A Brief History



THE COLOURED HOCKEY LEAGUE OF THE MARITIMES

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INTRODUCTION



Before the National Hockey League of 1917, the National Hockey Association of 1909 and even the Canadian Amateur Hockey League of 1898, there was the Colored Hockey League (CHL) that later became the Colored Hockey League of the Maritimes (CHLM) in 1900 that was comprised of former American slaves. Canadian historians George and Darril Fosty, through their ground breaking book Black Ice, brought to light the CHLM's lost history and legacy to the modern game of hockey.

Origins of the League

In 1894, attendance in the local Baptist Churches in Halifax and Dartmouth in Nova Scotia was low. To help fill the pews, Henry Sylvester Williams, a black law student and later founder of the Pan-African Movement, with the help of Pastor James Borden of the Dartmouth Lake Church appealed to the young men's passion for sports by organizing three hockey teams – Halifax Eurekas, Halifax Stanley and Dartmouth Jubilees – that became the CHL. The first game was played on February 27, 1895 between the Halifax Eurekas and Dartmouth Jubilees resulting in a 1-1 draw.

On March 9, 1899 an impromptu game was held between the Halifax Chebuctos, an all-white team in the Halifax City Hockey League, and the Halifax Eurekas, marking the first time an all-Black and all-White hockey team played against each other. The Eurekas won the game, 9-7.

LEAGUE GROWTH

In 1900, the CHL expanded from three teams to include the Africville Sea-Sides, Hammond Plains Moss Backs, Truro Sheiks, Amherst Royals and Charlottetown West End Rangers of Prince Edward Island, thus becoming the Colored Hockey League of the Maritimes.

James Robinson Johnston (Nova Scotia's first black lawyer), and James A. R. Kinney (a local black businessman) joined Henry Sylvester Williams in running what was considered a league like no other at the time. Kinney was the league's First President while Johnston served as its Legal Advisor. To these men the league was more than just a sports organization. The league's agenda was to promote Black consciousness, pride, and the tenets of Christianity and the Baptist faith.

There was no set schedule of CHLM games. Instead, the teams engaged in organized competition by issuing formal invitations and challenges to one another that were often placed in the local newspapers. This was due in large part to the fact that teams were only permitted arena access and ice time after the white leagues finished their seasons. Consequently, CHLM games were generally played between late January and early March at which point the ice conditions would become too poor to play on.

Games were played with no official rules, as such, other than the Bible. Ironically, the result was a more physical and innovative style of hockey. The CHLM is credited with some innovations that had a profound and lasting effect on the way the game was and still is played today.

GAME STYLE

• Goaltending Style (Butterfly)

Henry “Braces” Franklyn, who stood 3 feet 9 inches tall and played with the Dartmouth Jubilees from 1895 to 1898, was the first recorded goaltender to employ the “butterfly style” to stop a puck. He would go down on the ice with both pads with his toes pointing outwards and the tops of his pads meeting in the middle. This resulted in a wall of padding without any holes, lowering the chances of low angle shots getting in.

At the time, other amateur and professional leagues adopted a “stand-up only” position for their net minder, occasionally even issuing fines to goaltenders if they fell to the ice while playing the puck. The “butterfly style” was later perfected by NHL goaltending greats Glenn

Hall (1950s-1960s) and Tony Esposito (1970s-1980s). The style is, perhaps, the most widely used style in amateur and professional hockey today.

Going down onto the ice “butter-fly” style wasn’t Franklyn’s only innovative technique. As a goaltender, he would also regularly wander out of his goal to play the puck, skate with it, and pass it forward up the ice to teammates. This aggressive style of goaltending would not be seen until the emergence of legendary NHL Hall-of-Fame goaltender Jacques Plante of the Montreal Canadiens in the mid-1950’s.

• Slap Shot

During the early 1900s, recreational and organized hockey rules did not permit players to raise their sticks above their waist to shoot the puck. In 1903, during a controversial game between the Halifax Eureaks and the Truro Victorias, the Eureaks’ star player, Eddie Martin, in a baseball like swing raised his stick above his waist in shooting the puck. This technique resulted in harder and more accurate shots on the net as well as scoring opportunities.

Newspaper accounts of Martin’s shooting technique indicate that he may have pioneered the “hockey slap shot”. This would have been 25 years before future hockey Hall- of- Famer Frank “Bun” Cook of the New York Rangers introduced the slap-shot to the NHL and 50 years before Bernie “Boom Boom” Geoffrion of the Montreal Canadiens and Andy Bathgate of the New York Rangers perfected it in the 1950’s. Bobby Hull, the Golden Jet, later popularized the shooting technique while playing with the Chicago Blackhawks in the 1960s and 1970s.

LEAGUE'S DECLINE



The meteoric rise of the CHLM reached its height between 1900 and 1905, when games often out-drew those of the white leagues. This was due largely to the league's brand of hockey, which the local media described as "fast paced and entertaining". Also, events such as speed skating contests and performances by local black bands prior to games and between periods were big factors. Attendance often reached as high as 1,200 spectators at many games.

While a number of factors contributed to the CHLM's decline, however, there's one that perhaps had the most impact.

In 1905, James Robinson Johnston, Legal Advisor for the CHLM, became embroiled in a legal battle against the City of Halifax and the Halifax and South Western Railway Company over landownership rights in the black community of Africville. Basically, the City wanted to evict the residents from their homes in order for the railway company to build a line through the community. A number of the plaintiffs who took on the City were members of the Africville Sea-Sides' hockey team.

As a result, white rink owners in the Halifax/Dartmouth area cut the CHLM's access to ice times. When they did have access, it was under very poor ice conditions or late in the evenings. Slowly, the local media lost interest in covering the games, people stopped showing up, and the league was effectively left to once again play on local outdoor ponds and lakes. The last recorded newspaper account of the league appeared in 1911.

RESURGENCE OF THE LEAGUE

In 1921, the CHLM was reformed with three teams, the Truro Victorias, the Africville Sea-Sides and a team of select Halifax and Dartmouth players under the banner of the Halifax All-Stars. Unlike the earlier CHLM, the new league played under the standardized hockey rules of the day.

Although the CHLM re-emerged to some prominence, its social and religious goals were largely forgotten. All the original league organizers were by this time deceased. After 1925, many teams came and went.

Not surprisingly, news coverage by the media also eventually faded away again as attention shifted to the National Hockey League. Black teams such as the Halifax Diamonds, Halifax Wizards, New Glasgow Speed Boys, Africville Brown Bombers and Truro Sheiks as well as others would compete at various points in the 1930s, but would disappear from the collective consciousness by the time of the Second World War.

A RECORD TO RELISH

Based on the Fosty brothers' research and document 70 All-Black Rosters 1894-1936, which lists the rosters of the all-black hockey teams from 1894 to 1936, it's estimated that approximately 400 people played organized hockey. Of that number, some 300 plus played on as many as 14 teams in the CHLM.

The Men Behind the CHLM



Henry Sylvester Williams
Founder of the League



James A. R. Kinney
First League President



James Robinson Johnston
League Legal Advisor

Teams of the Colored Hockey League of The Maritimes



1900 West End Rangers (Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island)



1903 Halifax Eurekas (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Teams of the Colored Hockey League of The Maritimes



1922 Africville Sea-Sides (Halifax, Nova Scotia)



1930 Truro Sheiks (Truro, Nova Scotia)

League Champions and Co-Champions

1895 – Halifax Stanley

1896 – Halifax Eurekas

1897 – Halifax Eurekas

1898 – Halifax Eurekas

1899 – Halifax Eurekas

1900 – Halifax Eurekas

1901 – Africville Sea-Sides and West End Rangers

1902 – Africville Sea-Sides and West End Rangers

1903 – Halifax Eurekas and West End Rangers

1904 – Halifax Eurekas

1905 – Halifax Eurekas

1906 – Halifax Eurekas

1907- 1913 – No public records of games

1914 – 1919 –League suspended due to World War I

1920 – Truro Victorias

1921 - West End Rangers

1922 – Amherst Royals

1930 – Truro Sheiks