

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Fri., Aug. 7, 1970

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Old Sport Thrills Recounted In Talk

By NEIL A. MATHESON

I TALKED RECENTLY to the oldest living Island sports writer so far as I know. John (Buller) Murley started sports writing in the Patriot about 1927, so far as he can recall.

He recalls that he played an important part in drumming up public interest for a new skating and hockey rink. That was what we now know as "The Forum", and it was opened in 1930, to the best of my knowledge.

Buller broadcast the first hockey match in this province and it was from The Arena, the then hockey rink in Charlottetown. A new building has been built on the site; it was used as an automobile sales room and garage for some time and it's situated on Fitzroy Street, across from Riteway Cleaners.

Mr. Murley did his first broadcast in 1928 over CFCY which was then located on Great George Street, across from where the Card Shop is now located, or close to that location.

As Buller recalls it now, "I was tickled to death with broadcasting, but after a few years I found I was not good at it."

The words are those of Mr. Murley, not mine.

When I asked him why he thought that way, he said: "Well, I didn't have the voice for it. I used to think faster than I could talk. I'd get tangled up."

He'd Get 'All Wrapped Up'

CONTINUING, HE SAID "I couldn't watch a game like MacAulay (Leman). I'd get too excited. I'd get wrapped up in the game too much. Very much so."

Then as he thought about it, Mr. Murley thought about it and said "I think a little of that is alright. For instance, do you remember Charlie Dougan (Dr. Dougan) when he was broadcasting the horse races here?" he asked me.

"This chap that broadcasts now is good, this Ed Watters. He's really good," Buller observed warmly.

But everyone in the stands knew that Dougan was crazy about horses, and he'd really put himself in it.

Laughingly, Buller observed: "Dougan was in it up to his neck. He wasn't a better announcer. But he had that life in him.

"Dougan not only knew every horse on the track, he knew what the horse had that morning for breakfast."

Broadcast At Amherst

BULLER CAME TO Amherst with me one time to broadcast a junior hockey match between our team and Amherst St. Pats. That was back in the 1930's, the middle Thirties I think.

I cannot remember the name of the team, but I do remember that Reg Flannagan played on it. The St. Pats had been a power in Maritime junior hockey for several years, but our team whipped them that night, just as they had done here two nights previously.

Buller was active in boosting junior hockey in his days as a sports writer. So he knows the difficulties junior club executives experienced in those years. Incidentally he has warm words of praise for the way our present chaps handle the Junior Islanders. "They surely do a good job."

I was secretary of the junior hockey club at the time in the 1930's. All winter we couldn't draw enough fans to pay for the rink rental and pucks. Then our team met St. Pats in the opening stages of the Maritime playdown and whipped them convincingly.

I was writing the game next morning at my desk at the Patriot office on Richmond Street, when Bill Gillespie walked in and said: "Tiny, will you go to Amherst tomorrow and broadcast the game for us?"

Looking at him in amazement, I asked "where are you going to get the money? All winter we haven't been able to pay our way, not even on the everyday expenses."

'We'll Get The Money'

BILL CAME BACK with "You go to Amherst for us and we'll look after the money part of it."

Overnight the town had awakened. They realized the caliber of the team and they were ready to back them all the way.

I believe that the Silver Foxes was the name of the first good junior hockey team we had here. Mr. Murley was the secretary and he recalls that the Levin Fur Company financed them.

That was long after the real boom days of foxes here, but there were still a lot of foxes on the Island and Levin Fur was one of the companies buying fox pelts.

As Buller recalls it, the Silver Foxes played Moncton in the Maritime finals and beat them. The Moncton club had Gordon Drillon, a chap who was later to star with the Toronto Maple Leafs. One of things I recall about Drillon was that he scored the winning goal in a Stanley Cup final against Boston Bruins once.

I saw him a week or ten days later and asked if it had been a tremendous thrill. His reply was surprising but understandable.

"No", he said, "there was dead silence in the Boston rink.

"For a minute I thought there was something wrong, that they were going to disallow the goal."

Back to Buller and the promotion of what turned out to be The Forum, I asked what it cost. He does not recall. I don't either, but the amount of \$35,000 sticks in my mind.

Of course building was cheap then. Labor was 35 cents an hour, a carpenter got 55 cents Mr. Murley recalls. "Building materials were dirt cheap."

Earle Baker's father built The Forum, Mr. Murley added. "He was a good man."

We reminisced a bit about the big-time hockey teams that played in The Forum back in the Thirties. There was a big six that included Moncton, Fredericton, Dalhousie, Bathurst, Charlottetown, and I believe the other team was St. John, though I cannot be sure of that.

I started newspapering as a sportswriter in November, 1932. The Big Six was before that time.

Remember The Hawks?

FOR YOUNGER readers we had a Big Three of Halifax, Charlottetown (?) and the Moncton Hawks in the middle Thirties. Moncton won the Allan Cup – it was the big trophy in hockey at the time – two years in a row. The Halifax Wolverines won it a year or so later.

Buller recalled that Percy Nicklin coached the Hawks to their Allan Cup victories. Later the same year Nicklin got a team together in England that won the Olympic title. In goal for him was Jimmy Foster, the man who goaled the Hawks to the two Allan Cup wins.

I asked Buller about the hot, and at times bitter rivalry that existed between the Charlottetown Abegweits and the Summerside Crystals back in the 1920's. Special trains loaded with fans went to Summerside when the Abbies played there. The Summerside fans came to Charlottetown when their team played here.

Exploded In 1931

THAT RIVALRY exploded in 1931 as memory tells me. The rivalry got so hot that the final game for the Island championship was taken to Moncton, something that never happened here before or since.

The Crystals won the game and the score was not close. Memory tells me that it was 6 to 1. Buller agrees with me, though we could be out a goal either way.

Recalling that the Abbies never lost a game in Maritime competition in the years 1922 and 1923, I asked Mr. Murley if any of the players were paid in those days. Buller tells me some of them probably were paid, though the money in those times never did even begin to compare with figures that developed later. The ones that got paid "might get \$15 or \$20 a week". At least that was what was rumored at the time.

I am running out of space, I fear, so I'll have to leave the rest of my chat with Buller for a later column. He had many interesting reminiscences. I'll pass them on to you.