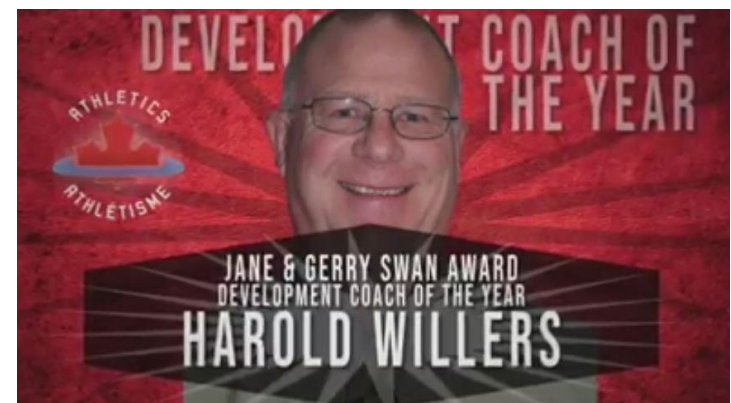




Sean LaForest Succeeds Harold Willers as Valley Royals Throws Coach

"Throw Far" is the motto that Valley Royals Coach Harold Willers has encouraged his athletes to strive for. He even prints it on his own custom-designed "Throw Far" T-Shirts which he gives to his throwers. His athletes have responded brilliantly to Willers' encouragement, warm sense of humour and skillful coaching. Many champions have emerged from his Valley Royals Throws Group over the years. Willers, himself a four-time Canadian Champion (1981-1984) in hammer, has invested over 30 years into the training of Valley Royals athletes, training them in Hammer, Discus, Shot Put and Javelin. Last year, Harold Willers was named "**Canadian Development Coach of the Year**" for the **2017 Season receiving the Jane and Gerry Swan Award from Athletics Canada.**

This past Fall, Willers retired from coaching with the Royals. Of his retirement Willers said, "I am also planning to retire from teaching and coaching after 32 years in the Chilliwack District, teaching everything from grade 4 to 12. My very patient wife, Mary, and I plan to do some travelling around North America, then relax and be more involved with family. To all my former athletes thank you for making my coaching career challenging, fulfilling and most of all fun. I certainly wouldn't have made it this long without you and the support of your families." Willers introduced Sean LaForest as the new coach of the Valley Royals Throws Program at the first practice of the Fall season on October 15th, 2019.



LaForest, who was trained by Willers, as a Valley Royals athlete and as a thrower for UBC, is himself an accomplished thrower and coach. He is Vice Principal of MEI Middle School where he has served as throws coach to the MEI Middle and Secondary School track & field teams for eight years. Of LaForest, Willers says that, "Sean was part of a group of throwers that were gifted physically and with a drive to constantly improve, never losing the sense of fun and fair play."

LaForest got his start as a thrower when he was in grade 7 where he recalls that, "I was asked to go to the Mission District track meet for discus, so I said, 'why not.' I showed up but had to leave early so they let me take all my throws first and leave. I found out a week later that I won the meet. My mom was shocked and did some research on how to get better. The next week I was introduced to Harold Willers who would go on to coach me for the next 8 years." LaForest specialized in Hammer and Discus, with Hammer being his most successful event. He also threw shot put and javelin for fun.



His two favourite memories of training and competing were "laughing in practices" and "winning a big meet and knowing that all that hard work paid off."

Of his time training with Willers, LaForest says, "Hands down, the most important lesson I learned from Harold was 'stay loose.' This worked both physically to help throw farther, but also mentally. There's no point in stressing and worrying.

He always told me to go out and have fun with it. This is why you would see me eating an In-and-Out burger in the middle of a throwing competition down in California (not my fault: the food truck showed up in the second round of throws and I wasn't sure if it would stay), or playing pranks on my comrades in the middle of a competition at Nationals in Ontario. The list could go on."

In addition to coaching the Valley Royals Throws Group, LaForest is looking forward to getting back into throwing as a Masters Athlete himself in the next few years. He plans to start throwing as he introduces his own kids to the sport when they are old enough (currently his kids are ages 4, 6 and 8). LaForest and his wife Chrystal have been married for 10 years. They have 3 lovely kids, 2 goats, 3 rabbits, 2 ducks, a cow, 21 chickens, 2 cats, 3 dogs and a donkey on the way. On June 18th, 2018, LaForest was inducted into the **Mission Sports Hall of Fame "in recognition of his achievement in track and field and hammer throw"**

Article by Monica Carsience

President of the Valley Royals Board of Directors