

History and Heroes

Lesson 2: He Shoots, He Scores!

Athlete Article

The Building of a Dream - A Short Biography of the Patricks



Nearly every sport in the B. C. Sports Hall of Fame has its founding fathers. Dr. James Naismith is known as the father of basketball, for example. However, when it comes to “founding fathers”, ice hockey is more fortunate than other sports. It doesn’t have a father but rather a whole family which was responsible for making the game what it is today – and the whole family has been inducted into the BC Sports Hall of Fame. No story about hockey – past, present or future – is complete without telling the many tales about the Patricks. The most notable member of this hockey – mad clan was Lester Patrick who began his pro hockey career just after the turn of the century and for more than 40 years was a major force in the game as a player, coach, manager and builder.

Together with his brother Frank, Lester is identified with many of the major developments in style of play, and the organization and expansion of the game. And, some of his developments didn’t only affect hockey, but other sports as well. Among the many contributions to the game made by the Patricks were:

- First use of the rushing defenceman, who prior to the Patricks arriving on the scene was strictly a defender like the fullback in soccer today;
- Hockey’s first major farm system;
- Numbers on the jerseys and programmes so the fans could identify the players (this was quickly adapted by many other sports);
- First in any sport to use the playoff system to determine champions;
- Introduced pro hockey to British Columbia and New York State as a founder of the Rangers;
- Standardized the six-man team;
- First to use the forward pass whereas before only lateral passing was allowed;
- First to use the blueline;
- Splitting the game into three 20-minute periods;
- The first to use assists in keeping scoring statistics.

When you look down the list, there isn't much the Patricks were not responsible for on the ice and in fact they also built the first indoor rinks in both Vancouver and Victoria when they founded the old Pacific Coast Hockey League. Before this, all ice hockey was played outside.

In his competitive days Lester played on two Stanley Cup winning teams and when he and Frank sold the PCHL in 1926, Lester went on to manager for the New York Rangers. Under his guidance they won three Stanley Cups between 1928 and 1940. And, it was while with the Rangers that Lester, in his late 40's, came from behind the bench one night and played goal! That particular evening is well described by Lester himself on tape at the BC Sports Hall of Fame.

Both Lester and Frank were inducted into the BC Sports Hall of Fame in 1966, the Hall's first year. Other family members were quick to follow in 1968. Lynn Patrick, Lester's oldest son, and brother Murray were inducted in that year. Lynn played eight seasons with the Rangers and later coached the Boston Bruins and was also managing director of the St. Louis Blues. Murray played four years for the Rangers. He later coached that team and acted as its general manager.

Frank and Lester's father, Joseph Patrick, were also inducted into the BC Sports Hall of Fame in 2000 for their contribution and support in launching professional hockey on the Canadian West Coast.

When it came to hockey it was "all in the family" as far as the Patricks were concerned. Their family deeds and exploits are all in the BC Sports Hall of Fame; it's worth a visit, even if only to view hockey's first family, the Patrick's of Victoria.