

# Athletes Honored for Taking Their Faith Into Professional Sports Arena

**More than 300 sports figures were on hand for an honorary banquet hosted by Athletes International Ministry**

Sean Michaels, one of professional wrestling's biggest names, stood silently as tears rolled down his face. With all eyes in the Crystal Ballroom focused on him, he revealed that his tears were from joy, not sorrow. His phenomenal success as a wrestler couldn't match his newfound joy in having become a believer in Jesus Christ.

"What I've experienced can't compare to what's in store for me," he told the audience of more than 300 athletes who were gathered in Scottsdale, Ariz., for the 18th annual Athletes International Ministry (AIM) conference in June. Michaels was on the guest list at the four-day conference that read like a Who's Who of sports legends and current stars from the World Wrestling Federation (WWF), the National Football League, and professional rodeo and martial arts associations.

In the midst of all of the activity, Larry Kerychuk watched and proclaimed, "I'm believing for an even larger gathering next year."

Kerychuk, who with his wife, Wendy, founded AIM in 1972, said he got the idea for the ministry after attending a similar conference in Dallas. Watching professional athletes and coaches respond to the gospel fueled his passion for sports ministry.

He estimates that to date more than 7,000 athletes have attended the conference with their families. A look at the list of past award recipients from the gatherings testifies to the growth. Award winners and attendees have included college football coach Bill McCartney, NFL star Reggie White, Dallas Cowboys coach Tom Landry, NBA player David Robinson and heavyweight boxing champ Evander Holyfield.

This year's conference recognized seven honorees: Derrick Harris, who played with the San Diego Chargers, was named NFL Man of the Year; Charli Turner-Thorne, head coach of the PAC 10 champion Arizona State women's basketball team, was Women's Coach of the year; Indiana University basketball head coach Mike Davis was honored as Men's Coach of the Year; Rope Meyers, Pro Rodeo world champion, was Rodeo Champion of the Year; Jim Marshall, a 21-year NFL veteran, received the Hall of Faith Award with Aaron Norris, a martial artist and producer-director—whose brother, Chuck, star of the popular TV show Walker, Texas Ranger, received the Lifetime Achievement Award.

The Norris brothers told how they brought their faith to Hollywood and for eight years were able to share Christian values every Saturday night with the nearly 18 million viewers who watched their show.

"The confirmation of the call in my life happened as a direct result of my involvement with AIM," said former WWF wrestler Ted DiBiase, better known as "The Million Dollar Man."

**Bruce Goolsby in Phoenix**