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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Reader Gives Assist On Hockey History

By NEIL MATHESON

A READER wrote me a few days ago saying that it was Campbellton and not Saint John as I had suggested that was the sixth team in the Big Six Hockey league in 1931 – 32.

I know little personally about the Big Six Hockey League as I did not see any of the games. That was in depression years, my cash was short, so I couldn't afford major hockey prices.

Dalhousie Rangers won the Big Six, the reader says, and tells me that Frankie Lavigne and Frank Graham were the Dalhousie defense, and they moved to Halifax next year. J.B. Murley had told me about Graham and Lavigne being with Dalhousie in the Big Six.

Next year it was a Big Four – I was sports writing then – and Saint John was the fourth team along with Halifax, Moncton and Charlottetown.

I agree with our reader that the Moncton Hawks could have won the Allan Cup the third straight year – they did win it twice – so far as Halifax opposition was concerned. But fan interest fell off sharply in Moncton and the Hawks disbanded.

Allan Cup Team Here

I AGREE with several local people to whom I talked recently that Charlottetown really had an Allan Cup caliber team lined up here at the start of that season.

I remember, for instance, the forward line of Ray Gettiffe, Joffre Desilets and Nic Brenneman that was outstanding. Gettiffe had a really good NHL career later, and Desilets also made the NHL, though I cannot recall his record.

I recall only a few of the names but on defense we had "Des" Smith who also made the NHL later.

But a man called "Gilroy" was president of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association at the time, and he cracked down on Charlottetown's imports, and this wiped out a chance for us to see one of the best teams of that time.

We have to admit that Gilroy was technically correct, as Branch-Branch transfers laws were not complied with one hundred percent.

That Olympic Team Row

MY READER also recalls that after Halifax had won the Allan Cup in 1935, they did not represent Canada at the Olympic Games in 1936 though Allan Cup winners did represent Canada in Olympic games almost automatically at the time.

Halifax players, older readers will recall, wanted money to look after their families while they were overseas. The CAHA refused to allow this, so they sent a team combined of other Canadian players. Some were from the Montreal Royals, defeated

the previous year by Halifax in the Allan Cup semi-finals; others were from other Canadian clubs.

I recall a most interesting session in a Halifax Hotel over that row in 1936. The Maritimes put up a kick and the MAHA executive met with the chief CAHA spokesman in Halifax, the night before the Olympic team sailed for overseas. Memory tells me that Fred Marples was the CAHA man present. He was going overseas with the team.

Jimmy Wry was the president of the MAHA at the time. I was on the executive from P.E.I. – and we wanted to talk with the manager of the Olympic team.

We were told that he was sick, but we learned that he was sailing with the Olympic team next morning so we insisted on seeing him.

Memory is hazy as to our conversation with the team manager. His best answer, as I recall it, was that he was not mainly responsible – it was the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association that had made the team selections.

I do recall that a concerted effort was made to get Mr. Marples drinking enough liquor to get his tongue loose. But that effort also failed. The veteran CAHA man was too foxy.

About all we on the MAHA executive could do was to ask all the embarrassing questions we could, and raise all the heck we could at the same time.

Issue Was Boiling

THE CAHA had made its decision and it was sticking with it. The time was too late for any meaningful action anyway, as the team was sailing next day. But the issue was boiling in the Maritimes, and Mr. Wry felt that we should at least give those responsible a grilling.

My most vivid recollection is that I did not get to sleep that night. The train bearing the hockey team to Halifax was late, very late, and it was the early hours of the morning before the Olympic team manager arrived.

It was a very sleepy group that met at the station that morning as we headed for our respective homes.

Halifax won the Allan Cup in 1935. Moncton had won it the two previous years.

After the crack Charlottetown team – mostly imports – had been ousted by Gilroy, the Moncton fans refused to support what was left in the league, even though they still had a great team of their own. So the powerful Hawks were broken up.

The Wolverines managed to hang on – we had a team of our own that gave them a terrific fight in the league final – but Halifax didn't make money, any more than Charlottetown or any of the other centres.

Tremendous Task

RUNNING THAT kind of hockey team was a tremendous task financially especially in a centre where we had so few fans to draw on as Charlottetown. If that hockey left some lean pocket books here – and it did – the other centres suffered similar fates, even though they were larger and had many more fans on which to draw.

That old Big Six league comprised Halifax, Bathurst, Moncton, Dalhousie and Campbellton, along with Charlottetown. It operated 1931-32.

My only regret is that "reader" did not sign his name.

Your letter was most interesting, newsy and helpful. If you will, drop me a line with your name, and telephone, or street address. I shall get in touch with you. I am sure that you have more interesting data on hockey teams and games in the past.