

Basketball Hall of Famer Bill Walton to Lead CONNECT's Sports and Entertainment Innovators organization

The sport and entertainment innovation cluster is more than 600 companies strong in San Diego and a regional economic powerhouse. Yet until now, no trade organization has existed to help young companies in the industry to find funding, source innovation or understand business basics. To help remedy this situation, CONNECT is incubating a new sports and entertainment trade organization. San Diego native and lifelong resident, Bill Walton, who also starred at UCLA and in the NBA, will champion the effort as Executive Chairman.

“Walton and a dynamic team of successful sports and entertainment leaders have mobilized behind this effort. Thanks to their leadership and vision, young companies will now get real expert assistance with the many challenges of the sports and entertainment business economy like financing, consumer buying trends, patent protection, innovation, or outsourcing,” says Duane Roth, CEO, CONNECT.

Walton is building on CONNECT's world-renown success pioneering the growth of San Diego's high tech and life sciences clusters in San Diego over the past 25 years. He's also modeling the effort on CONNECT's successful incubation and spin-out of BIOCOM, CommNexus and most recently CleanTECH San Diego which became independent of CONNECT just two years ago.

“I'm a proud and fortunate native San Diegan. I'm passionately committed to helping local sports and entertainment companies grow and thrive in the competitive global economy. Our local companies need to be the leanest, greenest and cleanest, the most innovative and the smartest to succeed at the highest levels. We're known around the world as the sports and entertainment innovation capital. It's time we bring everything we have to helping these industries. We are here to stay. We plan to play at the highest levels in the biggest of games. We intend to win. We are going to make a difference” said Walton.

Bill Walton's high performance career makes him an ideal champion and spokesperson for CONNECT's Sport and Entertainment Innovation initiative.

Walton sparkled from the very beginning of his basketball career. At Helix High School, the team won most everything, and Walton eventually became the first and ultimately only high school basketball player to ever make the USA Senior Men's National Team and play in either the World Championship or Olympics.

At UCLA, Walton was a member of the record setting and multiple champion Bruins under Coach John Wooden. Those milestones still stand to this very day.

In the NBA, Walton was also a multiple champion, a two-time MVP and was selected as a member of the NBA's All Time Team.

Walton is generally regarded as one of the greatest basketball players ever at all levels.

Following his playing days, Walton enjoyed a stellar broadcasting and media career that lasted nearly two decades. A winner of multiple Emmys, Walton was recently named one of the Top 10 pundits in all broadcast media. He was also selected as one of the Top 20 Sports Business Athlete Representatives. And he was just named one of the 50 Greatest Sportscasters of All Time.

Asked about this resume, and his intentions and goals for CONNECT Sports and Entertainment Innovators, Walton simply stated, “I'm a lucky man.”

CONNECT has recruited a line-up of industry luminaries as advisors to help tailor well established CONNECT programs like Most Innovative New Product Awards, Springboard, CEO Strategy Forum, Venture Roundtable, and Frameworks Entrepreneurial Workshops to the industry's specialized needs. Co-chairs of the group include: Ludo Boinnard, Founder and former CEO, ONE Industries and a off road motocross rally racer, Dana Shertz, former President/COO, MacGregor Golf and former VP Sales at

Callaway Golf and Marco Thompson, Managing Director, Express Ventures, who originally conceived of the effort.

“The sport and entertainment industries are increasingly about innovation and also clean technology wetsuits made of limestone, surf boards out of green foam, golf clubs from composite materials are just a few examples. It’s time we brought together our expertise in high tech with our success in sports and entertainment innovation,” said Thompson who is also Vice Chair of CONNECT.

Other industry luminaries on the board include:

Michael Brower, GM of Power Metal Technologies, Inc., former CFO of Orange 21, the owner of Spy Optic and former GM of Odyssey Golf;

Brian Enge, CEO, Zoot Sports, which was recently acquired by K2 Sports;

Tony Finn, Founder, LiquidForce and inventor of the wakeboard;

Bob Rief, COO, C4 Waterman and Boardworks Surf, former CEO of Sanuk and Reef and former GM of Nike Golf and Merrell Hiking Boots;

John Sarkisian, CEO, SKLZ;

Mark Schmid, CEO of Form Function Technologies and former owner of Syndrome Distribution and Pro Skate Products; National Skateboard Champion (1979); and former Professional Street Skater;

Jim Stroesser, former CEO, Pony; former GM, Quiksilver and Oakley; former Co-Owner, Converse Peter (PT) Townend, CEO, The ActivEmpire, former SIMA President; former Head Coach, USA Surf Team; former Publisher, Primedia Surf Group; First World Champion of Professional Surfing (1976)

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The law firm Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton and Security Business Bank are founding partners of the program. Sheppard Mullin Managing Partner, Richard Kintz serves on the Advisory Board.

About CONNECT

CONNECT is a non-profit organization dedicated to creating and sustaining the growth of innovative technology and life science businesses in San Diego. Since 1985, CONNECT has assisted in the formation and development of over 2,000 companies and is widely regarded as the world's most successful regional program linking inventors and entrepreneurs with the resources they need for success. CONNECT focuses on research institution support, business creation and development, entrepreneurial learning, access to capital, public policy advocacy, awards, recognition and networking. More than 25 countries and regions have adopted the CONNECT model, including the U.K, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Australia, and China.

CONNECT’s Sport and Entertainment company list is available on request. Advisory Board members available for interviews.

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