



by Eddie MacCabe

A look back at '48 Flyers

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Well, in those days, Russia was not in international hockey and prior to the Olympic tournament, the Czechs were favored. And we didn't beat them, but we did play them to a scoreless tie and won the Olympic gold on the goals for and against.

It can be argued that the intense international rivalry had not developed then along ideological lines. That came with Russia's emergence as a hockey power.

But it was still an Olympics, and the RCAF Flyers were raked and scored in Canada before ever going overseas, and they were shaken again when, on the eve of their departure from Ottawa, their goaltender, Dick Ball from Toronto, failed to pass the medical test. Murray Dowey, from a mercantile league in Toronto, was brought in as a last minute replacement.

They sailed on the Queen Elizabeth, landed at Southampton, had one day's "walking out" and then took the ice against Streatham, an English club staffed largely by Canadians. Streatham tied them 5 to 5 and a few days later, the Flyers lost an exhibition game to Le Racing Club de Paris, 5 to 3, and that club too, was made up of Canadians. So now the critics were at the full bellow and while international hockey then did not stir the national corpuscles into a foam as it does now, they were in a situation of mounting pressure.

Strong area flavor

They were largely an Ottawa gang, with Reg Schroeter, Ted Hibberd, Ab Renaud, Frank Dunster, Patsy Guzzo, Louis Lecompte, Orval Gravelle all from the area, along with coach Frank Boucher Jr., and general manager was Sqdn. Ldr. Sandy Watson, still practising ophthalmology here.

The others included goaltender Dowey, Pete Leitchnitz, Ross King, Irving Taylor, Roy Forbes, Andre Lapierre, Hubert Brooks, Andy Gilpin, Wally Halder and George Mara, with trainer George McFaul, the latter an Ottawa man.

From Paris they went to Switzerland and beat the Swiss 6 to 3 in Zurich, playing in the rain on an outdoor sheet. Then they lost another exhibition to the Swiss in Basel, 8 to 5, and all the while the Olympic scene was chaotic because our skiers and speedskaters were on starvation rations.

They played another exhibition game in Switzerland, in Davos, and whopped them 10 to 3 and the Olympics were torn by a bitter wrangle in the ranks of the Americans. The Americans had sent two hockey teams, one from the United States Amateur Hockey Association and one from the United States Olympic Association.

Avery Brundage sided with the Olympic Association team, claiming the other club was tainted by being in league with professionals. But the Swiss accepted the Amateur Association team and the Olympic pooh bahs withdrew Olympic recognition from the hockey on the eve of the tournament.

Nice, social atmosphere

But the teams were all there, the Swiss people had the gold medals and they announced they'd present them with or without official recognition, and so they pressed on. Sandy Watson said at the time that the world would recognize the winners as Olympic champions, and so the political infighting by officials was being ignored.

The Czechs were heavily favored to win, with the Swiss second and Canada third. The Flyers beat Sweden in the first game, 3 to 1, on goals by Mara from Guzzo, Halder from Renaud, and Schroeter from Lecompte. That game ended on a note of confusion when Canadian goalie Murray Dowey was penalized for throwing his stick and the Flyers finished the last few seconds with a defenceman, Andre Lapierre, in nets.

Then Canada beat Poland 15 to 0 with Schroeter scoring three times. That was a friendly canter for the Canadians. On one occasion, a Polish player got a clean breakaway from his own end. He was caught and derailed by the time he hit centre ice.

Then the Flyers shut out Britain, 3 to 0, in a snowstorm, on goals by Schroeter, Mara and Halder, and the Brits were the defending champions, having won the previous Games title in 1936.

Nat 'big time' conditions

The Flyers then defeated Italy 21 to 1 with Mara and Halder, two Toronto guys, scoring five each. Hibberd and Guzzo scored three apiece, Schroeter got two, Renaud, Dunster and Gravelle once each. And this little waltz was played before a throng (?) of 75 fans in St. Moritz.

In their next outing, Canada beat the States 12 to 3, and the Americans managed only 13 shots on the Canadian net, and so Canada was tied on top with the Swiss and the Czechs.

But the Canadians had been expected to win these early games. They were now coming up to the big test against the Czechs, and the star of the Czechoslovakian team was Jaroslav Drobny, who was also a Davis Cup tennis player.

The experts still were calling Canada for third, with the Czechs rated as heavy favorites and Coach Frank Boucher was still saying his team was adjusting to the altitude, and that he was "confident they'll give a good account of themselves."

Coaches talked like that in those days.

But we're running out of space so we'll finish tomorrow.



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