

## **The Hockey Sweater - Hearst Version with apologies to Roch Carrier**

by Ernie Bies March 18, 2012

As an original season ticket holder of the Ottawa Senators I approach the visits of the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Montreal Canadiens with a certain amount of trepidation. Those games have always been guaranteed sellouts with 20,500 rabid fans raising the roof. Unfortunately Ottawa is located right in the middle of the traditional Leafs/Habs fan base so we poor Senators fans usually find ourselves outnumbered by the visiting Blue and Red sweaters. Growing up in Hearst you were either a Leaf or a Habs fan though recently Claude Giroux Philly sweaters are becoming predominant. Harold Ballard killed my Leaf spirit so I followed the local team when I lived in Edmonton and jumped onto the Senators bandwagon when they were reborn in Ottawa in 1992.

Ottawa has enjoyed seasonal superiority over their neighbouring Canadian rivals and has actually made more playoff appearances in the modern era much to the chagrin of the hapless Habs and lowly Leafs. This year is no exception as Ottawa sits comfortably in a playoff spot while the others are fighting for a high draft pick which is the bonus for finishing near the bottom of the league...

I usually expect an unpleasant evening when our biggest rivals visit, once even having to break up a fight in the Family Section but I gamely wear my original Ottawa Senators Peace Tower sweater with my name on the back and my Sens jacket and steel myself for the cat calls of the visiting hordes. Surprisingly the most recent game on March 16 against Montreal had a different result.

My son and I arrived at our regular seats to see a whole row of Habs fans beside us and too many to count behind us. I no sooner sat down when this young fellow in a Red jersey and hat accidentally kicked over a full large coke under my seat and feet. Now being a veteran of the Royal Theatre in Hearst I was accustomed to sticky floors. Remember that sloped floor that caused all the spilled drinks to flow to the front of the theatre so you had to shift your feet every few minutes to prevent getting stuck? I asked an usher to get us a mop and the apologetic young Habs fan came and stood with me while we waited for the cleanup crew. I asked

him where he was from and he said “Oh you wouldn’t know it, its way up North, its called Hearst.” What are the chances of a kid visiting Ottawa, buying a game day ticket (\$130 in the 300 level) and getting one of the 20,500 seats which happened to be next to an old time Hearstite?



Richard Therrien did just that. I enjoyed sitting beside this polite young man who applauded good hockey plays on both sides. Turns out this 19 year old is a graduate of the Hearst Elans Midget AA teams that Marc Lafleur coached to four consecutive championships and is presently the Captain of the Abitibi Eskimos Junior A team in Iroquois Falls in the Northern Ontario Junior A Hockey League. This League includes the Blind River Beavers, Kirkland Lake Gold Miners, North Bay Trappers, Soo Eagles, Soo Thunderbirds and the Sudbury Cubs and dates back to 1962 when an effort was made to give the players from Northern Ontario an opportunity to play closer to home. Two of Richard’s current team mates, Marc-Alain Begin and Guillaume Rheault and Jason Lacroix, who plays for the Sudbury

Cubs, are also graduates of the Hearst Elans. Begin finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in League scoring this year with 31 goals and 92 assists for 123 points in 39 games while Therrien was 6<sup>th</sup> with 44 goals and 47 assists for 91 points in 48 games. Unfortunately the Eskis were knocked out of the playoffs in the first round. Former Elans coach Marc Lafleur also made it to Junior as an Assistant Coach of the Rouyn Noranda Huskies in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

Oh, by the way, Ottawa beat Montreal 2-1 in overtime to put them in second place in the conference for a few hours before Boston retook the lead. The next night the Sens faced the Leafs and lost 3-1 which evened up the season series with three wins each. Obviously feeling the effects of the tough game the night before the Senators made it easy for the Leafs by scoring into their own net to get them started and then hitting their goalie 29 times.

Considering Ottawa is only in the second year of their rebuilding program and were not expected to make the playoffs this year, at least I'll get to wear my sweater for a few more weeks in April while the blue and reds are put back in mothballs till next year. Go Sens Go