

Moccasin Telegraph - Hockey Special 2nd Edition - 2003

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Hockey in the Yukon (1905-1964)

Following the distribution of the first edition of this Hockey Special, we received a lot of new photos etc. from Sheila & Norm Becker, Bill Craig and Joe Roenspies, and new information from a few other readers, so I have inserted the new input in the appropriate temporal spaces. The Les McLaughlin story has been moved to the end of this edition in order to simplify the placement of other material. – 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 courtesy of Vivian Stuart, Bunny Lelievre's daughter)*



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

Hockey in Whitehorse: Part 1 (1920-1954)

Whitehorse team 1920s



[photo & caption courtesy of Dorothy Graham]

“I believe the fellow in the cloth cap is **Alan Fraser**, two down from him is my dad **Yorke Wilson**, two down from him is his brother **Dave Wilson**. I got the photo from the YT Archives, it was marked as part of Goodie Sparlings collection.”

“We used to live in Mayo in the summer and Whitehorse in the winter, in with the first boat and out with the last. My father worked for the BYN/WPYR.” - Dorothy (Wilson) Graham

Whitehorse RCAF Flyers 1952- 53 *[photo & 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 McCooye, 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.

For a larger image, click on [Airforce1952_53](#)

For more Flyers photos, see

[Hume-Laurin-McCooye](#) Chuck Hume, Bud Laurin, Don McCooye

[Kleppe-Goodhue-Cloutier](#) Oscar Kleppe, Roy Goodhue, Morris Cloutier

[Airforce-Army game](#) Oscar Kleppe, Roy Goodhue, Bud Laurin in goal. Guitard of Army at Centre.

Legion 1952-53 [photos & names courtesy of Norm & Sheila Becker]



Sitting on boards : Len Kerr, Herb Wahl, Al Sowden, Red Hunter, Bob Frigon, Keith Brammer, Andy Johnson, Tim Bremner, Terry Delaney, Fred Howard, Norm Becker, -----, John Mazel.
Standing in front : Mr. Oliver, -----, Bob Friend, Dave Friesen (goalie), -----, -----.

For a photo of Becker, Mazel & Johnson, click on [Legion Line](#) .

Whitehorse Merchants 1954 (previously shown in MocTel 9)



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

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

For a larger image, click on [Merchants '54](#)

Another team at about this time was:

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

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.