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By Stephanie Johnson May 05, 2010 - 2:37 PM 0

Astronaut flies Stanley Cup rings into space

PARRY SOUND - Legendary Parry Sounder Bobby Orr has never been to space, but his 1970 and 1972 Stanley Cup rings have.

During the seventh annual Bobby Orr Hall of Fame Inductions, the crowd welcomed a special guest, Canadian astronaut Dr. Robert Thirsk.

Thirsk, a graduate of the University of Calgary and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has been in outer space twice.

The first trip was in 1996 when he flew aboard the space shuttle Columbia with six international crewmembers as part of the Life and Microgravity Spacelab Mission.

In 2009, Thirsk took his second flight to space and was the first Canadian to fly in a long-duration expedition aboard the International Space Station, spending 188 days among the stars.

Thirsk showed home movies of his expedition that included still shots, and talked about some special items that he took along for the ride his first time in space.

"Being an astronaut gives us the opportunity to deploy small objects into space or mementoes. Typically they're rings or medallions or bracelets and I had the opportunity to do so," said Thirsk, who wanted to offer the opportunity to fly an object into space for someone he'd never met – Bobby Orr.

"Just like you and tens of thousands of others who were inspired by Bobby's athletic ability, but also by his personality, integrity, humility and drive to do what is right I wanted to offer this opportunity."

Thirsk called up the legendary NHL star, who at first wanted to send the Stanley Cup.

"I said, 'Oh Mr. Orr, it's got to be a little smaller than that,'" said Thirsk amid the crowd's laughter. "He said, 'Well, could we fly my 1970 Stanley Cup Championship ring?' And I said, that's perfect."

Along with the ring, Orr sent Thirsk his Bruins jersey to fly with him on his journey.

Once in space, Thirsk came up with a brilliant idea for a photo that he presented a copy of to Orr on the stage.

"I had the ring, I had the jersey, and I had weightlessness – so I was able to take this photo," he said showing a photo on the big screen of himself wearing Bobby Orr's Boston Bruins jersey and his 1970 Stanley Cup championship ring, recreating Orr's horizontal leap after he scored the game-winning goal.

On his second flight, Orr sent Thirsk with his 1972 Stanley Cup championship ring, which he returned to him that evening.



Astronaut flies Stanley Cup rings into space. Canadian astronaut Dr. Robert Thirsk shows a photo of himself in space in 1996 reenacting the famous photo of Bobby Orr following the Stanley Cup game winning goal wearing Orr's Boston Bruins jersey and 1970 Stanley Cup ring. *Cody Storm Cooper/North Star*

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