

PATRIOTIC DUTY: THE 1942 AHL ALL-STAR GAME

By Chuck Miller

Before American troops were part of World War II, ice hockey already felt the effects of Europe's terrible conflict. Canadian soldiers were already sailing to protect England, to help liberate France, to do whatever was necessary to stop the advancing Axis powers.

By 1941, North American professional hockey teams wilted from the lack of available skaters. The NHL's New York Americans relocated to the Brooklyn Ice Palace to finish their existence; other clubs saw their buildings being confiscated for wartime purposes. Many young skaters could not play hockey in America without two months of Canadian military conscription - and even after that, could be yanked into service at any time.

Under these conditions, the American Hockey League drew up plans for its first All-Star Game, a Cleveland Arena contest pitting the best AHL Eastern Division players against those from the Western Division. All proceeds from ticket sales, concessions, programs and the like would be equally split between the American and Canadian Red Cross, for the benefit of both countries' overseas soldiers.

A consortium of fans, players and media selected the forwards, defensemen and goaltenders for this contest, and the Calder Cup-winning Cleveland Barons were well-represented at this inaugural event - five skaters, including the Barons' top line of Les Cunningham, Joffre Desilets and Norm Locking, were on the home ice. Bill Cook, coach of the Barons, faced an Eastern Division of All-Stars coached by his own brother, Providence coach Bun Cook. And Bun wasn't hurting for talent - not with Springfield's Eddie Shore and Frank Beisler guarding the blueline, and Washington's two point leaders, Polly Duroin and Lou Trudel, as his forwards.

Only the All-Stars received free admission into the Cleveland Arena that night - everybody from Barons owner Al Sutphin to the referees to the newspaper reporters all paid full price to get in the Arena. Sutphin bought another \$300 worth of tickets, which were distributed to a Cleveland orphanage. "It has been said that we of the upper estate [newspaper reporters] pay our way into wakes only," wrote the Cleveland Press' Franklin Lewis in an editorial. "We shall happily pay our way into The Arena tonight for the privilege of writing

pieces about the All-Star game."

Before the contest, the players were feted at a league dinner party at the nearby Alcazar Hotel. The teams' uniforms were displayed for all to see. "The Barons and other Western Division players are to wear white jerseys with blue stars and numerals and red stripes; red pants with red, white and blue stripes down the sides, and white stockings with red stripes," wrote the Cleveland Press.

"Representatives of the East will wear blue jerseys with white stars and numerals and red stripes, blue pants with red, white and blue stripes down the sides and blue stockings with white stripes."

Each player also received from AHL President Maurice Podoloff a gold-mounted silver watch charm/nail file/cigar cutter. "To You A Flourishing Life," was inscribed in French on each precious medal. "They came home with the All-Star sweaters in their grips and attractive watch charms in their pockets," wrote the Indianapolis News, "and a feeling that Canada and the United States are practically one and the same place."

The East's first goal came in the first period, when New Haven's Norman Burns intercepted a cross-ice pass. He and Pete Kelly raced up the ice on a 2-0 breakaway, passing the puck between them. Burns then took the puck, faked Joe Turner out of the net, then fired a fast shot into the twine. For Burns, it was another wonderful goal in a wonderful week - three days prior to the All-Star Game, he proposed to his sweetheart, Dorothy Billings. She accepted, and they married when the season ended.

The West evened the score at 14:05 of the first period, when Cleveland defenseman Bill Mackenzie fired the puck up the boards to Buffalo's Jack Toupin. Toupin passed to Norm Locking, who fed Joffre Desilets the puck. Desilets fired a 15-foot shot past goaltender Mike Karakis, and the score was tied. "The score board doesn't show it, but Toupin should be credited for a double assist," said the Buffalo Evening News. "He was surging into Eastern territory in the first period, carried the play into that section when Joffre Desilets scored his goal."

Early into the second period, the AHL's leading scorer, Providence's Ab DeMarco, had the puck and a clear shot at the net. He fired at the upper left corner of the goal, but Joe Turner (whose GAA was so low the Indianapolis fans called him Joe "No! No!" Turner) made an acrobatic save, knocking the puck away.

Ten minutes into the second period, both teams substituted netminders. Replacing Turner was Hershey goaltender Nick D'Amore; Springfield's Earl Robertson took over for Karakis in the crease.

Instantly Robertson was peppered with shot after shot from the Western team. "The West had all the better of the play for five minutes," wrote the Springfield Union, "but then lines were changed and the East tallied with a minimum of delay. Kelly, Springfield's ace wingman, collared a pass from Burns and whipped the puck past the startled D'Amore."

As the third period began, the East nursed a 2-1 lead. Then Les Cunningham intercepted a Pete Bessone pass, fired it to Desilets, who knocked in his second goal of the night and tying the contest up again. Then came the controversy.

At 6:29 of the third period, Norman Burns took a pass from Kelly and fired the puck point-blank at D'Amore. The puck got past D'Amore, into the net - and back out again, so fast that referee Rabbit McVeigh didn't immediately signal his decision. After conferring with the goal judge, McVeigh agreed that the East scored its third goal of the night.

The East added two more goals to put the game away. At 10:29, Providence's Norm Calladine fed Ab DeMarco, who whipped a 20-foot bullet past D'Amore. Then the Lions' Polly Durouin added an insurance

All-Star Game Lineup

Feb. 3, 1942

Cleveland Arena, Euclid Avenue, Cleveland OH

EAST STARTERS:

G - Mike Karakis, Providence Reds
 LD - Frank Beisler, Springfield Indians
 RD - Eddie Shore, Springfield Indians
 C - Polly Durouin, Washington Lions
 RW - Gus Mancuso, New Haven Eagles
 LW - Lou Trudel, Washington Lions

WEST STARTERS:

G - Joe Turner, Indianapolis Capitols
 RD - Chuck Shannon, Buffalo Bisons
 LD - Pete Bessone, Pittsburgh Hornets
 C - Les Cunningham, Cleveland Barons
 RW - Joffre Desilets, Cleveland Barons
 LW - Norm Locking, Cleveland Barons

EAST ALTERNATES:

G - Earl Robertson, Springfield Indians
 D - Victor Myles, New Haven Eagles
 D - Alex Singbush, Washington Lions
 D - Allen Shields, Washington Lions
 C - Norman Burns, New Haven Eagles
 C - Ab DeMarco, Providence Reds
 C - Max Kaminsky, Springfield Indians
 LW - Pete Kelly, Springfield Indians
 LW - Jack Shill, Providence Reds
 RW - Augie Herchenratter, Philadelphia
 Rockets
 RW - Norman Calladine, Providence Reds

WEST ALTERNATES:

G - Nick D'Amore, Hershey Bears
 D - Bill Mackenzie, Cleveland Barons
 D - Joe Jerwa, Cleveland Barons
 D - Bill Alum, Buffalo Bisons
 C - Normie Mann, Pittsburgh Hornets
 C - Wally Kilrea, Hershey Bears
 C - Jack Toupin, Buffalo Bisons
 LW - John Sheriff, Pittsburgh Hornets
 LW - Jack Keating, Indianapolis Capitols
 RW - Harry Frost, Hershey Bears
 RW - Joe Fisher, Indianapolis Capitols

goal at 15:39. "D'Amore took it all placidly," said W.F. Fox of the Indianapolis News, "but it hurt him to the heart for hockey knows no player who is more sincere about his work, or about preparing for his work, than the dramatic D'Amore."

But the West stormed back, as Barons defenseman Bill MacKenzie worked the blue line like a magician. "MacKenzie was the standout defensive man of the field, and received merited recognition in the scoring column in the closing minutes," wrote the Cleveland Plain Dealer. "At 18:31, his pass to Toupin, who was off to Robertson's right, enabled the Buffalo center to register on a short shot. Then, at 18:53, MacKenzie cut loose with a backhand from just inside the blue line, and the puck whistled by Robertson. With a little more than a minute, the West still had a chance to tie it, and was scrambling for a chance as the battle ended."

The East won the AHL's first All-Star Game, 5-4, but it was a contest bereft of bodychecking and boardcrunching; many teams were eligible for playoff spots, and an injury to a top star could be disastrous. Players like Pittsburgh's Normie Mann and Providence's Jack Shill spent time in the locker room calming down nagging non-contact injuries, Mann with a bone bruise on his left heel; Shill nursing a bum shoulder. "It was like watching a game of touch football or playing poker for match sticks ... The boys were not checking furiously because they did not want to get hurt. Yet, Herbie Lewis, [Indianapolis] manager, winced every time Joe Fischer and Jack Keating skated near the sideboards. 'Of course they aren't hitting each other hard,' he exclaimed. 'D'ya realize we've got 18 games left to play?'" (Indianapolis Times, Feb. 4, 1942)

1942 AHL ALL-STAR GAME BOXSCORE

WEST 1 0 3 - 4
EAST 1 1 3 - 5

FIRST PERIOD: 1 East, Burns (Kelly), 6:57. 2 West, Desilets (Locking, Toupin), 14:05. Penalties: None.

SECOND PERIOD: 3 East, Kelly (Burns), 15:05. Penalties: None.

THIRD PERIOD: 4 West, Desilets (Cunningham, Bessone), 3:00. 5 East, Burns (Kelly), 6:29. 6 East, DeMarco (Calladine), 10:29. 7 East, Durouin, 15:39. 8 West, Toupin (Mackenzie), 18:31. 9 West, Mackenzie (Fisher, Keating), 18:53. Penalties: None.

SHOTS: West 28, East 21.

Goaltenders: East, Karakis (30:00), Robertson (30:00, wimer). West, Turner (30:00), D'Amore (30:00, loser)

Coaches: East - Bun Cook, Providence; West - Bill Cook, Cleveland.

Officials: Rabbit McVeigh, referee; Elwood Lee, linesman.

Attendance: 3,580.

Sadly, only 3,580 people showed up that night - more than 6,000 seats were unsold. Some media pundits thought an All-Star game should be a battle between players from rival leagues that would never meet during the regular season - say, an NHL-AHL affair. Others felt it should be a team-

versus-league setup. "The game was adequately publicized, the stars were here, it was good hockey, but it didn't have the sting in it that it would have had under ordinary circumstances. Had the Cleveland team as a unit been playing a collection of All-Stars assembled from the other teams in the league, Cleveland fans, who are hot about hockey, might have been there. They have been attending Cleveland games in crowds that have reached five figures practically all season." (Indianapolis News, Feb. 4, 1942).

Yet from the proceeds, almost \$5,000 was raised for both Red Cross organizations. Patrons were encouraged to bring packages of cigarettes for the soldiers, and more than 1,300 packs of smokes and 90 tins of tobacco were deposited in boxes at the Arena entrances. And from the All-Star rosters came one more contribution for the war effort. "[Right wing] Augie Herchnratter of Philadelphia was applauded when Maurice Podoloff, presiding, announced this would be [Herchenratter's] final game 'before being called into service.'" (Buffalo News, Feb 4, 1942).

The success of the All-Star Game as a fundraiser for charities prompted the AHL to announce a similar series of annual contests. The games would benefit the Red Cross or some other wartime charity, and game proceeds after the war would be used as a pension for retired AHL players. Unfortunately, these plans were scuttled when the war reduced the AHL from 10 teams to 6 in just two years. An AHL All-Star game would not be played again until 1955.

A side note - perhaps the West might have won the initial All-Star Game had Bob "Red" Herron been on their roster. The day after the All-Star Game, Red Herron became the first AHL man to score six goals in one game, when his double hat trick helped the Hornets defeat New Haven, 13-4.

Assistance in this article has been provided by George Lloyd, Gene Kiczek, Jeanine Klein, and the staff of the New York State Library, the Indiana State Library, the Springfield Public Library and the archives of Cleveland State University. All their help is greatly appreciated.