

# Great Sports Legends Dinner Honors Nick Buoniconti, Supports Miami Project to Cure Paralysis

The Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis, the fundraising arm of The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, paid an emotional posthumous tribute to its founder, the Hall of Fame football legend Nick Buoniconti, and bestowed honors upon a legendary group of Hall of Famers, Gold Medalists, and Olympians in front of a crowd of more than 1,000 supporters Monday night. The 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Great Sports Legends Dinner at the New York Hilton Midtown raised millions to support the groundbreaking work of The Miami Project, the leading center in the world for spinal cord injury research.



From left, Dwyane Wade, Marc Buoniconti, Lindsey Vonn, and Dr. Barth Green.

The dinner honored Miami Heat NBA legend Dwyane Wade, NFL Hall of Famer and Baltimore Ravens legend Ed Reed, U.S. National Women's Hockey Team Gold Medal star Meghan Duggan, heavyweight champion boxer Wladimir Klitschko, FIFA soccer legend Christian Vieri, MLB World Series Champion Chase Utley, six-time Olympic Gold Medal swimmer Amy Van Dyken-Rouen, and eight-time Olympic Gold Medal swimmer Matt Biondi.

Two other honors were presented. Congressman Jim Langevin, who has served as U.S. representative from Rhode Island since 2001

and is the first quadriplegic speaker pro tempore, appointed during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, received The Buoniconti Fund's 2019 Inspiration Award. The mother-daughter team of Suzie Sayfie, recently retired as executive director of The Miami Project after 25 years at the helm, and Stephanie Sayfie Aagaard, who served as senior director of major gifts and events at The Miami Project for nearly two decades, jointly received The Buoniconti Fund Award.

The highlight of the evening was the heartwarming tribute to Nick Buoniconti, who passed away earlier this year. Nick co-founded The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis in 1985 after his son, Marc, sustained a spinal cord injury during a college football game. Marc, who is The Buoniconti Fund's president, led the tribute, declaring that "no son could ever have a better, more loving, and more supportive father. Without him, I would not be alive today."

"Though my father has passed, his legacy lives on in the work we do at The Miami Project," Marc Buoniconti added. "We will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that when spinal cord injuries happen, medical science will have answers. This annual dinner is a crucial part of this mission, raising much-needed funds for the cutting-edge research conducted at The Miami Project. We are so grateful to our benefactors, our guests, our friends, and all our Legends for their tireless, enthusiastic support. On behalf of my father, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart."

The evening, presented by the Tudor Group and the Mack Family, was chaired by Mark Dalton, hosted by Marc Buoniconti and Miami Project co-founder Barth Green, M.D., and emceed by NBC

Sports personality Cris Collinsworth. The annual dinner benefits The Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis, the fundraising arm of The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis. The Miami Project, a Center of Excellence at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, is the world's premiere spinal cord injury research center.

The many notable guests in attendance included Lindsey Vonn, former World Cup Champion alpine skier and 11-time Olympic Medalist; Harry Carson, Pro Football Hall of Famer, New York Giants; Bob Beamon, 1968 Olympic Gold Medalist and former world record long jumper; Andre "The Hawk" Dawson, Major League Baseball Hall of Famer; Gary Hall Jr., 10-time Olympic medalist and two-time world record holder in swimming; Dick Anderson, former NFL Pro Bowl safety and two-time Super Bowl Champion; Scott Erickson, former MLB pitcher, All Star, and World Series champion; Nat Moore, former NFL wide receiver and Pro Bowler; Amir Arison, film, television and stage actor, currently starring in NBC's "The Blacklist"; Tom Rouen, former NFL punter and All Pro; Colin Egglesfield, actor in "All My Children," "Melrose Place," and "The Client List"; Riki Ellison, former NFL linebacker and three-time Super Bowl Champion; Tammy Pescatelli, stand-up comedian; Adam Kuperstein, Emmy Award-winning journalist and NBC4 New York anchor; Kevin Sorbo, actor, star of "Hercules: The Legendary Journeys"; Aiden Turner, actor known for roles in "The Hobbit" films; Mike Eruzione, captain of the 1980 Olympics U.S. "Miracle on Ice" hockey team; Lesley Visser, sportscaster and first female NFL analyst on TV; Brian Kelley, former pro football star with the New York Giants; Rick Barry, NBA Hall of Famer; Joe Gatto, member of the Impractical Jokers; Mike Dunleavy Jr., former NBA player and current assistant general

manager of the Golden State Warriors; Jill Martin, sportscaster and 10-time Emmy Award winner; Tommy Vigorito, former NFL wide receiver and running back, Miami Dolphins; Brent Qvale, current NFL offensive tackle, New York Jets; Monica Aksamit, saber fencer and 2016 Olympic Bronze Medalist; Jeff Dellenbach, former NFL offensive lineman and Super Bowl champion; and Tom Murro, journalist and television personality.

Since its inception in 1985, the Great Sports Legends Dinner has honored more than 350 sports legends and humanitarians and has raised more than \$120 million for The Miami Project's spinal cord injury research programs. The Miami Project-Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis is committed to finding a cure for paralysis resulting from spinal cord injury and to seeing millions worldwide walk again.

Event sponsors included the Tudor Group and the Mack Family, Mark Dalton, Reed Mack, Carnival Corporation & plc, Carnival Foundation, Micky and Madeleine Arison, Pepe Badia and Badia Spices, Inc., The Gonzalez-Bunster Family, and HBO Sports.