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Hockey in the Yukon (1905-1960s)

e-Conversations with Les McLaughlin & Sherron, and prior submissions to MocTel, started the idea of this Special Hockey Edition. I offered to serve as editor, so Sherron suggested that I put it together. It is not a comprehensive account. We can only tell the history of hockey in the Yukon through the photographs & newspaper clippings on hand. We hope you all enjoy it. – Ralph Lortie

Hockey in Dawson 1905-1930s

Dawson City Nuggets, 1905



(Photo & background courtesy of Yukon Sports Hall of Fame).

The **Dawson City Nuggets** Hockey Team was inducted to the Hall of Fame for its contribution to the sport of hockey in the early twentieth century.

The team that was formed from the Dawson City Klondikers Hockey Club, challenged the **Ottawa Silver Seven Stanley Cup Champions** to a game in the 1903-04 season. Under old Stanley Cup rules, once a team won the cup, they could take challenges for the next season. The Dawson City challenge was accepted and two games were played on January 13 and 16, 1905 in Ottawa. Although the Nuggets were no match for the Ottawa team, their tenacious spirit and long journey from the Klondike made this team worthy Hall of Famers. It took the team 23 days and cost \$30,000 to travel east to play their challenge.

Editor's note: the man front & centre in the photo is **Joseph Whiteside Boyle (1867-1923)**, aka Klondike Joe Boyle. Boyle financed & managed the team on this historic quest. For more about Joe Boyle, his role in Dawson & WW I, read *The Sourdough & the Queen*, by Leonard W. Taylor. For any other Joe Boyle fans, I have photos of his burial monument in Woodstock, ON.

Dawson City team, 1930s (*photo previously in MocTel 18, courtesy of Vivian Stuart, Bunny Lelievre's daughter.*)



L to R: Myers Samuelson, unknown, unknown, Bunny Lelievre, unknown, John Dines, Helmer Samuelson.

For somewhat better images, click on [DawsonCityNuggets1905](#) and [DawsonCityteam1930s](#)

Hockey in Whitehorse 1948 - 1964

GILPIN GETS THE GOLD

By Les McLaughlin

(first appeared in the Whitehorse Star in 1998, the 50th anniversary of the Olympic gold medal)

When Sergeant Andy Gilpin was transferred to the Whitehorse Air Force base in March of 1947, he could hardly have imagined the roller coaster ride he was about to join and Olympic glory was the certainly the last thing on his mind.

"I didn't want to go to Whitehorse because I had a wife and two young daughters and was just getting comfortable in Pat Bay on Vancouver Island," says Gilpin from his retirement home in Grand Bend, Ontario. "But my Commanding Officer said I should try it. And if it didn't work out, he said he'd do something for me. He also told me there was a very good brand of hockey being played in Whitehorse."

Ross King, a goaltender who had played for the Portage LaPrairie Junior team when they won the Memorial Cup, was also transferred to Whitehorse in March of 1947. Gilpin had played Junior A hockey in Montreal. Len Beech was a local hockey star who had played for the Whitehorse RCAF Flyers the previous year.

"One day in the early fall of '47, a bunch of us had a pickup game on a frozen pond. I was surprised at the number of good players out on that pond," says Gilpin. "Len Beech told me about the high calibre of play in the Whitehorse Senior Hockey League. I began to like Whitehorse a

little more after hearing that."

But the only rink in town was an outdoor facility at the base.

"I told Len I hadn't played outdoors since I was a kid and wasn't sure I wanted to go back to that," laughs Gilpin. "So we went to the C.O. and asked if we could put an ice surface inside one of the hangers. He said Ok, but we'd have to do it ourselves on our own time."

Thus Len Beech and Andy Gilpin began shaping the first indoor hockey rink in Whitehorse in Air Force Hanger B.

"We hauled sawdust from a sawmill down the Alaska Highway and spread it over the concrete floors. Then we built the sideboards and some carpenters at the base helped us put up the stands. We were just getting ready to flood the sawdust, when we got a call from the C.O."

That call would be the beginning of an unforgettable adventure for Andy Gilpin, Len Beech and Ross King.

In the summer of 1947, the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association had decided not to send a hockey team to the upcoming Winter Olympic Games in Switzerland in 1948 because they couldn't find a team which would be good enough and still meet the strict new Olympic rules governing amateur players. At headquarters in Ottawa, the Air Force stepped forward and said it could put together a team, which would be amateur and would be good.

"I hadn't heard anything about this until we went to see the C.O.," recalls Gilpin.

The RCAF Flyers - Canada's designated Olympic team - were holding tryouts for players from airbases across the country. The Commanding Officer said he wanted King, Beech and Gilpin to go to a one-day tryout camp in Edmonton.

"I didn't want to go because I had just brought my family to Whitehorse and was building a house up the hill. At the time, we were living in a small shack downtown with no running water. Just like everyone else."

But the C.O. said they'd only be gone three days. So the three airmen boarded a plane and joined the large group of would be Olympians at the Edmonton tryout camp.

"They came from all over western Canada, says Gilpin, The ice was packed with players."

When the day ended, three players were selected to go to Ottawa where the main tryout camp was being held. They were Gilpin, King and Beech.

"They put us on the train the next day. I didn't know what to do now except call my wife in Whitehorse and tell her I'd be back after we got finished with the tryouts in Ottawa."

More than 75 Air force hockey players went thru the revolving door of the Ottawa tryout camp. When the final team was announced in early December of 1947, the three players from Whitehorse, Andy Gilpin, Len Beech and Ross King were among the 17 survivors of the gruelling two-month training camp.

"I was really worried about my wife and kids back in Whitehorse," recalls Gilpin, "but the C.O. said they'd be well-taken care of. He even got some of the guys at the base to finish our house up the hill."

The first exhibition match featuring Canada's newly minted Olympic team, the RCAF Flyers, was against the McGill Redmen, a university team from Montreal. Played in front of the RCAF brass, CAHA officials, and six thousand fans, the game was a disaster. The Air force lost 7-0.

Press reports had not been very favourable when the team was being assembled. But after this thrashing by a hodge -podge collection of University students, they got worse.

"The folly of putting together a hurriedly organized team of Airmen has now become apparent," raged an editorial in the Ottawa Citizen. Changes to the team had to be made and made quickly.

Five ex-Airmen from the Ottawa area were called in to bolster the team. Len Beech, who had made the original team, was cut. Andy Gilpin maintains Beech was one of the best players and still doesn't really know why he was axed. But Gilpin and King remained.

"Canada shouldn't expect very much of our Olympic hockey team," said the Ottawa Journal as the players rode the train to New York on January 8th, 1948 to catch the boat for Europe. By this time, Andy Gilpin's three-day trip to Edmonton had become a three-month odyssey and counting.

After playing a few exhibition games in England, the RCAF Flyers headed for St. Moritz, Switzerland. The Olympic Hockey round robin began on January 30th with a game against Sweden, which was picked as one of the top three teams along with Czechoslovakia and Switzerland. Neither Gilpin nor King were in the lineup.

"By Olympic rules, we could only dress 10 of our 17 players plus the goaltender, so the coach Frank Boucher picked a starting line-up and said he would change it only if we lost," remembers Gilpin. "I was disappointed, but we went over as a team and won or lost as a team."

To the surprise of the hockey world, the RCAF Flyers didn't lose. When the tournament ended, Canada had a record of seven wins and one tie. They won the Olympic gold medal over Czechoslovakia on the basis of a better goals for and against record.

"I was elated," says Gilpin. "There was a lot of pressure on us because of the bad press we got back in Canada. No one expected us to win, but we did. We won it as a team."

The RCAF Flyers were now the darlings of the European hockey circuit. They played 42 exhibition games before a total crowd of 250 thousand people, winning 31 games. Gilpin recalls getting a goal and two assists when they beat the Czech national team 5 - 2 in Prague. Ross King was in goal.

On April 8th, 1948, the RCAF Flyers returned to Canada to heroes welcome and a parade thru the streets of downtown Ottawa.

"But I wasn't sure I was going to be a hero in Whitehorse," says Andy Gilpin. "I'd been gone from my family for six months."

When King and Gilpin arrived back in Whitehorse, the entire station, including his wife and family and a lot of townspeople came out to see them and their Olympic gold medals.

"I wasn't sure I'd have a wife when I got back, but our house was built and the family was really happy to see me, " laughs Gilpin.

Andy Gilpin, Len Beech and Ross King all played for the RCAF Flyers in Whitehorse during the 48-49 season. And they played inside, in the hanger where they had installed the ice surface the year before.

"It was great hockey in Whitehorse. The biggest rivalry was between the Air force and the Town Merchants. If we won a game against them, we didn't dare go downtown because no one would serve us."

"We beat the Merchants 6 - 5 in the final playoff game to win the 1949 league championship. It was good, fast, clean hockey."

In March of 1949, Andy Gilpin was transferred to the St. Hubert base in Quebec. His prowess as a hockey player was now well known in Airforce circles. He was in demand and in those days, good hockey players were often transferred because of their hockey skills.

"I didn't want to leave Whitehorse. Neither did my wife. My third daughter had just been born there. We really liked it. One day, I'd like to go back and see what the hockey is like now."

When he does go back, Andy Gilpin will bring with him an Olympic gold medal won in 1948 when this hockey player from Whitehorse left home for three days and returned six months later to a heroes welcome.

Whitehorse RCAF Flyers 1952- 53

Photo & player names courtesy of MaryAnn (Laurin) Kelleway



Back Row: F.O. Ray Charlton, L.A.C. Ned Rainboth, L.A.C. Cliff Green, Cpl. Morris Cloutier, Cpl George Legault, Cpl. Bob Barnard, L.A.C. Don McCoaeye, F/S. Rod Simms

Front Row: L.A.C. Al Piper, L.A.C. Chuck "Junior" Hume, Sgt. Oscar Kleppe, Cpl. Roy Goodhue, F/S. Bud Laurin, L.A.C. Syd "Shaky" Thayer, Cpl. Beu Cameron, L.A.C. Danny Daniels, L.A.C. Art Truscott.

Whitehorse Merchants 1954 *(previously shown in MocTel 9)*



FRONT ROW: Lloyd Camray (coach), -----, Jim (Red) Hunter, -----, Garth Langford (goalie), -----, Don Drew, Wally Choptain, and Sam McClimon.

BACK ROW: Joe Bodnar (coach), Len Kerr ?, -----, -----, Bob Frigon.
(George Aylwin, Manager, not in the photo)

Thanks to Dan Vars for help on some players' names, in both photos.

For larger images, click on [Airforce1952_53](#) and [Merchant1954](#)

More Flyers Hockey Photos

[Hume-Laurin-McCooeye](#)

Left to Right: Chuck Hume, Bud Laurin, Don McCooeye

[Kleppe-Goodhue-Cloutier](#)

Left to Right: Oscar Kleppe, Roy Goodhue, Morris Cloutier

[Airforce-Army game](#)

Left to Right: Flyers – Oscar Kleppe, Roy Goodhue, Bud Laurin in goal.
Guitard of Army at Centre.

Dan Vars has also reminded me of another team of this period, and some of its players.

LEGION 1955-56

Paul Bernard, Jack Cook, John Jellicoe, Ken Bowman, Dave Friesen (goalie), Len Kerr.

Airforce, ca. 1957 (R.Lortie photo)



I recall the names of only a few players here. The tall man over the goalie's left shoulder was **'Dez' Desembrini**. At far right of the back row is **Bob Clark**. The man between the goalie & the captain(C) is **Lionel 'Nel' Bergeron** (Wendy Walford's father). A lot of help on names is needed here.

Army, ca. 1957 (R.Lortie photo)



BACK Row: -----, ? Kosowan, ? Walin. Far right- Bill? Craig (a Mountie).

FRONT Row: 'Mitch' Mitchell, Norm Becker, Leo Macdonald, -----, -----, -----, Rocky Hebert, -----, -----.

Thanks to Dan Vars for help on some players' names.

For larger images, click on [Airforce ca.1957](#) and [Army ca.1957](#)

Whitehorse Merchants 1956-57 (R.Lortie photo)



BACK Row: Jerry Fromme, Willie Nicholson, Al Lortie, Vin Taylor, Danny Vars, Billy Jordan, Mike Scott, Al Norrington, Eddie MacKay.

FRONT Row: Doug Solonick (stickboy), Scotty Munro, Len Kerr, Don Hagen, Gerry Guerin.

For a larger image, click on [Merchants1957](#)

[these photos might be in reverse sequence]

Whitehorse Merchants 1957-58 (R.Lortie photo)



BACK Row: -----, Jim King, Danny Vars, Al Lortie, Henri Chaisson, Mike Scott, -----.

MIDDLE Row: Willie Nicholson, Billy Jordan, Al Norrington, -----, Vin Taylor.

FRONT Row: Lorne Scott, Gerry Guerin, Len Kerr, Don Hagen, Scotty Munro, Bud MacLean, Doug Solonick (stickboy).

For a larger image, click on [Merchants1958](#)

Whitehorse Merchants 1958-59 (R.Lortie photo)



BACK Row: Roy Reber, George Aylwin, Lorne Vance, Boyd White, Willie Nicholson, Bud MacLean, Len Kerr, Henri Chaisson, John Carswell, Jim King, -----?, Scotty Munro.
FRONT Row : Billy Jordan, Vin Taylor, Don Hagen, Al Norrington, Les McLaughlin.
Stick boys: Ralph Lortie & Benny Sheardown.

Whitehorse Merchants 1959-60 (R.Lortie photo)



BACK Row: Scotty Munro, Jack Kreitzer (injured goalie), Lorne ?, Stewart White, Len Kerr, Gordie Bond, Ken McKinnon, Larry? Krismer, -----, Ralph Lortie, -----.
FRONT Row: Henri Chaisson, --?--(Army? goalie borrowed for finals), Bud MacLean.
Stickboy: ? **Not in photo:** Roy Reber (coach).

For a larger images, click on [Merchants1959](#) and [Merchants1960](#)

Bud MacLean, Don Hagen & Henri Chaisson, Merchants '59 (R.Lortie photo)



Vin Taylor, Len Kerr & Les McLaughlin, Merchants '59 (R.Lortie photo)



For larger images, click on [Bud Don Henri](#) and [Vin Len Les](#)

Dan Vars has also provided me with some of the names of another team of this period.

Dawson & Hall

Al Adams, Fred Howard, Jack Simpson, Clare Chaisson, Pierre Choquette, Norm Broeren (sp?), Danny Vars, Father Basil Studer, Paul Lucier (coach).

MINOR HOCKEY

Minor hockey consisted of two leagues, Midget (for ~ 8-12 year-olds) and Juvenile (for 13-18 yrs), both with 4 teams. The Midget teams were Kiwanis, Nelson's Pipebenders (Matt Nelson team), Capitals (Sam McClimon team), and one more which I can't recall. Juvenile teams were Whitehorse Beverages (briefly), Lions, later CYO (Catholic Youth Org.), and others I don't remember.

Crests from my old hockey uniforms or jackets:

Midget [KIWANIS](#) '54-55, **Juvenile** [LIONS](#) '58-59, **Senior** [MERCHANTS](#) '58-59 & '60-61

Whitehorse Beverages 1956-57, Juvenile League *(R.Lortie photo)*



Back row: Lawrence Seeley (Sponsor), Mike Scott, Al Fromme, Greg Lyslo, Al Norrington, John Carswell, Stan Wilcox, Dick Carswell (Coach).

Front Row: Jay Amor, Ralph Lortie, Grant Lortie, Wayne Lee, Neil Campbell.

For a larger image, click on [WhseBev1957](#)

Trophy Winners, 195? *(Les McLaughlin photo)*



BACK Row: Willie Nicholson, Al Norrington, Al Fromme, Dan Vars.

FRONT Row: Don Murray, Doug Wood.

Of course, in those days, all these lads were known as Alan, Danny, Donnie, etc.

For a larger image, click on [Trophy Winners](#)

(Back to the '60s)

YPC Knights ca.1964- *courtesy of Jim Perry*



BACK: Kerry Vars, Bill Bowker, Bert Perry, Howie Firth, Doug Graham, Les Weiss, Wayne White.

FRONT: Len Kerr, Gordie Bond, Jim Perry, ----?

University of Alaska 1964 *(from Anchorage Daily Times)*



In 1964, the U of A team included two Whitehorse lads, **Benny Sheardown** (front left) & **Dave Carter** (goalie). Another young man from Whitehorse, **Jim Perry**, joined the team in 1966. Several others followed. For a larger image, click on [UofA 1964](#)

University of Alaska 1969



Player-coach **Jim Perry** presents U of A - MVP trophy to **Ben Sheardown**.

For a larger image, and to read caption, click on [Jim & Benny](#)

More newspaper clippings & photos of Whitehorse lads on University of Alaska Nanooks hockey teams can be seen by clicking on the following links:

[U of A team 1966](#)

[U of A team 1969](#)

[Jim, Dan & Dan 1968](#)

[Jim & Bert Perry 1969-70](#)

[U of A team 1970-71](#)

[Jim Perry instructs](#) while

[Ken Jones listens](#)

[Mike Newton rests feet](#) and

[Vin Taylor takes lemon](#)

Editor's note: Many thanks to Jim Perry for all of these terrific items, except for the 1964 Anchorage Daily Times clipping, which I somehow acquired long ago. All of this U of A material is important to me because of the hundreds, if not thousands, of hours I spent playing hockey, basketball, and softball with Jim, Ben and Dave, while growing up in Whitehorse. - R Lortie

One Product of Hockey in Whitehorse

[I hope you don't mind if I blow my own horn]

Melville Millionaires, SJHL 1961-62 (R.Lortie photo)



I've been told that I was the first Whitehorse kid to make a Junior A hockey team. A few other boys probably could have done it too, if they had tried out for the right team in the right league. Nevertheless, it says a lot about the level of hockey in Whitehorse back in the '50s.

UBC Thunderbirds, 1963 (from the Kingston Whig-Standard)



The UBC Thunderbirds, coached by Father David Bauer, won the Western Canadian university championship in 1963 & went to Canada's first National Collegiate Hockey Championship in Kingston, Ontario. In the first game against Sherbrooke College (Quebec), I scored two goals, and we won 6-2. In the final, I scored one goal, but we lost 3-2 to the McMaster Marlins.

For larger images of above photos, please click on: [Melville 1961](#) and [UBC 1963](#)

Crest from my old Melville jacket [Sask. Jr. League Millionaires 1961-62](#)

If you'd like to see more of the UBC Thunderbirds, click on [Thunderbirds '62-63](#) and [UBC vs Vancouver Canucks](#) of the old WHL, in an exhibition game, showing Lortie, Gilles Villemure and Peter Kelly (*this photo courtesy of Vancouver Province photographer*).

Whitehorse's Hockey & Skating Rinks

– by Les McLaughlin, with some editorial input by RL

The first indoor rink I remember was a Quonset building on the corner of 1st Avenue and Strickland, built by either the Lions or Kiwanis in the late Forties. It was supremely cold in that unheated metal structure and I used to put my gear including skates on at home, 507 Strickland and skate on the snow-covered road down to the rink. Not good for skates, but easier for a little kid than trying to tie skates in that frozen rink.

Organized hockey (men's and boys' leagues) was played in the Airforce Hanger B, where the fans were a lot rougher than the players. I think the Civic Centre arena (later re-named Jim Light Arena) opened in 1953. Your readers may recall names like Tipton, Bodnar, Frigon, the Chaisson Brothers (Clare & Henri), Reber, Kerr, Hagen, and many other fine players who came to play hockey in 'B' Hangar and the Civic Centre.

There was an outdoor rink behind the old Mountie barracks and station, just behind where the Gold Rush Hotel is now. Over the years, outdoor rinks were also built behind the Catholic School & at the Indian Mission School (the rink having been on the corner of 5th Ave. & Lowe). Another area outdoor hockey rink was established at the Mission School at Carcross, where the ice sloped from end to end.

[Editor's note: once you have received this MocTel Special, you can open the larger images and paste them in place of the small ones. It would help to set up your pages for legal-size paper. If you need help to cut-and-paste the larger pictures, please send me a note. We had to use small images to keep the document small enough for efficient transmission]. – Ralph

Hi, By the way, to change your page set-up from regular 8.5"x 11" paper to 8.5 x 14, just click on File, click Print and/or Page Set-up, then Paper Size. Choose whichever paper size you need to use.
Cheers. Ralph

NOTE:

Readers who would like to retain any of the linked images in this MocTel should soon save them to your own hard-drives, because I've nearly used up my free web space, and I will need some or all of it before long for other projects, such as images of Yukon coins and tokens, on which subject I'd like to do another MocTel Special. So, before the links become useless, please save those images.

Thanks Ralph