

NEW YORK

An Iconic Venue

An Interview with Philip Schwalb, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sports Museum of America

EDITORS' NOTE Immediately prior to founding the Sports Museum of America, Philip Schwalb managed TPC, Inc., a diverse holding company, for the Kennedy-Schlossberg family. Prior to that, Schwalb was Chief Operating Officer of Centerprise Information Solutions Inc. From 1996 to 1998, he was Senior Vice President of Business Operations and Marketing for SSYH Software. From 1994 to 1996, Schwalb acted as Executive Director for the Community Club in New York. He was also Senior Vice President for a professional sports franchise. From 1991 to 1993, Schwalb was an officer of the Arena Football League (AFL) and Chairman of the League's Legal and Business Affairs committee. He served as a Managing Executive at Time Warner's Court TV/American Lawyer Media from 1986 to 1988. Schwalb received his BA with honors from Duke University and a JD while on academic scholarship at Emory University.



Philip Schwalb

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The Sports Museum of America (SMA) (www.sportsmuseum.com), based in New York, is a \$100 million venue and the nation's first and only every-sport attraction, richly showcasing the history and significance of sports in American culture. Created in exclusive partnership with more than 50 single-sport halls of fame, national governing bodies, and other sports organizations across North America, SMA features amazing state-of-the-art interactive technologies, dramatic original films, and an iconic collection of sports memorabilia. SMA is also home to the legendary Heisman Trophy (an annual televised presentation) and the Billie Jean King International Women's Sports Center, including the first Women's Sports Hall of Fame.

Are you happy with the museum's recognition?

I am very happy. Endorsement is coming from several places, most importantly from the athletes. We've had hundreds of iconic and hall of fame athletes come through the venue, and they've loved it. It's really interesting to be in the Olympic gallery watching Carl Lewis, Jim Craig, and Bonnie Blair absorb it. The athletes' reaction was the first thing I was looking for.

How is the museum structured?

The first exhibit is called Dreaming Big, and



it's an homage to superstar athletes when they were children. There are photos of Lance Armstrong on his bicycle at age 10, Serena and Venus Williams hugging one another at ages 8 and 11 respectively, and Bonnie Blair skating when she was 5. We also display Billie Jean King's report card, telling a little bit about what she was like as a child, and

Derek Jeter's little league jersey. There's a film of clips of iconic athletes in childhood, like Tiger Woods at age 3 and Wayne Gretzky at age 5.

The next exhibit is the Immersion Theater, which is a surround-sound theater projecting all kinds of emotional and moving sports moments. After that, we become sport-specific through the bulk of the museum. It starts with the Olympics, followed by baseball, auto racing, basketball, tennis, soccer, hockey, golf, and football. But the last three galleries are not sport-specific. Breaking Barriers is the story of people who broke gender, racial, and international barriers in sports, narrated by ESPN's John Saunders. It's a beautiful film with testimonials from some of the current greatest athletes of all time reflecting on the accomplishments of those who came before them, like Serena Williams talking about Wilma Rudolph, Danica Patrick talking about Janet Guthrie, and Tony Dungy talking about Fritz Pollard and Jackie Robinson. The next gallery is Games People Play, an homage to the everyday sports that people play, like bowling, volleyball, running, and softball. Visitors end their tour in a room that's a salute to the fans. It's filled with interactive activities – you can make your own broadcast or play computer sports trivia. And we show a moving film called *More Than a Game*, narrated by *Good Morning America*'s Robin Roberts, about the significance and impact of sports.

You've put together a board of trustees that is a who's who from the sporting world. How engaged is your board of trustees?

They are very critical, because they add a lot of credibility and ideas. It's important to have their enthusiasm. They are very active in supporting the museum; half of them were here on opening day. All these athletes do it for one reason, and that is they find it a shame that

the U.S. never had a museum about sports until now. There are probably about 30 athletes, including Martina Navratilova, Joe Frazier, Billie Jean King, Mario Andretti, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Bob Cousy, Harry Carson, Walt Frazier, and others, who have been particularly enthusiastic and gracious with their time.

What made you feel New York was the right location?

Initially, I looked at Orlando and Las Vegas, but I pretty quickly became convinced it should be in New York. This was meant to be and is truly an iconic venue. We want to be an icon of a Smithsonian-type stature, so Orlando and Las Vegas were not the right places for us. We are right across the street from the Statue of Liberty ferries, and we're part of the World Trade Center rebuilding effort, so we feel really happy with our home. Also, New York gets as many visitors as any place in the country – last year, there was a record 46 million visitors to New York. And for many people, New York is the sports capital of the country. It's home to more teams and more history than any city, and it's a sports-crazed city.

How critical is being involved in the community to the culture of what you're doing, and has it been important to build nonprofit and charity relationships?

It's huge for me personally and for the museum as an entity. More than 20 halls of fame, including the Tennis Hall of Fame, Hockey Hall of Fame, Soccer Hall of Fame, Boxing Hall of Fame, Pro Football Hall of Fame, and College Football Hall of Fame, are partners, and they're all nonprofits. About \$2.5 million a year gets distributed among about 60 nonprofits, which in addition to the sports museums and halls of fame include governing bodies like USTA, USOC, USGA, USA Hockey, and US Lacrosse. We also picked The Jackie Robinson Foundation and Pat LaFontaine's children's hospital charity called Companions in Courage to each receive 1 percent of our ticket sales. We divert our revenue to more than 60 nonprofits on an annual basis. ●

The Charging Bull of Wall Street dressed in a Sports Museum of America jersey