



JON GRUDEN, PHIL ESPOSITO HEADLINE STELLAR 2016 CLASS Enshrinement Set for Nov. 15 in Tampa

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TAMPA, FL -- **Jon Gruden**, the man who brought a Super Bowl Championship to Tampa Bay and **Phil Esposito**, the cornerstone of the movement that lured the NHL to Florida, headline a group of five distinguished honorees who make up the 2016 class elected to the Florida Sports Hall of Fame.

This year's class will be officially inducted into the Hall at an Enshrinement Dinner on November 15th at the TPepins Hospitality Center in Tampa. The Enshrinement activities will also include the Wade Boggs Florida Sports Hall of Fame Celebrity Golf Classic on the morning of Nov. 15th at Tampa Palms Golf Club. *For sponsorship and participation information visit www.flasportshof.org.*

Gruden and Esposito will be joined by two-time World Series Champion, Orlando product and former Tampa Bay Ray **Johnny Damon**, the University of Florida's beloved retiring athletic director **Jeremy Foley** and sailing Olympic gold medalist **Allison Jolly**, now head coach at the University of South Florida, who round out this year's class.

The Florida Sports Hall of Fame is in its 56th year and has enshrined 243 of the brightest and best sports celebrities, each having brought great honor and distinction to the state. The organization's charitable mission is the fight against childhood obesity and support for youth coping with juvenile diabetes.

Also, being recognized at the enshrinement celebration is the 2016 *Fame for Fitness* honoree, former Tampa Bay Rays outfielder **Sam Fuld**. Fuld's T1D Sports Camp, in conjunction with USF Health's Diabetes Center, brings together hundreds of youth who are coping with juvenile Type 1 Diabetes. Held each February at the University of South Florida, camp attendees learn to manage their Diabetes while competing in sports. Fuld,

himself, was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes at age 10, but has gone on to a 10-year major league career. He currently plays for the Oakland Athletics.

“This has to be the dream class for the Tampa Bay area and for the state of Florida,” said Florida Sports Hall of Fame President Barry Smith. “Has there ever been a group that has accomplished so much in their athletic endeavors and yet succeeded in so many ways outside of that? It would be hard to imagine.”

Founded in 1961 by the Florida Sportswriters and Florida Sportscasters Associations, the Florida Sports Hall of Fame has inducted 243 members. Eligibility for the Hall is gained by achieving athletic greatness as a Florida native or by making a significant contribution to a sport or related profession while residing in the state.

Here are the bios on the 2016 Class of the Florida Sports Hall of Fame:

Johnny Damon (Baseball)

Raised in Orlando, Damon was the top rated high school prospect in the country his senior year at Dr. Phillips High School. He was a first-round draft pick of the Kansas City Royals (35th overall) in 1992. He would go on to become a two-time World Series Champion and a two-time All-Star during a major league career that spanned 18 years.

Damon, who won World Series titles with the Boston Red Sox in 2004 and the New York Yankees in 2009 also played with Oakland, Detroit and Cleveland during his career and spent the 2011 season with the Tampa Bay Rays. Damon was named to the American League All-Star team in 2002 and 2005 while with the Red Sox.

He led the American League in runs (136) and steals (46) in 2000 with Kansas City and in triples with 11 in 2002 with the Red Sox. Damon would finish his career with 2,769 hits (52nd all-time), 522 doubles (46th), 1,668 runs scored (31st) and 408 stolen bases (67th). Damon played in nearly 2,500 major league games during his career.

The Johnny Damon Foundation raises money to support numerous charitable organizations and supports local and national programs that provide leadership and growth opportunities for disadvantaged children at risk.

Phil Esposito (Hockey)

Phil Esposito, one of the most decorated NHL personalities of all-time, is credited along with his brother Tony, for brokering the deal to bring NHL hockey to Tampa Bay. Phil's dogged pursuit of an NHL franchise for Tampa was the tipping point and the Tampa Bay Lightning was founded in 1991. Phil has been a mainstay in the Tampa Bay area ever since as an administrator and commentator.

Inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1984, Esposito was a 10-time NHL All-Star, six of those years as a first-teamer, and had his No. 7 jersey retired by the Boston Bruins in 1987. He retired as the second leading all-time NHL goal and point scorer and was third all-time in assists. To this day, he remains among the elite in NHL history in goals, points and assists. During the 1970's, Esposito became the first player in NHL history to score 1,000 points in a decade.

It was Esposito's determined effort to bring investors, business leaders and NHL executives together to make Tampa Bay a franchise site. Against all odds, Esposito's dream became a reality and the Lightning was born in 1991. The franchise would go on to win the 2004 Stanley Cup and have become one of the most successful and beloved organizations in professional sports.

On December 31, 2011 a statue of Phil Esposito was unveiled and now stands in front of the team's home at Amalie Arena in Tampa.

Jeremy Foley (Administration)

Jeremy N. Foley, who has handled virtually every aspect of the University of Florida's \$119.3 million athletic program during his athletic administrative career - which began with an internship in the Gator Ticket Office in 1976 – will retire as AD on October 1, 2016. He has served as UF's Director of Athletics since March of 1992.

Florida has been equally successful on the field of play and in the classroom during Foley's administrative tenure. The Florida athletic program has ranked among the nation's top 10 for 33-straight years (1983-84 – 2015-16) and among the top five for 18 of the last 25 years, according to national all-sport rankings. Florida was among the nation's top five schools in each of the last eight years, including three straight runner-up finishes from 2011-12 – 2013-14. Florida was the first school to win the Capital One Cup in both the men's and the women's competition since the Cup was introduced in the 2010-11 season.

Foley is the only athletic director in Division I history to supervise a program that has won multiple national titles in football (1996, 2006, 2008) and men's basketball (2006, 2007). Overall, 27 UF teams have been crowned national champions under his watch.

Jon Gruden (Football Coach)

Jon Gruden will forever be remembered for being the head coach who brought a Super Bowl Championship to Tampa Bay. He coached the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to their only Super Bowl victory to date, a 48-21 victory over the Oakland Raiders in 2002. It was the first of seven seasons Gruden would coach at Tampa Bay.

Ironically, the team the Bucs beat in Super Bowl XXXVII, the Oakland Raiders, had been the previous coaching stop for Gruden. He had been the head coach in Oakland during the four previous seasons (1998-2001).

But it did not matter on which coast Gruden worked the success was off the charts. His Raiders teams captured two division titles and his Bucs teams won three. He compiled a 95-81 overall record as a head coach, including 57-55 in Tampa Bay. He continues to reside in the Tampa area and is a commentator for ESPN's Monday Night Football coverage. He also has worked a number of Florida Bowl Games for the network, including the Outback Bowl in Tampa and the Discover Orange Bowl in Miami Gardens.

Gruden's brother, Jay, is the current head coach of the Washington Redskins.

Allison Jolly (Sailing)

With a list of sailing accolades dating back for decades, including an Olympic Gold Medal, Allison Jolly is one of the sports great career success stories. She is currently in her 13th season as head coach of the University of South Florida sailing team.

Allison's competitive career includes two Intercollegiate Championship sailing titles, two U.S. Women's Sailing Championships, runner-up in the European Women's Championships, and the U.S. Yachtswoman of the Year designation, all before graduating from college.

The highlight of her sailing career occurred when the International Olympic Committee announced the first-ever women's sailing event for the 1988 Olympics. Encouraged by family and friends to campaign for the team, success came in the form of a Gold Medal in Korea with her partner in the 470 class sailboat.

As coach of the sailing team at USF since 2004, Jolly has led the team to six appearances at the ICSA Women's Singlehanded Nationals (2005, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015) and 12 straight appearances at the ICSA Women's Dinghy Nationals (2005 through 2016).

Allison, who was hired to be the USF sailing coach in August of 2004, currently lives in St. Petersburg with her family.

About the Florida Sports Hall of Fame

In its 56th year of recognizing the state's brightest and best sports figures, the Florida Sports Hall of Fame continues its mission to honor Florida's vast sports heritage by taking the inspiring stories of its 243 current members to the people of the state. This outreach is the hallmark of the modern-day Florida Sports Hall of Fame. The Hall recently opened a sparkling new museum and preview center for memorabilia provided by its members located in directly in the center of the state in Davenport, FL. But the modern-day Hall is also mobile and flexible. With its "Fame for Fitness" initiative, the Florida Sports Hall of Fame has embarked on a journey to take its message across the state of Florida to promote youth fitness and its fight against childhood obesity and diabetes.

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