Vikes Championship Breakfast continues to fuel UVic teams

Cleve Dheensaw / Times Colonist
September 30, 2013

With every new move Dr. Paul Zehr learned when he first took to the martial arts mats as a kid, he kept wondering: "What's going on inside my body and my mind [to make this progression happen]?

His career path was set.

Not on the mats, although he is a fourth-degree black belt in karate, but in the classroom and lab as professor of kinesiology and neuroscience at the University of Victoria.

Zehr, also director of the Centre for Biomedical Research at UVic, will deliver the keynote address this morning at the sixth annual Vikes Championship Breakfast at McKinnon Gym. He will have an attentive and large audience. The event again soldout with all 1,400 tickets gone.

The breakfast raised $430,000 last year with all proceeds going to athletic scholarships for UVic Vikes student-athletes. The first $200,000 raised through ticket sales is matched in funding by the UVic administration. Nearly $2 million for athletic scholarships has been raised in the first five years of the event.

"Scholarships are a major determinant of where varsity athletes choose to go to school," said Clint Hamilton, UVic's director of athletics and recreation.

"Scholarships are really, really important in order for us to be competitive."

The Island sports and business community has responded with their support of the Vikes breakfast.

"Now in its sixth year, we have had a class of Vikes athletes go through their entire five-year careers benefiting by the scholarships it has raised, and now those just-graduated Vikes are stepping up to purchase tickets to support the breakfast," noted Hamilton, of the alumni support that also runs deeper to Vikes who graduated many years ago.

Zehr sees many of the Vikes varsity athletes in his classes.

It's about unleashing the human body's potential, said the author of the books Becoming Batman: The Possibility of a Superhero and Inventing Iron Man: The Possibility of a Human Machine.

"It's about imagining and dreaming and pushing for all you can do," adds Zehr, who follows past years' keynote speakers such as MLS Vancouver Whitecaps president Bob Lenarduzzi, former Swimming Canada CEO Pierre Lafontaine, and Vikes hoops grad Chris Hebb, until this past summer the senior vice-president of content and communications for Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment.

But sports records certainly can not be infinite.
“There are biological limits to what the human body is capable of and we are getting closer and closer to those,” acknowledged Zehr, whose research was featured in the Scientific American in a 2009 Q&A piece Headlined Why Batman Could Exist — But Not for Long.

“Yet technological, nutritional and training advances also keep pushing those limits further and further.”

There promises to be plenty of breakfast food for thought, as well as the stomach, this morning in McKinnon.

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