



Photo courtesy of UC Irvine

Dr. F. Sherwood Rowland, a Nobel Prize-winning chemistry professor from UC Irvine, also left quite a mark during his college years outside the classroom in baseball and basketball.

Rowland Has Seen It All, From Curveballs to CFCs

Receiving the news of his induction into the GTE Academic All-America Hall of Fame wasn't quite as exciting as when Dr. F. Sherwood Rowland received news of winning the Nobel Prize in 1995.

But Dick Enberg wasn't the one calling to tell him about the Nobel Prize. "Boy, I was surprised to hear Dick Enberg's voice on the phone," Rowland says. "I was stunned to hear I was receiving this honor."

The world knows Rowland, a 72-year-old chemistry professor at UC Irvine. He is the man who discovered that chlorofluorocarbon gases (CFCs) deplete the earth's ozone layer. For that he won the Nobel Prize in 1995. Rowland also has won the Japan Prize in Environmental Science and Technology, the Dana Award for Pioneering Achievements in Health, the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement and the Global Role of Honour of the United Nations Environment Program.

But Rowland also has played semipro baseball in a small town in Canada; played basketball barefoot with Communist scientists in Siberia; won a lovely banner for his tennis playing in Austria; batted .340 and played first base for the University of Chicago while he earned a master's



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and doctorate in chemistry; was Ohio Wesleyan's leading rebounder and third-leading scorer as a senior even though he was only 19 years old.

Rowland skipped several grades, which was great for his academic pursuits but tough on his sports career because of the difficulty competing in college as a skinny, 15-year-old freshman.

Rowland will join fellow inductees Danny Ainge from Brigham Young; Dr. Regina Cavanaugh, a star shotputter when she was at Rice as well as a Rhodes Scholar; Oliver Luck, a three-year starting quarterback at West Virginia; and Pablo Morales, the Stanford swimmer who has won three Olympic gold medals. There now will be 63 members in the GTE Academic All-America Hall of Fame.

None is more surprised at the honor than Rowland.

"I always loved sports," Rowland says, "but because I was always younger than my classmates it was quite a while before I was particularly competitive."

Rowland, who was the founding chair of UC Irvine's chemistry department in 1964, grew up in Delaware, Ohio, a small university town. His father was a mathematics professor at Ohio Wesleyan. Rowland was a tall, lanky kid who loved to throw a baseball, shoot a basketball, hit a tennis ball and solve chemical equations. He was 6 feet 5, extraordinarily smart and didn't

mind setting a hard pick in the lane.

After arriving at Ohio Wesleyan with no intention of playing collegiate sports, a coach saw the tall chemistry student and asked Rowland to try out for the basketball team. "I was good-sized for the times," Rowland says. His

college career was interrupted by World War II and service in the Navy. Rowland was most valuable player of his boot-camp basketball team and in those days of less-stringent NCAA rules, college students were allowed eligibility in grad school until they had earned four letters in any sport.

"By the time I got to the University of Chicago," Rowland says, "I had become a pretty fair baseball player. I was still only 21 years old and I played first base. My first year I led the team in hitting."

During his first year of grad school, Rowland's coach got a call from a semipro baseball team in Ontario, Canada. The team needed pitching and an infielder. Rowland had planned on spending the summer doing research.

Instead he packed away his books and beakers and traveled north. The town was small, the air was full of mosquitoes and a month or so into this adventure the coach quit. Still 21, Rowland was asked if he wanted to coach.

"I said yes," Rowland says. "So my first year in pro baseball I was a player/coach."

What a dichotomy. This tall, elegant bookworm with a bunch of guys, most of whom never attended college, yet Rowland loved the game and the life and, briefly, entertained thoughts of playing major league baseball.

"But even though I hit .365 that summer I realized I would never have the speed of bat or foot to go any further with the game," Rowland says. Even now, 50 years later, Rowland seems far away, in another time, when he talks about his Canadian summer.

He may have put his pro baseball dreams to rest, but Rowland never quit playing sports.

With a smile Rowland tells of the time in 1967 when he was on a scientific expedition in Siberia. His Soviet colleagues challenged the Americans to a game of soccer. It was explained that the Americans didn't play soccer, so basketball was the compromise.

"But I hadn't brought any gym shoes with me," Rowland says. "We came to the agreement that the tallest player on their team and I would play barefoot."

Rowland still works at UC Irvine in a structure named the Rowland Building. This is not a coincidence. His sports-playing days are mostly over, but Rowland is still a fan. He may have discovered the holes in the ozone layer, but Rowland has no solution for the ugliness that sometimes accompanies college sports now, the academic shortcuts too many student-athletes take, the money that has become involved.

When he receives his award Monday night in Boston, though, Rowland will love talking basketball with Ainge and football with Luck. But what about CFCs in the ozone layer? He'll save that discussion for another night.

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