family, including his four daughters – Lisa, Debra, Kristi and Suzy – and his four grandchildren – Kevin, Finleigh, Gilby and Brady. Like their dad, the Petrushchak girls have always been into sports, playing and

excelling at softball, field hockey and volleyball. Lisa and Suzy also pursued gymnastics. Ironically, none of John's daughters played basketball, but their love of sports made its way down to the grandkids too who played rep baseball and hockey. And John's granddaughter Finleigh, who is autistic, has competed with the Toronto Silhouettes Rhythmic Gymnastics Special Olympics for the last nine years. A true inspiration!

John also acted as Camp Director of Haliburton Hockey Haven Boys Camp from 1970-1975, and worked with many hockey greats, including the NHL's Johnny Bower. In 1976, John left the Director role and began coaching basketball at Olympia Sports Camp in Huntsville. It was there that he met a young Leo Rautins, Canadian broadcaster, TSN personality, former professional basketball player and the former head coach of the Canadian men's national basketball team.

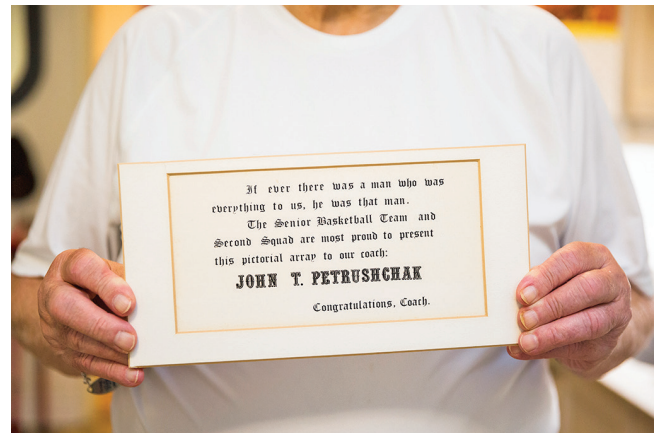
Eventually, Olympia started adding more sports and moved locations, but the Petrushchak family continued to make it part of their summer plans for 15 years. "My daughter Suzy became a counsellor up there, and my daughter Debbie was married there as well," John tells us. "It was (and still is) a magical place." The Petrushchaks met many of their best friends at Olympia, who they still keep in touch with to this day. Their love of the Huntsville area motivated John to buy a cottage there in 1995, and they've enjoyed spending time together there as a family ever since.

John definitely left his legacy on Ontario sports. In 2003, Jason



Paul from the Toronto Sun ran a story about John and his former assistant coach (and former student) Paul Melnik, referencing their contribution to making Runnymede Collegiate the “powerhouse of the province.” Jason Paul noted that while there is no official high school record book, John was believed to have the most wins in Ontario high school basketball “with about 1,400 wins over 26 years at Runnymede and nine years before that at George Harvey. At Runnymede, where he was known as “Coach P”, John made 17 trips to the OFSAA tournament – winning four gold medals, five silver and two bronze...” The Toronto Sun even honoured the school in 2003 as the best program in provincial history – a well-deserved accolade, considering 15 Runnymede players earned NCAA scholarships under John’s coaching! In fact, John’s program at Runnymede was the first Canadian high school boys basketball program to be fully sponsored by the likes of Converse, Adidas, and Reebok at different times. John and Paul Melnik later resumed their coaching relationship at Father Henry Carr, though the roles were reversed.

Given his tremendous contribution to high school sports, it’s no surprise that many of John’s past players regularly visit him at Chartwell and seek his company and advice. Many have gone on to become teachers, coaches, doctors, lawyers, politicians, social



A heartfelt message from John’s former players captures just how much John meant to them.



John had about 1,400 wins over 26 years at Runnymede and made 17 trips to the OFSAA tournament.



Many of John’s past players - some still visit him today.



“Coach P” doing what he loves!



workers, directors, and actors. On his 80th birthday, Leo Rautins even paid tribute to John on his social media. And in August 2019, Coach P was honoured with the prestigious "Legacy Award for Lifetime Achievement" at the P.H.A.S.E 1 Journey Awards, celebrating his immense contribution to the success and development of Canadian basketball.

Paul Melnik captured the essence of John in a statement he made about him, calling him a father figure and mentor to many students. He spoke of feeling blessed to have chosen Runnymede as his high school, and that "Coach P" inspired him to become a teacher and high school basketball coach himself, giving him a reason to go to school and work hard at his craft. Positive role models, teachers and coaches can have a powerful and significant impact on youth during their formative years, and Coach P is a perfect example. It's heartwarming to learn about the tremendous impact John had on so many athletes, his friends, and of course his family. I'm confident that they will continue his legacy by passing on their love of sports and coaching.

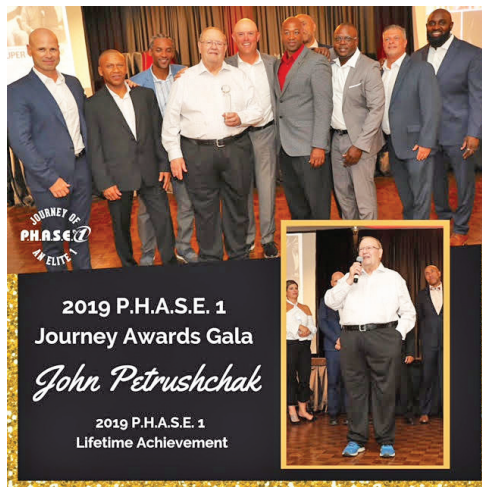
John's former players made the following heartfelt statement about him once: "If ever there was a man who was everything to us, he was that man." Thank you, John, for being a light on and off the court. 🙏



John's teaching career began in 1965.



Coach P in action.



From left, Ray Tone, Darren Thomas, Al St. Louis, John Petrushchak, Doug Lawrie, Kurt Henry, Phil Edwards, Paul Melnik, and Wayne Dawkins at the 2019 P.H.A.S.E 1 Journey Awards Gala.

Photo courtesy of the Petrushchak Family



John with his daughters (from left) Kristi, Suzy, Debbie and Lisa.

Photo courtesy of the Petrushchak Family

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