

An Olympic Wedding. Those other Olympic rings:
A day after the 1948 Games ended, Canadian hockey player Hubert Brooks got hitched, and Barbara Ann Scott was there to see it. How everything fell into place for a special ceremony in Switzerland



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A hockey-stick honour guard is formed by players from the RCAF Flyers for the wedding of team member Hubert Brooks to Birthe (Bea) Grontved at St. Moritz, Switzerland, on Feb. 9, 1948.

PHOTO: Hubert Brooks Private Collection

If a childhood road hockey friend of Rocket Richard hadn't es-

caped from German POW camps and fought with Polish forces and met a Danish Red Cross worker and fallen in love ...

And if the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association hadn't revolted against an International Olympic Committee ruling on "amateurism" by announcing this country wouldn't send a men's hockey team to the 1948 Winter Games ...

And if Ottawa-based Royal Canadian Air Force medical officer Dr. Alexander "Sandy" Watson hadn't decided the RCAF could form its own squad to send to St. Moritz, Switzerland ...

And if the former POW hadn't survived the tryouts ...

Then Barbara Ann Scott might not have had the chance to be a bridesmaid in Switzerland and Ralf Brooks might not be spending winter in the Florida sunshine.

Really.

Having met in the American zone of post-war Germany while he was with the Missing Research and Inquiries Service and she was with the Red Cross, Hubert Brooks and Birthe (Bea) Grontved had talked about marriage, but they remained unwed and apart in the fall of 1947; he had returned to Canada.

"All the while, he was trying to get her to come over to Canada from Europe," Ralf Brooks, the couple's son, said last week. "Apparently, at the time, it wasn't quick or easy to bring people over. But he had been trying for six months to actually get her over to Canada. It just hadn't happened."

This was where the CAHA, IOC and Sandy Watson created an opportunity, though. Brooks not only volunteered to try out for the Flyers, but also made the roster. That got him a free trip back to Europe.

Because of pre-tournament exhibition games and the Olympics themselves, marrying before the Winter Games wasn't possible, but the couple developed a plan: The ceremony would be Feb. 9, one day after the closing ceremony, right in St. Moritz, Switzerland, the host city for the Games.

The defending world figure skating champion from Ottawa, Scott had performed an exhibition between periods of an Olympic Night fundraising game in the nation's capital that generated funding that helped get the Flyers to Europe. Along with winning her own gold medal in St. Moritz, she was an avid and noticeable supporter for the Flyers, as they were for her, and she had come to know Birthe through another figure skater.

So, somewhere between winning the women's skating gold, watching the Flyers' 3-0 gold-clinching victory against Switzerland and travelling to Davos, Switzerland, to defend her world title, Scott accepted an invitation to serve as maid of honour for the wedding. Watson was the best man. News agencies transmitted photos of the wedding party, including one of the groom kissing the maid of honour while the amused bride looked on.



Bride Birthe (Bea) Brooks, left, Hubert Brooks, maid of honour Barbara Ann Scott and best man Dr. Sandy Watson.HUBERT BROOKS PRIVATE COLLECTION. / OTTWP

"I spoke to her just before she died," Ralf Brooks said of Scott, who passed away in September 2012 at age of 84, "and she remembered (the wedding) and my mother. She said they had great fun when they were over there."

Hubert Brooks' father had died a few years earlier and the family wasn't rich, so his mother couldn't attend, either, but the Flyers did, in full uniform. Brooks' teammates formed an honour guard, holding hockey sticks over the couple's heads outside the chapel.

After that, the Flyers headed out on another European tour, needing to play another series of contests from which their cut of proceeds would cover costs for the return trip to Canada. Honeymooning Hubert Brooks missed a couple of days at the start of the tour and more games at the end while with his new wife in Copenhagen, but they met up with the rest of the squad in London and boarded the RMS Queen Mary for the overseas voyage to New York. From there, it was a train ride back to Ottawa.

"The marriage over there made it so much easier for my mother to come back to Canada," Ralf Brooks said. "I mentioned that my father had been trying, but the very fact that they had been married, then there was no problem in bringing her back to Canada."

Maybe, probably, Hubert Brooks and Birthe Grontved would have married anyway, but capitalizing on the opportunity for a post-Olympic ceremony in Switzerland in February 1948 sent their lives together on a path that they might not have taken otherwise.

The additions to the family included not only Ralf, but also sisters Diana and Brenda. Hubert also resumed his Canadian military career, rising to the rank of wing commander with postings around the world. He was Canada's representative on the ground in the Middle East immediately after the Six-Day War in 1967, and the federal government tapped him for duty in Quebec during the October Crisis in 1970.

He retired from the military in 1971 and became director of housing at the University of Ottawa, where he had a heart attack at his desk and died on Feb. 1, 1984. A residence building on campus bears the Brooks name in his honour. Bea Brooks passed away on June 14, 2001.

Hubert Brooks' Olympic stats line was, it could be noted, blank. He was one of the Black Aces, a handful of reserves who, even though they would receive gold medals, played in no games because active rosters comprised only a goaltender and 10 skaters.

"No, my father was not openly bitter about it. Essentially he was saying, 'We won as a team,'" said Ralf Brooks, who maintains a detailed website in tribute to his father, hubertbrooks.com. "(Coach Frank Boucher) could only dress a certain number of players and, in his estimation, these were the best guys for the job, and he turned out to be right."