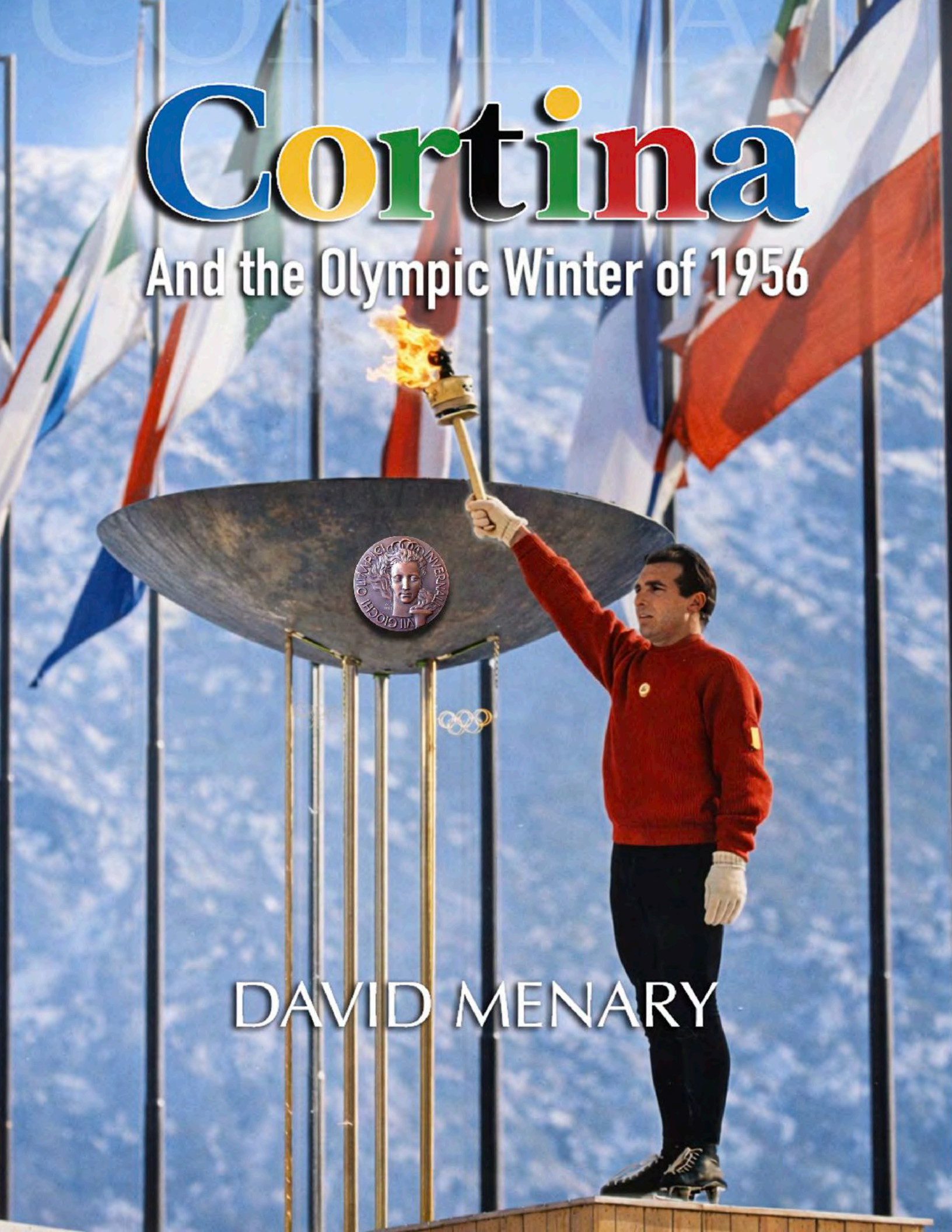
Cortina

And the Olympic Winter of 1956



DAVID MENARY

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and the Olympic Winter of 1956

BLUE RIVER PRESS

The Olympic Winter of 1956
by David Menary

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For Jack McKenzie and Don Rope, teachers and Olympians

"Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are—
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"

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Forword

This is the story of the friendship between Brandon, Manitoba's Jack McKenzie, and Winnipeg's Don Rope, and how hockey cemented that friendship and took them, as teammates, to the 1956 Cortina Olympic Winter Games.

The two were outstanding young hockey players and prospects, and although they didn't really get to know one another on the Prairies— Jack recalls seeing Don play once back in their Manitoba days — they both went east to finish school at the University of Toronto and play Junior A hockey against some of the best young hockey players in Canada.

This small book was going to be simply an article about Jack McKenzie, who, as the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympic Games approached, was alive and well, and living in Huntsville.

But it quickly became apparent that the story was really about Jack and his best friend Don Rope. Jack was Don's best man when he wed Benita in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario in the late 1950s.

The two shared many similarities. Both became schoolteachers, despite being courted by the Toronto Maple Leafs. Indeed, Conn Smythe and his son Stafford befriended Jack and were extremely high on his hockey talent. And the Leafs funded Don's high school and university studies, paying for room, board and much else as he played Junior hockey with the Marlies.

But Don's hockey career was secondary to his education. He continued his education at teacher's college, and although he had an impressive Leaf camp and was being talked about by the big names of Canadian sports journalism, like Milt Dunnell — scoring four goals against the legendary Turk Broda will do that—he had unfinished schooling to do at the U of T.

In both cases, each young man wanted to finish school and become a teacher. McKenzie, in particular, opted for stability. He had a steady girl in Manitoba—Joyce, who also graduated as a teacher and spent one year at Elmira District Secondary School, attended university in Manitoba—and they were soon to wed.

He got a teaching job at Preston High School, which was close to the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen Sr. A hockey team. No longer would he have to commute. And with a teaching job, his future was set. If he opted to play professional hockey—NHL great and Hockey Hall of Famer Bobby Bauer, his coach in Kitchener, said he could play for any NHL team —he was concerned that after his playing days were over, he'd be left with no skills to carry him through the rest of his life.

Rope was thinking along the same lines.

What both young men did was become teachers while continuing to play hockey at a high level. They were young; they knew they couldn't play forever. Still, as much as they loved

the game, it wasn't easy. Both taught high school, coached, practiced and played with the Dutchmen, one of the top Senior clubs in Canada, at a time when Senior hockey was at its peak.

During the decade of the 1950s, both helped the Senior Toronto Marlies captue an Allan Cup, and then won two more with the Dutchmen.

But they did much more than this, all while teaching. They won a bronze medal at the 1956 Cortina Olympics, and then McKenzie was a pickup for the Whitby Dunlops, which captured the world title in 1958.

Rope continued playing for another couple of years and helped the Galt Terriers win silver at the World Championships in Colorado Springs in 1962.

This story is about these two teachers and Olympians, and how it took them decades to finally internalize the Olympic Creed as espoused by the modern Olympic Games founder, Pierre de Coubertin, more than a century ago.

Hockey is a team sport, and they would be the first to understand this point. Their Olympic bronze medal wasn't just because of captain Jack McKenzie and Don Rope. They were two members of an impressive team.

But being part of so many winning teams meant they were doing something right.

The focus of this story is on these two friends, teachers and Olympians. I have talked to Jack and interviewed him on many occasions, and I knew Don Rope well. I wanted to tell their story because it is a good story about victory and defeat, about fighting well, and how the "most important thing in life is not the triumph, but the struggle."

In their youth, they could not abide by defeat. Yet for both, the Olympics at Cortina were one of the high points of their lives. For years, it was impossible to reconcile these two things.

Impossible, until they had aged and the years gave them a different perspective, one that was not possible as young men hell-bent on winning.

That is not to say that young athletes should not aspire to win, to do their utmost on the playing field. But the Olympic Games bring out the best in many athletes, including sportsmanship.

When the Dutchmen returned home after winning bronze, they were treated like heroes. That helped set the stage for what would come decades later, when they realized the truth of Coubertin's creed.

The entire team deserves praise, and hopefully, the stories of all the men can be told in greater detail down the road. For now, this small book delves into the lives of two best friends and remarkable teachers, athletes and men.

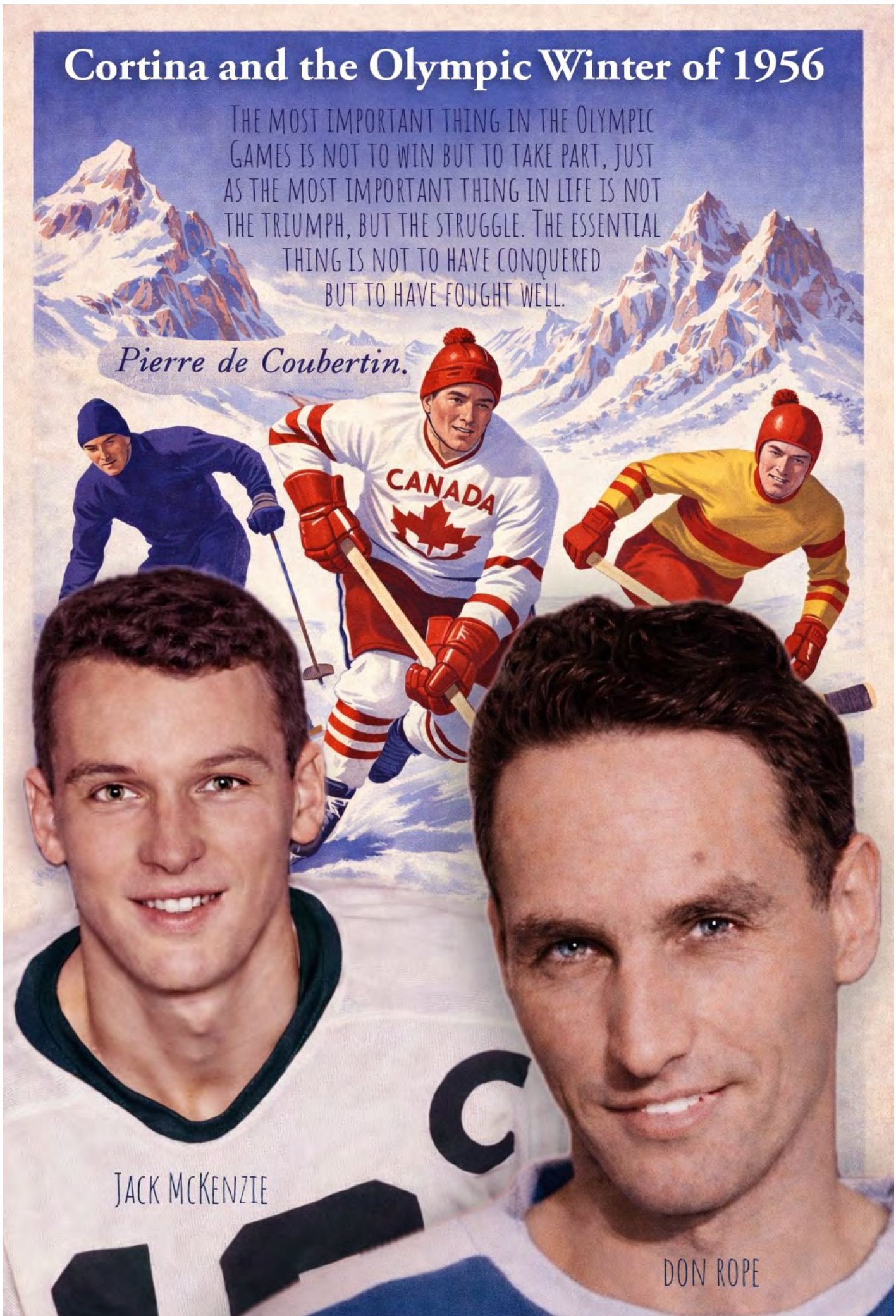
Both will always be united by the Olympic spirit.

Don Rope, centre back, and Jack McKenzie, second row, fourth from left, got to know one another when playing for the University of Toronto Blues in 1951.

Cortina and the Olympic Winter of 1956

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES IS NOT TO WIN BUT TO TAKE PART, JUST AS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE IS NOT THE TRIUMPH, BUT THE STRUGGLE. THE ESSENTIAL THING IS NOT TO HAVE CONQUERED BUT TO HAVE FOUGHT WELL.

Pierre de Coubertin.



Chapter 1

An Exhausting Week

Jack McKenzie and Don Rope did not grow up expecting the Olympic Games to come looking for them.

They were Prairie boys who learned early that dreams were a luxury and winters were not. McKenzie grew up in Brandon. Rope was raised in Winnipeg, where he once sold peanuts at Osborne Stadium and watched Jesse Owens—the Berlin Olympian, the man who seemed to run on a different set of laws—race a horse. The Games were a story you read about from a long way off, something that belonged to Europe and headlines and people who had money for trains.

And yet here they were, in Kitchener, called to serve on Canada's national hockey team: the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen, bound for Cortina. On departure morning, half the city was outside the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium (the Aud) to see them off, some even ready to follow in a convoy to Malton Airport.

The team bus sat outside the Aud, its engine running, coughing blue exhaust into the dark, early January morning. Voices cut through the sharp cold; every word and breath was visible in the air.

Only one problem: the team's roll call had a hole in it.

On the morning they were supposed to leave for the Olympics, Don Rope didn't show.

But Rope wasn't the kind of guy who didn't show. He was a gifted athlete who savoured being in the arena, going head-to-head against worthy adversaries. He was the guy who gave his all, played long and hard, and did the unglamorous work that made a line hold together.

He was also, earlier that morning, a young man doing laundry in the wee hours when sensible people sleep, because he was leaving for three weeks and he wanted to be ready. He washed and rinsed and wrung out his life into neat piles—clean, folded, prepared as if

cleanliness might count as readiness for his trip across the ocean. When he shut his eyes, it wasn't laziness that pulled him under, but exhaustion—the honest kind you earn.

He'd just played his heart out that night at the Aud—they all did—before a packed house that saw them skate to a 5–2 victory over Windsor. He'd had a busy week at Galt Collegiate Institute, where he taught and coached. By the time he lay down, it was almost time to get up and drive back to Kitchener to catch the bus.

But the body doesn't negotiate with destiny. It simply takes what it needs. Rope fell fast asleep, and while he slept, the world kept its appointment without him—the team, the bus, the road to Malton.

Hours earlier, the players had showered after their game, then packed their duffel bags. They wouldn't see their hometown rink for three weeks.

At home on the Prairies: Jack McKenzie as a young player with the Brandon Wheat Kings.

Late that Saturday night, there was a sense of satisfaction among the players and in the stands. They had skated to a 5–2 win before a standing-room-only crowd of about 7,200 fans. Everyone in the building knew their Allan Cup–winning Dutchmen would be leaving early Sunday morning for Malton, beginning their quest for Olympic gold at the Cortina Winter Games in Italy.

Local fans delighted in seeing them wear their white Olympic jerseys for the game, a dress rehearsal for what was to come. The task ahead was daunting, but the players were young and eager. That night, a deep feeling of camaraderie helped them embrace the challenge ahead as they towelled off and packed up. They were in this together, as they had been the previous spring when they won the Allan Cup. In a few hours, they would gather again at the Aud to board the bus for Malton.

Only a handful of years earlier, McKenzie and Rope were playing Junior A hockey while attending the University of Toronto. Both were skilled enough to excite NHL scouts, and both had been invited to training camp with the Maple Leafs. In one intrasquad game, Rope scored four goals on Leafs goaltender Turk Broda—earning sportswriter Milt Dunnell's attention.

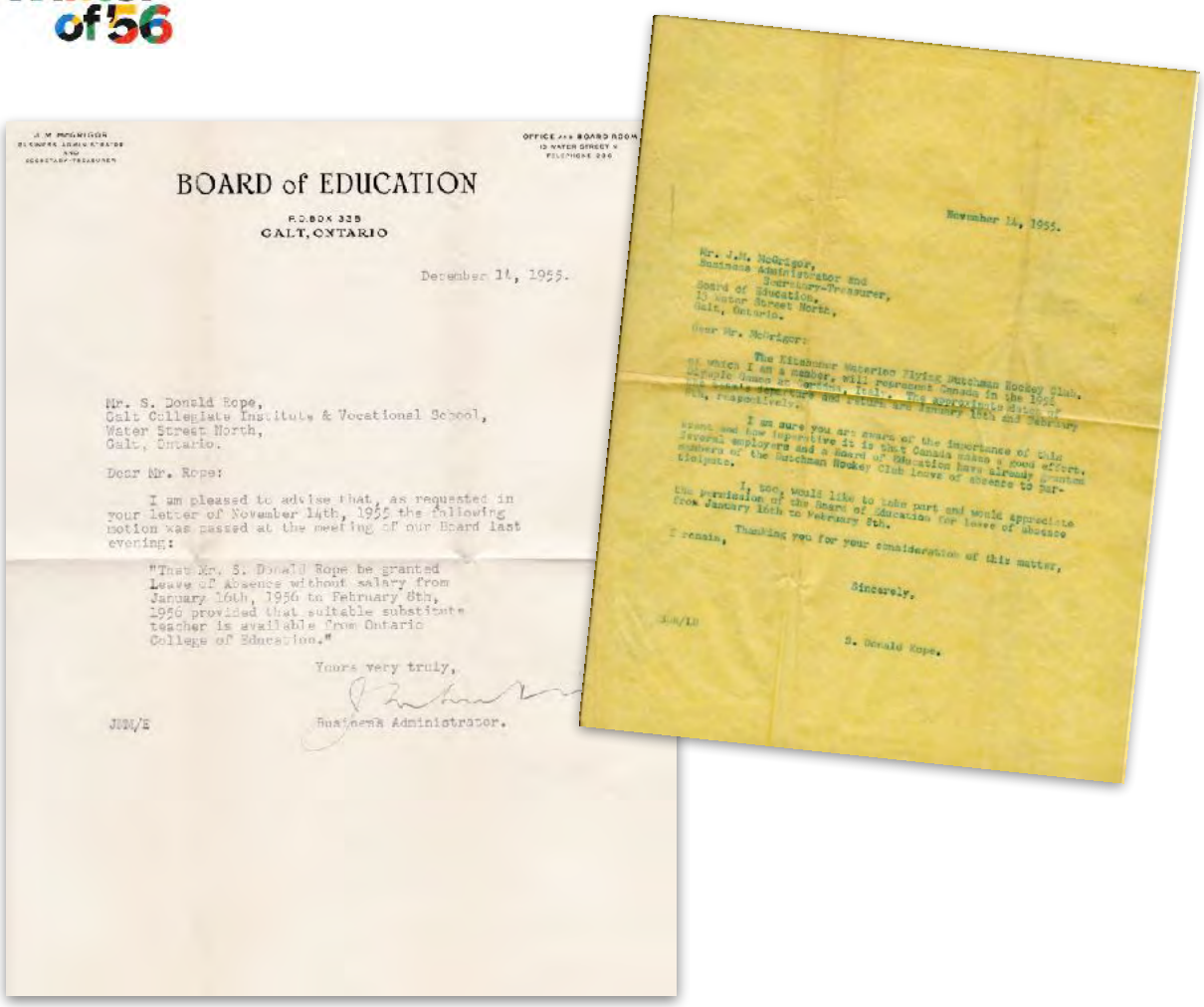
Jack McKenzie, left, as coach, with his Preston High School hockey team. His players thought the world of him.

"The Leafs paid my way from Grade 11 through university," said Rope, who was forever appreciative for that help. They covered room and board, books and everything else.[1]

But despite the Leafs' overtures and interest, neither Rope nor McKenzie wanted to become professional hockey players. They would almost certainly have to start in the minors, before ever getting a realistic chance with the Leafs. No, both wanted to become teachers.

On this Sunday morning in January, their ultimate destination was Italy's northern Alps region, the Dolomites—a distinctive mountain range surrounding Cortina. Famous for pale, steep limestone cliffs and towers, the Dolomites are marked by dramatic vertical walls and deep valleys, with peaks rising above 3,000 metres. Cortina sits in the Ampezzo Valley, where mountains such as Tofane, Cristallo, Sorapiss, Faloria, and Cinque Torri encircle the town. It's a resort town set in a bowl-like valley ringed by Dolomite massifs, which is why it became such a marquee Winter Games host.

[1] Don Rope, scrapbook notes.



BOARD of EDUCATION

P.O.BOX 335
GALT, ONTARIO

December 14, 1955.

Mr. S. Donald Rope,
Galt Collegiate Institute & Vocational School,
Water Street North,
Galt, Ontario.

Dear Mr. Rope:

I am pleased to advise that, as requested in your letter of November 14th, 1955 the following motion was passed at the meeting of our Board last evening:

"That Mr. S. Donald Rope be granted Leave of Absence without salary from January 16th, 1956 to February 8th, 1956 provided that suitable substitute teacher is available from Ontario College of Education."

Yours very truly,

Business Administrator.

JMM/E

November 14, 1955.

Mr. J.M. McGrigor,
Business Administrator and
Secretary-Treasurer,
Board of Education,
10 Water Street North,
Galt, Ontario.

Dear Mr. McGrigor:

I am sure you are aware of the importance of this and how imperative it is that Canada makes a good effort. Several employers and a Board of Education have already granted members of the Dutchman Hockey Club leave of absence to participate.

I, too, would like to take part and would appreciate the permission of the Board of Education for leave of absence from January 16th to February 8th.

Thanking you for your consideration of this matter,

I remain,

Sincerely,

S. Donald Rope.

Rope received word that the Galt Board of Education would give him an unpaid leave to compete at the Olympic Games. Inset: His letter asking for leave to compete in Cortina. Jack McKenzie also got a leave, from the Preston Board of Education. His was a paid leave.

For the Canadian players, despite it being half a world away, they were ready; they had been preparing for the Olympics for months.

On November 14, 1955—two months before the Games—Rope wrote to Galt School Board administrator J.M. McGrigor requesting leave to play in the Olympics.[2]

"The approximate dates of the team's departure and return are January 16th and February 8th, respectively," he noted.

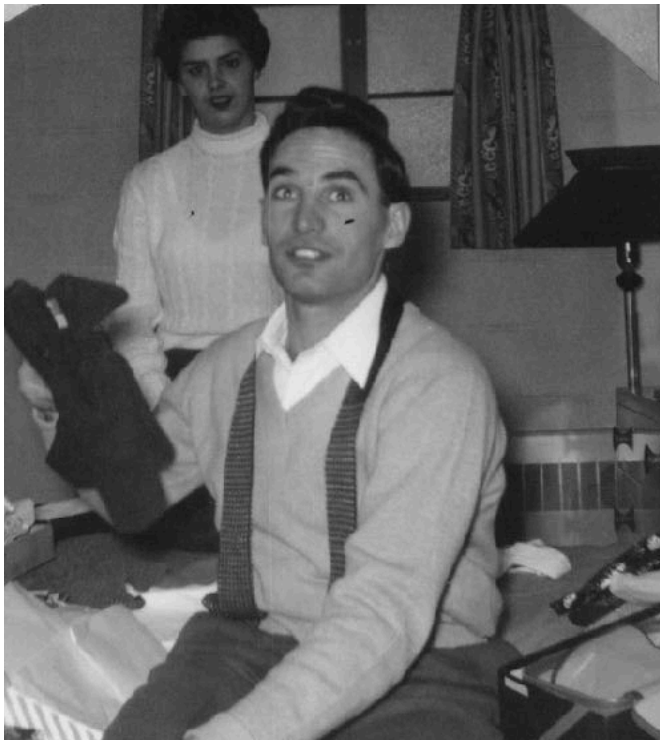
Rope and his Dutchmen teammates had known since late August that they were going to Cortina. After winning the Allan Cup the previous season over the Fort William Beavers,

[2] Letter from Don Rope to Galt Board of Education business administrator J.M. McGrigor, in Don Rope's scrapbook that Don's daughter, Marnie, graciously loaned me.

they received official word from the CAHA in August 1955 that they would represent Canada at the Olympics early the following year.

"I am sure you are aware of the importance of this event and how imperative it is that Canada makes a good effort," Rope wrote McGrigor. "Several employers and a Board of Education have already granted members of the Dutchmen Hockey Club leave of absence to participate."

As a young teacher on staff at Galt Collegiate, one of the oldest secondary schools in the province of Ontario, Rope knew that being granted a leave was no certainty. In his letter, he inferred that the Preston Board had already approved a paid leave of absence for McKenzie, though he didn't come out and say that.



After a draining week of teaching, coaching and playing with the Dutchmen, Rope stayed up half the night to do laundry on the eve of his departure for Cortina.

Rope waited for a reply. November came to a close, and still he had not heard back. He expected an answer in early December, but it wasn't until December 14—one full month after his request, and only a month before the team was to leave for Italy—that McGrigor responded.

"Dear Mr. Rope, I am pleased to advise that…the following motion was passed at the meeting of our Board last evening: That Mr. S. Donald Rope be granted Leave of Absence without salary from January 16th to February 8th, 1956, provided that a suitable substitute teacher is available from the Ontario College of Education."

It was the most eagerly awaited letter Rope had ever received—and even though Preston was sending off McKenzie, whose wife was expecting, with full salary, and the Galt Board was not sending him with salary, Rope was over the moon. Now it was official: he was going to the Olympics.

For McKenzie, the team captain, the excitement of the Olympics was tempered by the knowledge that his wife Joyce was expecting their first child in early February. The anticipated date fell around February 4, when Jack would still be in Cortina.

"I was worried I wouldn't be back for the birth," he admitted.

The two expectant parents spoke at length about the timing of the Games and the possibility that Jack might miss the birth. Joyce had a plan if he did. They both hoped he'd

be back in time, but they were reassured that if he

Opened in 1951, the Kitchener-Memorial Auditorium, with a seating capacity of nearly 7,000,
It was one of the finest rinks in Canada outside of big-league facilities like Maple Leaf Gardens and the Montreal Forum. Home to the Kitchener-Waterloo Flying Dutchmen Senior A hockey club, the Dutchmen won two Allan Cups in the 1950s—1953 and 1955–and represented Canada at two Olympic Winter Games. Some of the same players also represented Canada at the 1962 World Ice Hockey Championships, playing for the nearby Galt Terriers during their Allan Cup win in 1961 and their subsequent play at the Worlds in Colorado Springs in 1962.

Painting by David Menar

wasn't, everything would still be okay. Her parents would be staying with her.

They had met several years earlier—she was also from Manitoba—and although she went to the University of Manitoba and he went east to the University of Toronto, their courtship unfolded on the Prairies, and they were married there. Joyce, too, was a teacher. She taught in Elmira for a year before they married, while Jack taught in Preston. She was fully behind his hockey dream. Although he had embarked on his life's work, he was also in the prime of his life, and she knew he owed it to himself and his teammates to seize this moment before they began a family.

1956 CORTINA OLYMPICS, ITALY - CANADIAN HOCKEY TEAM

1st Row: Keith Woodall, Jack McKenzie, Bobby Bauer, Ken Laufman, Dennis Brodeur
2nd Row: Harry Wharmsby, Art Hurst, Paul Knox, Gerry Theberge, Bob White, Beryl Klinck, Jim Logan, Ernie Goman
3rd Row: George Scholes, Floyd Martin, Bill Colvin, Charlie Brooker, Buddy Horne, Don Rope, Howie Lee

Balancing family life with the demands of an Allan Cup–calibre team—while starting out in the teaching profession and coaching high school students along the way—was not easy. There were times it felt overwhelming. But children had not yet arrived, and he was young. It wasn't sustainable forever, but it was the life he had chosen, and he wouldn't change it for the world.

That Sunday morning, the couple decided to drive their own car to the airport, but first they would meet the bus at the Aud, and then follow along in the caravan. So early on January 15, 1956—just hours after their convincing win in their final league game before the Olympics—the McKenzies set out.

As they left their apartment across the road from Preston High School, Joyce knew she would return in a few hours alone. But she also knew her husband had a job to do, and that Kitchener-Waterloo, Preston, and Galt—and indeed, all of Canada—would be cheering him on.

Rope and McKenzie were recent U of T graduates who chose teaching over professional hockey.

Canada's captain, Jack McKenzie, said coach Bobby Bauer could make any NHL team, bar none.

The drive to Kitchener wasn't long, but it gave McKenzie time to think. The task at hand—winning Olympic gold—was a tall order, but it was not only possible; it was expected. How many sportswriters had already written columns declaring Canada the heavy favourite? Many predicted a clean sweep in Cortina.

These two talented Westerners from Manitoba were up for the task. They had already played pivotal roles in three Allan Cup championships: first with the Toronto Marlboros Senior A team in 1949–50; then with the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen in 1953; and once again while McKenzie was teaching in Preston.

McKenzie and Rope were no ordinary young men. At the University of Toronto, Rope's athletic pursuits ran the gamut—hockey, baseball, soccer, tennis, and more. He seemed to excel at everything.

Now, as the team began its journey to Cortina, Rope and McKenzie were about to be thrust onto the international stage, tested against the world's best young hockey players.

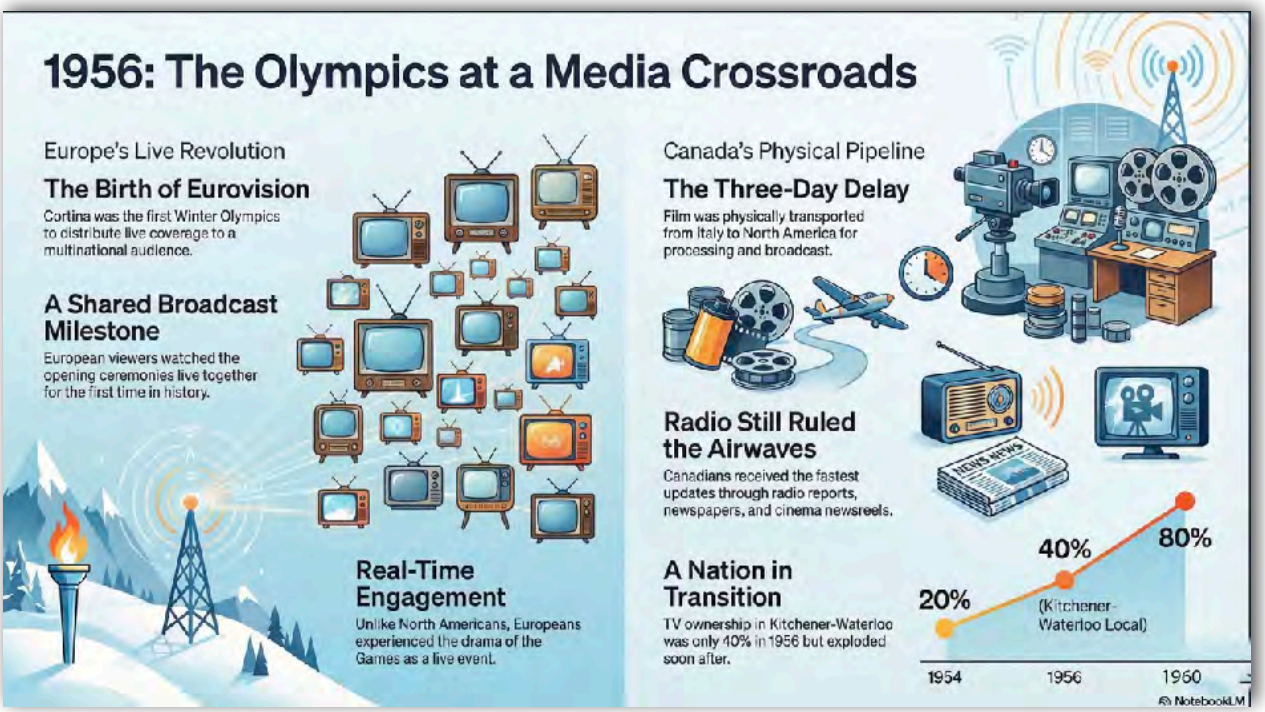
Early on the morning of Sunday, January 15, 1956, the K-W Dutchmen left the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium for the Malton Airport without Rope and McKenzie, followed by a caravan of nearly 1,000 people. Below, McKenzie, front left, and Rope, back right, as teammates on the U of T Varsity Blues.

That morning, the team and its staff—including manager Ernie Goman and coach Bobby Bauer— arrived and boarded the bus on schedule. Even though he would be driving, McKenzie was among them.

It was odd that Rope had not yet arrived. Rope, of all people —the man perhaps most enthusiastic about the Olympics. The bus waited. And waited. Rope was nowhere to be seen. Calls were made, but there was no answer. Finally, it was decided that McKenzie, who knew Rope better than anyone, would drive down to Galt to find out what had happened.

In the meantime, the bus had to leave. Cortina couldn't wait.

As the bus pulled out, the McKenzies sped off toward Galt to fetch Rope.



In the coming weeks, thousands of local fans would get their Olympic news by radio, the KW Record newspaper, and through delayed television coverage. Roughly 40 per cent of KW households owned TV sets; there were no satellite feeds in those days.

Canadians witnessed the Cortina Winter Olympics at a moment of media transition. CBC Television had launched in 1952, and TV ownership was growing rapidly; by 1960 about 80 per cent of households had a television.[3]

Cortina is often remembered as a broadcasting milestone because, for the first time at a Winter Olympics, live television coverage was distributed to a multinational European audience via early Eurovision, most notably the opening ceremonies, which were carried to multiple countries.

But Canadian audiences could not watch Cortina live as intercontinental television feeds were not yet feasible. Canadians got the fastest updates through radio reports supported by daily newspaper and wire-service coverage, while cinema newsreels highlighted big events well into the 1950s.[4] Television footage was filmed in Italy, then physically transported to North America for processing and broadcast days later. A final played on February 4 might be seen on February 7 back in Kitchener.

CBC's plan for hockey coverage included radio reports from the scene, with scheduled daily commentary by Thom Benson. Television coverage was led by Steve Douglas, who

[3] Statistics Canada.

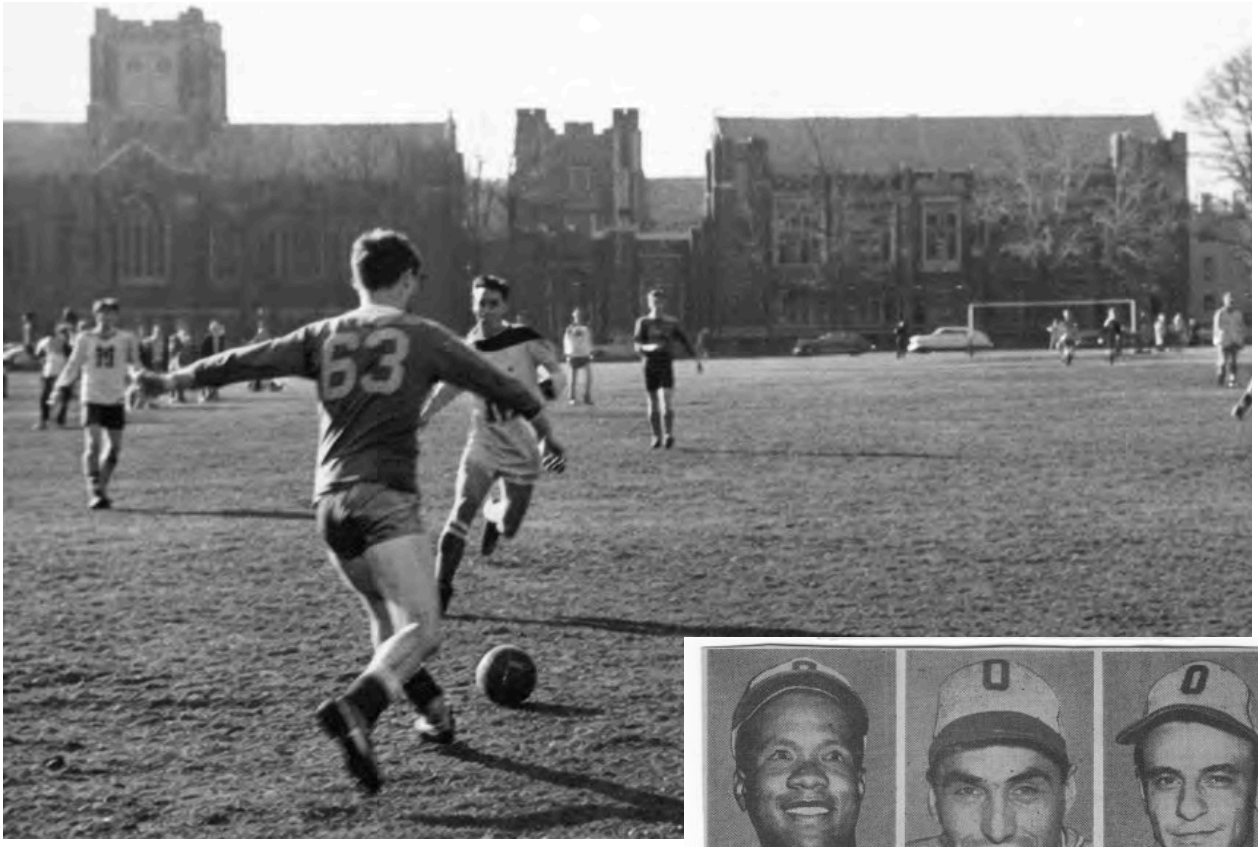
[4] At least six Canadian newspaper journalists were in Cortina for the Olympics.

had done play-by-play during the World Championships in 1955. TV viewers would receive a short daily film "package" of highlights and key moments.

For Europeans, it was a different story. They could watch the Olympics live as a shared broadcast event.

Douglas, for one, thought the Canadians would win it all. After watching them in Kitchener against Windsor on Saturday, he granted that although the Russians could skate, "if the Dutchmen play anywhere near as well as they did in their farewell appearance, they shouldn't have much to worry about."

In Italy, in the days before the Games began, *Canadian Press* reporter Ken Metheral wrote: "Canada's K-W Dutchmen are such prohibitive favourites for the Olympic hockey title that



Don Rope was a gifted all-around athlete who played Hockey, baseball and, at left, soccer at the U of T. Rope The player running toward the ball, facing the camera.

most of the pre-tournament speculation concerns the runner-up spot."

Confidence was in abundance that January. Some might call it overconfidence. Canada's national team was a strong unit, and if history was any indication, Olympic gold was the likely outcome. Canada's men's team held a dominant record of 57 wins, one loss, and three draws across seven Olympic tournaments. During this period, Canada outscored opponents 403 to 34, winning six gold medals and one silver.

So expectations were high for the Canadians, as they always were when competing internationally. Hockey honour and national pride were at stake, and the players, to a one, understood it.

"It is the greatest opportunity and privilege the Dutchmen will ever receive," said Ray Bauer, past president of the team.

As McKenzie sped to Galt on that early January morning, he kept wondering where Rope was. Meantime, as the bus and its long caravan made its way to Malton—in the days

Don Rope and Jack McKenzie took in a variety of sports while at the University of Toronto. Rope is pictured here on various championship teams at the school. Above he is in the back row, third from the right. Below, the church at St. Michael's College.

before Highway 401 existed—teammates and coaching staff were uneasy. Their captain was not on the bus; instead, he was off to Galt in search of one of their star players.

In Galt earlier that morning, a neighbour noticed Rope's car still out front of his apartment at 4 Mill Street—long after he was supposed to have left.

Just hours earlier, Rope had played well, as they trimmed the visiting Windsor Bulldogs 5–2. Everything had seemed fine.

"They were great," said a source close to the team after the win. "They really let go. I think some of the players

have been holding back in recent games because they were afraid of getting injured and thus missing the trip."[5]

The game ran late into Saturday night, and immediately afterward, Rope had driven home to his downtown Galt apartment—about 40 minutes away at the southern end of Waterloo County. There was packing still to do. And laundry. Coupled with an early rise to catch the team bus, it meant he would get very little sleep.

MADE IT!—Don Rope, utility player, nearly missed the Olympic special when he overslept yesterday morning.
Record Photo

Rope Sleeps As Olympic Trip Starts

Thanks to a Galt woman's glance from her window, Dutchmen got off for Europe proximately on time.

The team was ready to leave for Malton and the flight to Ot... when a check showed leftwinger Don Rope missing.

The bus was held at the auditorium while calls were made to Don's home in Galt. There was no answer.

DROVE TO TORONTO

Then it was agreed team captain Jack McKenzie, who was driving to Toronto, would stop at Don's home in an attempt to find the missing player.

But it wasn't necessary. Don, who lives alone, had slept through the ringing of his alarm clock.

A neighbor glanced from her window and noticed his car still in the driveway. She knew he was supposed to be leaving with the Dutchmen so she awakened him. While the utility player was chasing to Kitchener, team officials were making the calls to his home in Galt.

15 MINUTES LATE

He arrived at the auditorium about 15 minutes after the motorcade had left.

John Decker, auditorium assistant manager, sped the missing puckster in pursuit of the bus. It was overtaken just east of Breslau and Don got aboard —and team officials breathed easier.

If the players thought they could catch up on sleep during their stopovers in Scotland and Prague, they were mistaken. In both places, there were receptions and events. They were visiting celebrities.

Rope, single and living alone, slept through his alarm clock. His neighbour rushed over and pounded on the door, waking the sleepy teacher. By the time the team was frantically making calls from Kitchener, Rope had already left home and was speeding toward the Aud—unknowingly passing McKenzie, who was driving the other way.

Rope arrived about 15 minutes after the bus had left. The only person still there was John Decker, the Aud assistant manager, who took matters into his own hands and drove Rope in hot pursuit of the caravan. Decker overtook the bus just outside Breslau. Rope climbed aboard—with some explaining to do.

Meanwhile, where was McKenzie?

Now Rope was safely on board, but the captain was missing. The bus had no choice but to continue to Malton. McKenzie was captain for a reason: level-headed, immensely talented, respected by everyone. If anyone could adjust on the fly and still make it to the airport on time, it was McKenzie.

The big question in the McKenzie household during that early winter of 1956, aside from how the Canadian men's hockey team would fare in Cortina, was whether Canada's team captain, Jack McKenzie, would be back in time for the birth of his first child. The due date for his wife, Joyce, was February 4, around the time of the gold medal game in Cortina.

[5] *The Globe and Mail*, Monday, January 16, 1956. Front Page.

,000 Twin City hockey fans who followed the Dutchmen to Malton Airport crowd around the aircraft as the players boarded their plane

The sendoff at the Malton Airport was over a thousand strong and was the largest ever seen at the airport.

The mood was festive in the caravan following behind the bus. They comprised a long parade, including several busloads of fans, sportswriters, and many of the Who's Who of K-W. Not surprisingly, news of Rope's "sleep-in" made the front page of the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* the next day, along with photographs showing more than 1,000 well-wishers lining the observation deck at the airport.

The McKenzies failed to find Rope in Galt but, after speaking with his neighbour, had no option but to drive to Malton to catch up with the team. McKenzie hoped Rope would be among them. An hour and a half later, as their bus pulled into the airport, so too did a caravan of boosters. McKenzie was not far behind.

Nearby, production work had already begun on the Avro Arrow by some of the top aeronautical engineers in the world. Serious development began in March 1955, after earlier design studies. As the Dutchmen gathered in Malton that day, they didn't know that production on one of the most famed aircraft in aviation history had begun on the first airframe (RL-201), and that by Oct. 4, 1957, the first Arrow RL-201 would be rolled out

Milt Oswald and son Jack congratulate captain Jack McKenzie at the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium on Saturday, January 14, during their last home game before leaving for the Olympics. Team members were presented with pen and pencil sketches, “a tribute to their good sportsmanship” in Cortina.

A crowd exceeding 1,000 K-W Dutchmen fans and supporters lined the observation deck and platform at Malton Airport to give the team a rousing sendoff. The club was scheduled to return Feb. 10. Nearby, the Avro Canada CF-105 Arrow was “in production” —Avro, one of the most storied Canadian initiatives of all time, had begun.

The Avro Canada CF-105 Arrow was a Canadian-designed, all-weather supersonic interceptor conceived at the height of the Cold War to defend North American airspace against long-range bombers. Built around a distinctive delta wing and packed with ambitious technology—including early fly-by-wire concepts—it aimed for Mach 2 performance at very high altitude, a symbol of Canada’s aerospace confidence and industrial reach. Production began in 1956; the Arrow was unveiled in 1957, and flew in 1958, before the program was abruptly cancelled in 1959.

publicly.[6]

[6] Canada Aviation and Space Museum.

The Globe and Mail

Second Section TORONTO, MONDAY, JANUARY 16, 1956. Page 2

Canada's Olympic Hockey Team Flying to Europ

Louis Jaques—WEEKEND

Happy about the whole thing are Coach Bobby Bauer and his Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen, our 1956 Olympic hockey huskies (L to R) in front row: White, Scholes, Klinck, Brodeur, McKenzie, Brooker, Lee and, in rear row: Martin, Theberge, Knox, Rope, Horne, Colvin, Laufman and Logan. Missing when photograph was taken were spare goalie Woodall and replacement Hurst. See accompanying article for player details.

KITCHENER-WATERLOO RECORD, Monday, Jan. 16, 1956

Single float in Saturday's parade carried trophies won by Dutchmen hockey club.

Jack McKenzie accepts floral hockey stick from H. M. Crosby at Saturday game.

Record Photos by Dick Sutton and Ray Hebert

Dutchies' Farewell 5-2 Victory Over B

Sharp Hockey Effort Delights Sellout Crowd of 7,261 at Aud

By LEN TAYLOR

Control of the play, the winning factor in all sport shook the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen out of a mont long slump and sent them off for the Olympic Games fine style here Saturday night.

The Dutchmen, in their sharpest effort for four wee delighted a sellout crowd of 7,261 with a clever 5-2 v tory over the rugged Windsor Bulldogs.

Their winning form was the kind that has put them in first place most of the season. They skated all the way, outfought the opposition for loose pucks, and passed with the precision and flare that has stamped their best performances.

BODYCHECK EFFECTIVELY

Dutchies outshot Windsor 35-20 and their margin of superiority increased as the game wore on. These were the champions Canada is depending on to retain the world hockey title and few left the auditorium with any ideas other than that sort of effort is bound to be rewarded with success in Italy.

From the goal out the Dutchmen were "up" for this one. They bodychecked for the first time this year with Art Hurst, Byrle Klinck and "Butch" Martin laying on the body with rare effect.

Windsor, fighting to break a second-place tie with Stratford, stuck in the game for two periods but they had little left in the third which was played mostly behind the Windsor blue line.

KNOX NETS TWO

Right-winger Paul Knox, who can look as good as any in the game when he is hot, produced two goals and set up two more. Jack McKenzie centred that line and they fired four of the five K-W goals. Jim Logan and McKenzie got one each and left-winger Gerry Theberge notched a slick tally for the other.

The veteran playing coach Jim Peters and left-winger Jack Armstrong scored for Windsor. Peters was credited with a goal on a long shot by Ralph Willis in the first period. He wasn't making any play at the time but was skating near the Dutchman goal when the shot hit him and glanced in.

The Windsor score was sandwiched between Knox's first and Theberge's counter. Knox pounced on a loose puck and registered with a screened backhander. Theberge made a brilliant play his goal checking the puck at the Windsor blue line stick-handling around a de man to pull Dale.

Jim Logan tipped in the goal at 17 seconds in the m frame on a clever three-way ing bout with Knox and M zie.

CAGES REBOUND

Armstrong cut the mar 3-2 when he drove in a r at 16:11. But the Dutchme right back with Knox lifting a shot into the upper right corner on a power play move at 17:30 with Windsor's George McLugan sidelined.

McKenzie tapped in a goal-mouth relay from Don Rope in the final minute of the game to end the scoring. Rope, Bob White and Logan all starred on penalty-killing roles.

Windsor, with nine games in hand, can pass the Dutchmen and take first place by the time the K-Ws return from overseas if they can win eight of them. They have a 14-point bulge to make up.

KITCHENER-WATERLOO—Goal, Brodeur; defence, Lee, Hurst, Klinck, Martin; forwards, Laufman, Theberge, Scholes, Knox, Rope, Logan, Horne, Breaker, White, McKenzie.

WINDSOR—Goal, Dale; defence, McLugan, Ryan, McCallum, Willis, O'Connor; forwards, Sleaver, Brown, Oliver, Pawlyshyn, Haidy, Bathgate, Peters, Armstrong, Abbott.

First Period

1—Kitchener-Waterloo, Knox ... 5:15

2—Windsor, Peters (Willis) ... 8:34

3—Kitchener-Waterloo, Theberge ... 12:42

Second Period

4—Kitchener-Waterloo, Logan (Knox, McKenzie) ... :17

5—Windsor, Armstrong (O'Connor, Peters) ... 16:11

6—Kitchener-Waterloo, Knox (McKenzie, Logan) ... 17:30

Third Period

7—Kitchener-Waterloo, McKenzie (Rope, Knox) ... 19:01

Shots on goal by:

Kitchener-Waterloo ... 11 9 15—35

Windsor ... 15 6 1—20

BLOCKS WINDSOR THRUST—Goalie Denis Brodeur blocks a Windsor drive on the K-W net during the first period of the OHA senior hockey game Saturday night as defencemen Howie Lee (left) and Art Hurst close in to clear the puck away from the Bulldog attackers. The Dutchmen won 5-2.

Record Photo

McKenzie is presented with the floral lucky stick by H.M. Crosby at the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium on the night before their departure for Cortina. In the bottom *Record* photo, goalie Denis Brodeur and defenceman Howie Lee ward off Windsor attackers. Lee, McKenzie and Rope commuted three times a week from Toronto to play for the Dutchmen when they were finishing university. They took turns sleeping or studying on those long commutes, so school didn't suffer.

Don Rope takes the lucky floral hockey stick from Kitchener native and Lieutenant-Governor Louis O. Breithaupt at the Malton Airport, with Theberge and Brodeur looking on. Minutes later, as the team was boarding their plane, the stick was denied entry. Jack McKenzie had to act fast: he gave the stick to his wife at the stairs ot the plane, and she took it home. Soon, Joyce would put it to good use.

Chapter 2

Rousing Sendoff at Malton

Record reporter Sandy Baird could barely contain his enthusiasm for the throng he witnessed at the airport: "…the Malton TCA terminal may be weeks recovering. (The terminal) was jolted and jarred…as nearly 1,000 Dutchmen well-wishers turned it into a three-ring circus of music, cheers, handshakes and backslapping."[7]

This was the stuff communities are made of.

The airport had never seen anything like it—nor would it until September 1964, when the Beatles arrived.

On that January morning in 1956, the terminal was bedlam for 40 minutes until the plane taxied off at 11:30 a.m.

"We've just never had anything like it," said a harassed airport worker.

Baird called it a "tornado of humanity," a whirlwind that descended on Malton in more than 125 cars and three busloads of people, with an added surge of Toronto fans. "There were toddlers, grandmothers, roaring enthusiasts, and quietly dignified well-wishers. Many wore booster headbands, Dutchmen colours, and corsages—"including a stylish matron with a sleek orchid."

A relieved McKenzie finally spotted Rope. He asked what had happened.

"Late last night, after the game, I realized I had no clean socks, so I stayed up half the night doing laundry," Rope said.

"That's typical Rope," McKenzie said, laughing nearly seven decades later, on the eve of Canada's return to Cortina in 2026.

Not all the passengers were sounding the Dutchmen drum loudly. Some patiently took in the spectacle. And, it was a spectacle, while pipes skirled and drums thumped. In marched the Branch 50 Canadian Legion Band, leading a cortege of Legionnaires. It quickly became apparent that the band was drowning out flight announcements, so the towering band leader, Axel Rose, guided them closer to the plane, near the ramp.

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[7] Sandy Baird, "Ducthmen Sendoff Jolts Malton as Crowd Breaks Rules," Kitchener-Waterloo Record, Monday, January 16, 1954. Front Page.

Among the throng was Ontario Lieutenant-Governor Louis O. Breithaupt, a Kitchener native, holding a large banner proclaiming: "DEFEAT does not rest lightly on the shoulders of a Dutchman."

A day earlier, at the final home game before departure, H.M. Crosby had presented team captain McKenzie with a floral hockey stick—a good-luck goaltender's stick meant to bring good fortune in Cortina. Now, at the airport, the stick was front and centre.

The next day, the lucky floral stick was pictured on the front page of *The Globe and Mail*, with coach Bobby Bauer showing it to Breithaupt just before the team boarded the plane.

PHS hockey coach McKenzie, wearing his Olympic coat, is pictured back right. Bill Bartels is the goalie, front centre, and future WHA goaltender Russ Gillow is back centre.

Everyone was accounted for, and the team had its lucky stick. Fans and well-wishers had given Canada's Olympians a sendoff for the ages.

As they climbed the stairs to their plane, two players unfurled a Canadian flag, the Canadian Red Ensign, and waved it for all to see. Then, as they boarded, airline officials told McKenzie that the floral stick could not be taken on board. There were rules about the transport of plants and flowers on international flights. No matter that it was the team's lucky stick. Without hesitation, McKenzie handed the stick to his pregnant wife for safekeeping. In the excitement, few noticed it never made the journey.

After the hoopla, Joyce took it back to Preston, where it sat in their apartment across from the high school for the next few days.[8]

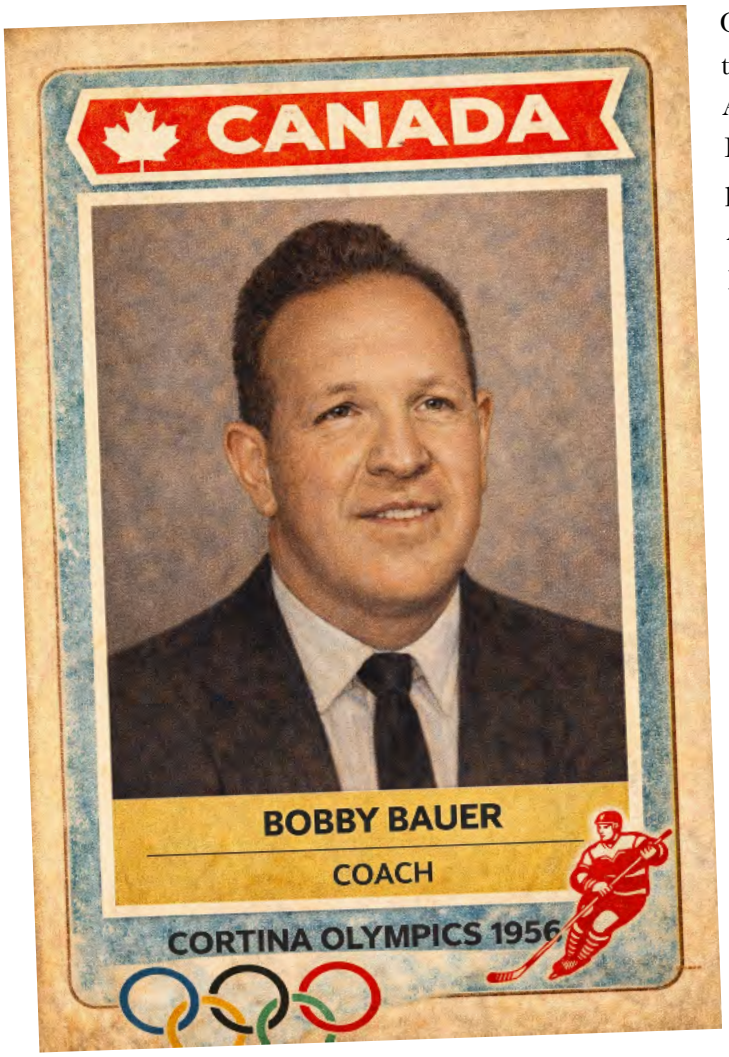
The next day's *Record* included a small note about the stick, buried at the bottom of a full page of coverage. The explanation given wasn't flowers, but weight: "The stick came off the plane at the last minute. It was apparently the victim of weight limit restrictions."

The pride of a nation was with them, even if their lucky stick was not, as they flew east on a TCA North Star, bound first for Montreal, where they were feted with a reception and meal, and from there, to Scotland, out to conquer the world.

As they flew east over Toronto and across eastern Canada, Montreal seemed to come quickly. It was just as well. It would be a long haul across the Atlantic. Tired, they settled in for the short flight, still riding the high from their sendoff. They carried hopes of winning gold. Everyone back at the airport—and back home expected no less. Those expectations were shared by Canadians across the country. Cortina would be no exhibition series. National pride was riding on their effort.

In Montreal to greet them were city councillor Charles Mayer, representing Mayor Jean Drapeau, the man who, in 20 years, would be responsible for the Montreal Summer

[8] Shackelton interview.



Bobby Bauer brought instant credibility to the Kitchener–Waterloo bench. A true hockey aristocrat, he was an NHL gentleman and champion—winner of the Lady Byng Trophy and a two-time Stanley Cup champion with the Boston Bruins—and he skated on one of the most celebrated forward units of the era, the "Kraut Line," alongside Milt Schmidt and Woody Dumart, a trio synonymous with skill, speed, and smart two-way hockey. Whether teaching or steadying a team in pressure moments, Bauer was a coach who had already lived the game at its highest level—and excelled. He was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1996 in the Veteran Player category.

Olympics. Also on hand were officials of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association and the Quebec Amateur Hockey Association, Ken Farmer, president of the Canadian Olympic Association, and A. Sidney Dawes, past president of the COA.

Coach Bauer was interviewed by various media outlets. He singled out one player on whom he was particularly high. He said that team captain Jack McKenzie could make any team in the NHL. "There's a player who has one of the hardest shots of anyone I've ever seen."

One of McKenzie's students, Bill Bartels, was a pretty good junior goaltender and was invited by Jack to go to one of the Dutchmen practices. Bartels went with McKenzie in his car to the Aud.

Years later, McKenzie recalled that Bartels said, "Boy, you guys sure shoot hard."[9]

Bartels had been on the same team as Bobby Hull when they played for the Jr. B Hespeler Hawks, an affiliate of the Galt Jr. A Black Hawks. Hull would often have Bartels stay after practice so Hull, who would go on within a few years to be known as an as having the hardest shot in the NHL.

Many years later, long after Bartels retired, he started having difficulty with his left hand, a reminder of those

[9] Bill Bartels interview, Feb. 22, 2026.

days spent trying to stop two of hockey's hardest shooters. Everyone knows of Hull's famous slapshot. Few knew that McKenzie's shots were on a par with Hull's.

Montreal native Brodeur reassured the media and fans that "We have a good team and I'm sure we can win. We have a great bunch of forwards."

Bauer agreed. "I think we have a good club," he said. "I have always stressed the fundamentals with the boys, especially a good defence. Up-front, we are a passing team, and we do plenty of forechecking: I think that's the style of play that can beat any team we face in the Olympics."

Nothing out of the ordinary marked their departure from Montreal, though the sendoff was more subdued than the one they had seen in Malton. Malton had been bedlam. As they left, a waitress at the terminal's coffee shop was overheard explaining the chaos to a patron.

"I'll bet you're wondering what all the excitement is about," she said. "Well, they say it's a bunch of Kitchener Germans going back to Europe."

The war had ended just a decade earlier. And although it had been forty years since Berlin, Ontario had changed its name to Kitchener, the large German population at the time had been heavily criticized, given that Germany was at war with the Western world. Kitchener was still known as a German town, but old animosities had been forgotten, and the German heritage had become a cause for celebration. A few years later, the city began an annual Oktoberfest celebration that grew into the second-largest—outside Munich's—in the world.

No matter the history. McKenzie's mind was on the task at hand, but he was also worried about the arrival of his first child. There was also much else to think about, including the

HERE'S THE TEAM which it is not too optimistic to prophesy will be Olympic hockey winners. In the centre is Capt. McKenzie, at his right trainer Harry Wharnsby, at his left manager Ernie Goman. There are two goalies, three defence players, 11 forwards, two of whom can play on the defence. Ken Laufman, a forward, was not present for the picture. All photos by Gilbert A. Milne.

The Star Weekly, Toronto, January 28, 195

sheer adventure of the trip to the mountains in Italy, where the world's best amateur athletes would soon gather.

McKenzie and Rope ate this kind of stuff up. To say they loved it was an understatement. They loved hockey and sports in general, and they were very good at it. The two were clearly NHL-calibre players, as were several others on the team. This was no bunch of also-rans. But they were also students of sports history, and they were about to write themselves into the history books.

Chapter 3

On to Scotland

With Montreal behind them, Canada's Olympic hockey team was finally on its way to Europe, scheduled to land in Scotland that morning and play an exhibition game in Paisley that night.

Don Rope was excited about going back to the old country. His father had come to Canada from Scotland, and his family was back there, including uncles and cousins.

After Paisley, they would fly from Prestwick, Scotland, to Prague, behind the Iron Curtain, on Monday, where two exhibition games were scheduled for Tuesday and Thursday. Then they were off to Cortina, where their first Olympic contest was scheduled for January 26 against Germany.

The Rope clan back in Scotland,with his grandparents front centre.

1954 - 1955 KITCHENER — WATERLOO DUTCHMEN ALLAN CUP CHAMPIONS

Front row, left to right: KEITH WOODALL, ERNIE GOMAN (Manager), GERRY THEBERGE, PAT BOEHMER (President), BUD KEMP (Captain), BOBBY BAUER (Coach), KEN LAUFMAN, DR. JIM SPOHN (Club Physician), DENIS BRODEUR.

Centre row, left to right: GEORGE LAWSON (Assistant Trainer), BUDDY HORNE, JOE SCHERTZL, GEORGE SCHOLES, BOB WHITE, JOHN RUMPEL (Secretary), MIKE DELICH, JACK WHITE, JACK HAMILTON, HARRY WHARNSBY (Trainer).

Back row, left to right: JIM LOGAN, CLARE MARTIN, JACK McKENZIE, CHARLES BROOKER, DON OBERHOLZER, PETE KOWALCHUK, HOWIE LEE.

Back at Preston High, McKenzie was on everyone's mind. The boys idolized him; the girls He embodied the hopes and dreams of his students—those he taught and coached, and everyone watching from the sidelines. At 6'3", he towered over his students and over many of his opponents. That alone made him a little intimidating, but on the ice, there were no dirty tricks. He was well-liked as a teacher and coach.

Pat Keachie was one of his students. "I was the Preston High School correspondent for the *Reporter* and every Saturday morning I took my column in to editor Mickey Mowbray," she said. "All the girls had a crush on him; he was tall and handsome in our eyes. I remember when he went to play in the Olympics, but tellingly, I don't remember who replaced him while he was away."

He could be tough, no doubt, but his students and players thought the world of him. He wouldn't tolerate nonsense, once holding a student up against the wall by the neck.

Rope was the same. Their no-nonsense approach to teaching earned them respect. But so too was their athleticism, which students admired. "Mr. Rope commanded respect," said former student David Oxford.

"Mr. Rope was a legend at Glenview Park S.S.," wrote Barb Leighton. "We Panthers were so blessed to benefit from his leadership."

Student John Duncan, who once received a grade of 100 on an essay, was hired by Rope to work on his garden one summer. But he also got kicked out of class by Rope on three

occasions, for some funny stuff. One of those occasions was when Rope threw a chalk brush at him for misbehaving. He should have known better, of course, but school is there to enhance learning, and learn he did. When Rope threw the chalk brush, Duncan ducked, just in the nick of time. "The brush hit the (innocent) person behind me."

Duncan was thrown out of class for ducking. "Overall, Mr. Rope was one of my favourite teachers."

"Mr. McKenzie was a legend at Preston High," said Margaret DaSilva.

In 1956 Preston High was a little, intimate school with only about 300 students, and everyone knew one another. The small community where he and his wife began their family was the same.

"We'd see him on Monday mornings after weekend games," said student Tom Conaway, "and he'd have gashes on his nose and face, and we were in awe."

For the 15-year-old Conaway, "there was no greater thrill than heading to the Aud on a Saturday night…where my favourite player was a tall, smooth-skating right winger named Jack McKenzie, who had a shot that must have made the maskless goaltenders of that era quake."[10]

Jack McKenzie receives the lucky stick from H.M. Crosby at the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium.

The magic of a Saturday night game at the Aud was shared equally by McKenzie, who thought highly of the Kitchener organization and the support fans gave the team. "There was a certain feeling when I played here (Kitchener)—a Saturday night hockey fever that seemed to grip both the fans and the players," he told sportswriter John Herbert in a 1966 *K-W Record* story.[11]

"Many a Monday morning, Jack would stride into class with an ugly welt over one eye or a slice out of his nose. Of course, we thought it was great—a true badge of honour."

McKenzie would sometimes drive members of his Preston hockey team to games, telling hockey stories along the way. His players loved it. Bill Bartels, his high school goalie, was one of them. He kept in touch with his teacher and coach the rest of his life. Like Conaway, he loved McKenzie's yarns.

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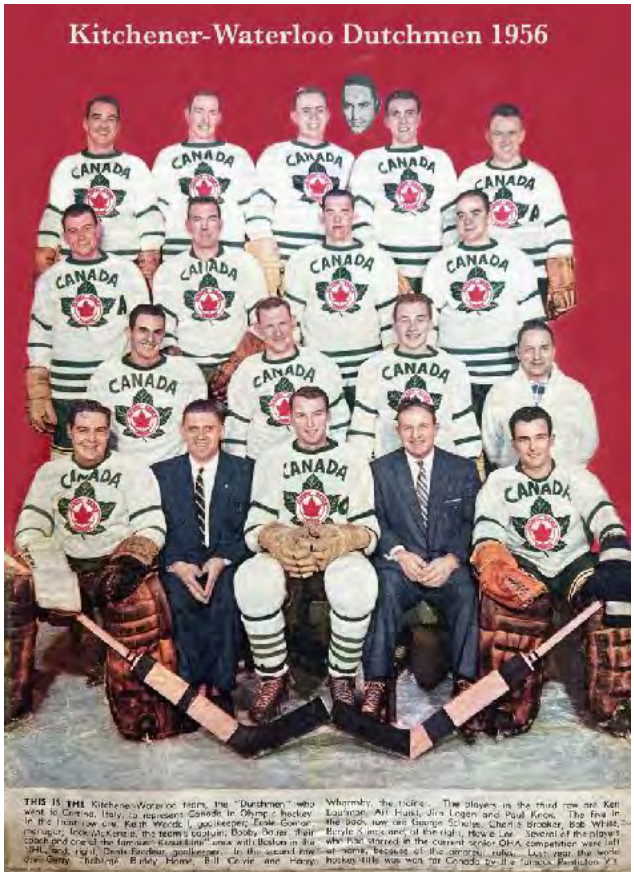
[10] Tom Conaway, *Kitchener Waterloo Record*, September 19, 1992.

[11] John Herbert, *KW Record*, Tuesday, December 20, 1966.

"Jack didn't talk much about his own exploits," Conaway wrote years later. "He was much too modest for that. But he could keep you spellbound talking about Don Rope, Ken Laufman, Gerry Theberge, Howie Lee, and the rest of his teammates."[12]

McKenzie thought the world of them, but it was Rope he counted as his best friend.



In the days after McKenzie's departure for Cortina, the buzz around school—just as it was at Rope's Galt Collegiate—was the Olympics. The excitement was palpable in the hallways. At Preston, student captain Bill Bartells organized a hockey tournament. There was a contest to vote for the Hockey Queen, with each class nominating one candidate.[13]

Dolores Baldrey (later Shackelton), who grew up at 1413 King Street, an athletic young girl—and the school's athletic captain, was named Hockey Queen.[14]

She later married her high school sweetheart, Bob Shackelton, who thought the world of his teacher, McKenzie.

"Bob (Shackelton) was a tremendous help to me in my first years at Preston," McKenzie recalled years later. Shackelton chose a career in teaching, like his idol. It was McKenzie's reference that paved the way with the local school board.

"He always claimed that it was Jack's reference that got him the job," Dolores said.[15]

Shackelton, a member of the Preston Scout House Band in the 1950s, taught in the K-W area, then at Hamilton Teachers' College, and later worked with the London Board of Education. He was only 49 when he died.

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Bill Bartels interview.

[14] Dolores Shackelton interview, January 25, 2026.

[15] Ibid.

The Dutchmen's Lucky Stick

That week at Preston, when Dolores was chosen Hockey Queen, her prize was the lucky floral stick Joyce had brought home from the airport—the stick that couldn't go on the plane. It no longer had green and white flowers; instead, it was wrapped in tinfoil and decorated in Preston High colours. That's when Dolores was told the story of the stick. The stick is still with her in London, on the eve of the 2026 Cortina Games.

"My mom hung it on my bedroom wall, where it stayed for years."[16]

When Dolores later had two young boys of her own, and they visited her mother in the old family home, her boys would plead with their grandmother to let them use it. They became lifelong hockey fans early on. "The whole family, except for me, became hockey fans."

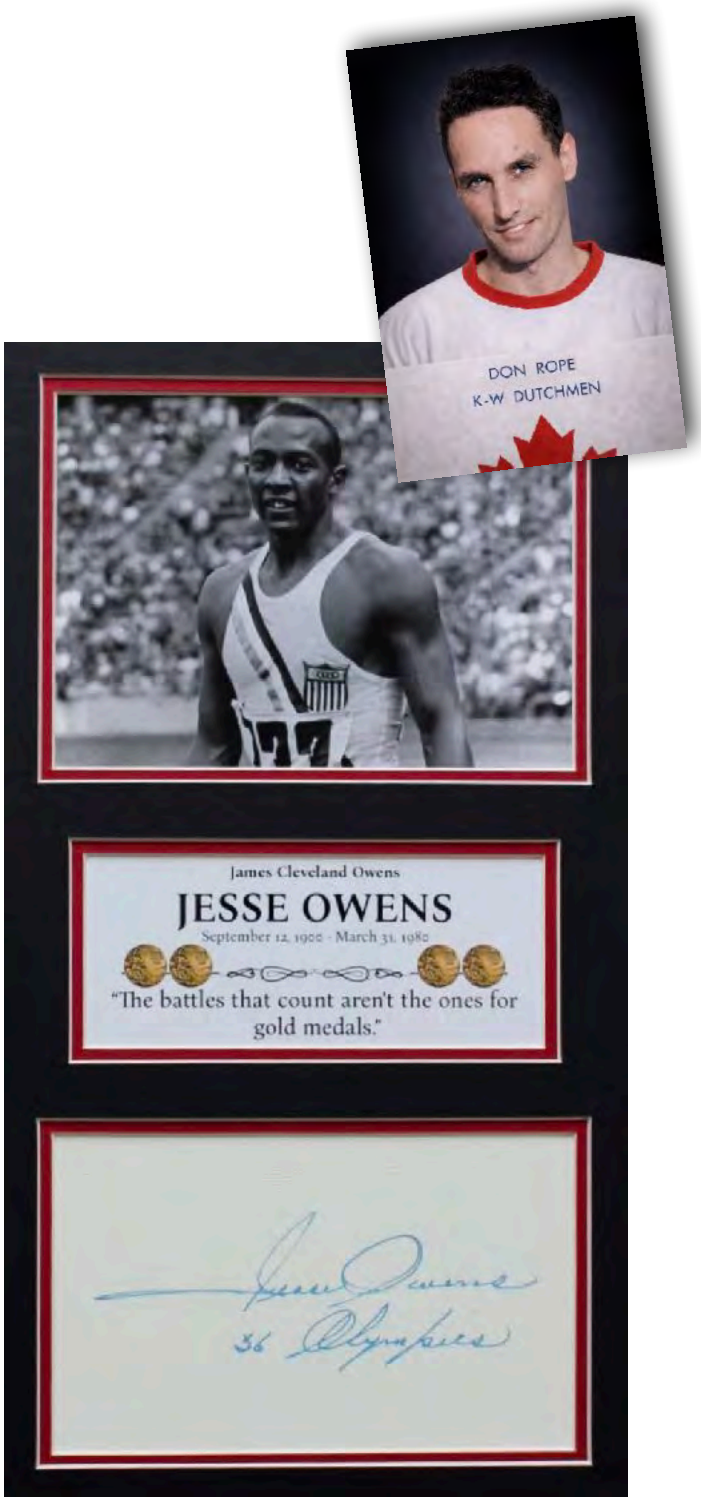
"Grandma," they would beg, "please take that goalie stick off the wall so we can play with it."

She never did.

"Eventually, I got the hockey stick when I moved to London."

When the Humboldt hockey tragedy took place in Saskatchewan in 2018, Dolores brought the stick out and made a small memorial at home to remember the players. "It was my tribute to the kids, with my old Preston High School sweater."

When Dolores went off to Toronto to train as a nurse, she returned home after an exhausting week on the night shift. She went straight to the train station after getting off work and arrived back in Preston dead tired.



"The battles that count," said Jesse Owens, "aren't the ones for gold medals."

[16] Ibid.

"Bob had gotten tickets to the Dutchmen game that night, and I can't remember all that transpired, but I fell asleep at one of Jack McKenzie's games—in the middle of the first period—and didn't wake up until almost the end of the third. Bob vowed he would never take me to another game."

He never did. She was not a big hockey fan anyway.

"Jack was well respected and well liked by all the students," Dolores said, "and the fact that he played hockey was a big thing with all the boys."

Charlie Brooker suffered a knee injury during the team's exhibition game in Scotland.

It was much the same for students at Rope's high school in Galt, who had the opportunity to learn from an Olympian. Year after year, his teams were tops, and in Rope, the boys knew they had a gifted athlete—still playing hockey, tennis, and almost everything else that took his fancy—who could teach them to play properly and excel. Hockey and baseball players like Ron Smith and CFL all-stars like Doug Smith came through his programs.[17]

Jesse Owens

Once, when Jesse Owens stopped by the school and spoke to his gym class, Rope was incensed that a couple of students chose not to listen when he called them in. Students learned to listen to Rope when he gave instructions—or suffer the consequences, which might mean having a football or basketball drilled at them.

But Owens told Rope he was fine with the two boys who continued shooting hoops at the far end of the gym. "Let them shoot," he said. "They don't want to hear an old guy talk. I understand where they're coming from." In a way, so could Rope. But as a teacher, Rope was always master of his domain, whether it was the gym or the classroom. Giving students an inch would mean they would take a mile. But with Owens there, he made an exception.

[17] Cambridge Sports Hall of Fame.

Meeting Owens was a highlight for Rope in a lifetime of highlights. As Don Thompson, a Cambridge lawyer who co-chaired the 1976 Canada Games for the Physically Disabled with David Ridsdale, recalled, Owens was rare and humble.

"I was asked to take him around to different events," Thompson said, tears welling up at the memory.

First, they went to Glenview Park Secondary School, where Rope was head of the boys' physical education department. "I was that high off the ground when I was with Jesse," Thompson said. "He was such a gentleman. We took him to the wheelchair basketball game, and he asked me if he could speak to the audience at halftime, which he did."

Owens and Thompson saw wheelchair basketball, blind runners sprinting, and a one-legged high jumper who set a world record at those Games. That athlete was Arnold ("Arnie") Boldt — the famous Canadian one-legged (right-leg amputee) high jumper.[18] As they drove across Cambridge to the track and field events at Southwood Secondary School, Owens said, "Mr. Thompson, they think I did marvellous things in Berlin. I did nothing compared to what those kids

Ernie Goman will handle business - manager chore.

Experience Aplenty Helps Goman in Recruiting Talent

If the Kitchener - Waterloo Dutchmen don't win a gold medal for Canada at Squaw Valley, Cal., this year, nobody will be able to rightfully pin the blame on the team management.

Few men in hockey history have worked as hard as Dutchie business manager Ernie Goman has this season in trying to line up the talent necessary to win the Olympic hockey tournament.

DRAFT PLAN FAILED

Forced to line up much of the talent himself after the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association plan fell through last fall, Goman has worked untiringly to provide coach Bobby Bauer with adequate manpower. It hasn't been easy, and Canadian hockey fans can be thankful that in Goman the team has a manager with a wealth of experience.

For one thing, Goman is the only man in the history of Twin City hockey to receive a Gold Stick award for outstanding service to hockey. Only one or two such awards are made each year to the top executives in Canadian hockey.

Goman won his last spring for his services to minor hockey, the Ontario Hockey Association, the Canadian Amateur hockey Association and to hockey in Kitchener-Waterloo.

BORN IN DENBIGH

Although he isn't a native of the Twin City, 44-year-old Ernie has been in the spotlight of Twin City sports for almost a quarter century.

Born in Denbigh, a small centre in Renfrew County, Ernie is the son of a clergyman.

At the age of two, Ernie moved with his family to Pembroke.

ERNIE GOMAN
Team Manager
Record Photo

They moved again to Hanover, however, before Ernie started to school. He attended high school in Hanover for 18 months, finished his secondary education in Millverton, then came to the Twin Cities to attend Waterloo College. He has been here ever since, outside of four years spent in the Canadian Army.

For many years Ernie was known for his work in baseball circles, although he readily admits that hockey is and always has been his first love. He played defence for Waterloo College, moved to the Kitchener juniors in 1933, and on to Waterloo and Kitchener intermediate teams.

An all-round athlete tipping the scales at around 190 pounds, Goman starred in soccer, football and basketball throughout the 1930s. He also won the Waterloo College track and field championship three years running.

ELECTED PRESIDENT

Ernie got his managerial start at Waterloo College, and later moved to Kitchener minor hockey ranks, becoming president of the K-W Juvenile Hockey Association which later branched out into midget and bantam ranks. He sponsored a junior club coached by Wilf Heller which introduced former National Hockey League great Howie Meeker to Twin City fans.

When the old Kitchener Auditorium closed down Ernie turned his interest to baseball and basketball. He was president of the Twin City Basketball League and also worked extensively in minor baseball ranks. He developed a juvenile team that went into junior and intermediate play, and won an Ontario senior B ball title for Waterloo in 1940.

After his stint in the army, Ernie returned to head up a group instrumental in reviving baseball in Waterloo. The Waterloo Tigers in 1950 won the Inter-County senior crown, and annexed an Ontario title as well.

SLOWED DOWN BRIEFLY

High cost of operation, however, forced the team out of business.

Seven seasons ago Ernie became manager of the hockey Dutchmen, and has been active in the position ever since.

A heart attack in the summer of 1955 slowed him down for a couple of months, but he's now back at obtaining players and handling other team business with as much gusto as ever.

[18] Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame.

are doing out there today."[19]

That stuck with Thompson the rest of his life.

It was the same for Rope. Meeting Owens—and hearing his words—was something he never forgot.

But the same could be said of Rope by his athletes. Over the years, legions of former students would recall his influence on their lives. But what many of his student-athletes didn't see was his innate sense of humour. It was a quality they came to appreciate later, after high school, as their friendships with their former teacher matured.

That sense of humour, coupled with his lifelong love of sport and health, endeared him to countless people over the years. His influence was wide.

At Althouse Teacher's College at the University of Western Ontario, where teachers were trained to become educators, the physical education professors used Rope's teaching methods in a variety of sports for years.

Rope was going to enjoy talking about his Olympic experience to his students once he returned from Cortina. But first, he was looking forward to the trip to Scotland, where his father's relatives lived.


CITY EDITION

Kitchener-Waterloo Record

U.S. Arms Outlay Hiked $1½ Billion

Dog-Tired Dutchies Hustled to Bed on Arrival in Scotland

See Little of Country In Dim Morning Light

'Strangler' Of Two Said In Institution

Rope Sleeps As Olympic Trip Starts

Dutchmen Sendoff Jolts

Malton as Crowd Breaks Rules

Oshawa Pair Grab $6,000 In Holdup

Legislature Opens Jan. 31; Major Topics Expected

KW fans kept abreast of their team thanks to a steady diet of stories filed by Record reporters who accompanied the team.

It was a long flight over the Atlantic from Montreal. They arrived in the morning—having gone back in time—and played that night. As Rope recalled, they ate seven meals on that one day alone. Though tired, they beat Paisley 6–5, then boarded a KLM flight for Amsterdam and on to Prague.

[19] Don Thompson interview, December 2025.

Chapter 4

First Taste of European Hockey

Upon their arrival at Prestwick, they were greeted by representatives of the Scottish Ice Hockey Association, the Paisley Pirates, and Crawford Burns of Vancouver, the Trans-Canada Air Lines official in Prestwick.

The story that reached fans back home underscored how tired the team was upon arrival: "Dog-tired after a hectic weekend, Canada's Olympic hockey players today spent their first hours in Scotland in bed. The team, flanked by 17 supporters, arrived early this morning from Montreal and immediately drove four miles to the Marine Hotel in Troon, overlooking the Firth of Clyde."

Troon and its Marine Hotel have appeared in film and TV productions, including the 1940s-themed film Turning Tide.

The Canadians were keen to see the old country, even though it was early morning and the light was low. Still, what they saw was impressive by their standards: double-decker buses, and everyone driving on the "wrong" side of the road. The wrong side was right. He was wrong.

Seeing cars on the other side of the road startled Bob White, 20, one of the youngest members of the team, who yelled, "Hey, get over!" as a car passed their bus on the wrong side of the road.

White may have been young, but he had a lot of talent; he was hoping to receive an athletic scholarship to pursue his studies at the University of Michigan. Having the Olympic Games on his resume wouldn't hurt. He had won a Memorial Cup with the Barrie Flyers in 1953 and an Allan Cup with Kitchener in 1955. He later got his chance to play at Michigan in the 1957–58 season, when the Michigan captain was Preston's Neil McDonald.

Thankfully, given that the players were exhausted, it was manager Ernie Goman who was doing the lion's share of the administrative work. No sooner had they reached the hotel

than Goman sorted out rooms, then checked and handled hundreds of pounds of luggage, including 240 hockey sticks. He was dead tired too, but didn't mind the chores. He still found time to tell Canadian Press reporter Ken Metheral that the Dutchmen were there to win.

"We didn't come over here to lose," he said.

Accompanying the team were Kitchener mayor Fred Dreger and Winnipeg mayor James Dunn, a fellow townsman of Rope's and president of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association. Rope and McKenzie, of course, were the pride of Manitoba. Both mayors were proud of all the young men on Canada's team. "They are not only fine hockey players but also first-class citizens."[20]

With a game scheduled in a few hours, no sooner had the players arrived at the Marine Hotel than they were fast asleep, grabbing a catnap before their game and the reception.

Back in Kitchener fans relied on newspaper updates about the team's arrival and their exhibition game. For good measure, there was another note about Rope. The paper mentioned that Rope had corresponded with a cousin in Scotland for 17 years without ever seeing her.

In 1934 Rope and his family visited his father's relatives in Blofield, Scotland, which led to correspondence with his cousin Glenna.

His father's brother Bert played Premier League soccer, while Glenna played high-level tennis.

"She was supposed to meet him in Paisley, but couldn't make it. Don almost didn't make it himself. He slept in…"[21] They weren't going to let Rope forget that one.

His Scottish relatives were athletes in many sports. His uncle George—his father's youngest brother—held the Norwich high jump record. Rope didn't see Glenna on the way over, but he did manage to see her for a two-hour visit following the Olympics. "Keeping in touch" made that visit, and future visits on his 1992 and 1994 cycling and backpacking trips so special.

After their 6–5 win in Paisley, the players returned to their rooms for a few hours of shuteye. Their sleep deprivation would have to continue; they had to get up at 4 a.m. to

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[20] *Kitchener Waterloo Record*

[21] Ibid.

catch a plane to Prague, Czechoslovakia, where two more exhibition games and another reception awaited. But first, there was a post-game reception in Paisley. Most of the players hadn't had a decent night of sleep since the previous Friday.

"All Scotland is pulling for you," said the provost of Paisley, Allan Maclean, at the reception. He gave each player a wool scarf in the famous Paisley pattern.

Beryl Klinck was so excited when he took to the ice for Canada's first exhibition game in the Czech Republic that he forgot to remove his skate guards and promptly did a swan dive.

And although 4,500 fans had been loudly critical of the Canadians during the game, afterward hundreds—"including white-haired grandmothers and youngsters not yet in their teens"—surrounded the team seeking autographs.[22]

"Many of the fans who booed loudest at what they thought were rough Canadian tactics were the first to wish the players good luck at Prague and Cortina," wrote *Record* sports editor Len Taylor, who was accompanying the team.[23]

Among the well-wishers was a group of Canadian Navy personnel from the submarine training depot at Rothesay, Isle of Bute, where 200 Canadians were stationed. They travelled more than 30 miles to take in the game and cheer on their countrymen.

The Paisley game was an important first taste of European hockey. Canada drew 25 minutes of penalties to Paisley's 10. Rope and McKenzie were singled out in newspaper reports as Canada's best players, though most of the roster looked visibly tired. Playing on the bigger ice surface didn't help.[24]

Their opponents seemed to get away with holding and hooking. "In our league at home (the OHA Senior A group), we would have been off the ice for the entire game for holding like that," Bauer said. "But we're not going with the holding and hooking style, which we feel spoils the game."

The Canadians had heard this before. The previous year, when the Penticton Vee's won the world title in Germany, they were the most penalized team in the tournament. Paisley—

[22] Ibid.

[23] KW Record sports editor Len Taylor, KW Record, January 16, 1956.

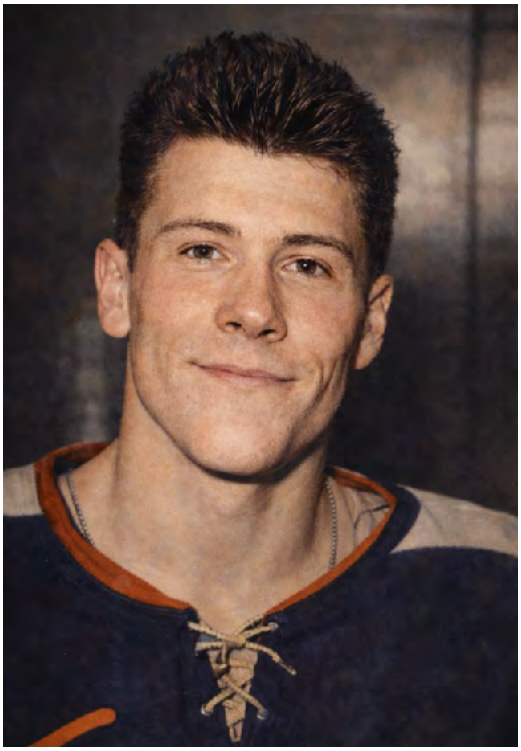
[24] Ibid.

and then Prague—would be a much-needed introduction to the European style and officiating.

But Bauer wasn't worried. "I will be disappointed if these boys are not the sensation of the Games," he said.

He had reason to feel confident. The famed member of the Boston Bruins' Kraut Line had handpicked a number of the "Dutchmen" with the Olympic trip in mind. The trick was finding players who could handle Olympic-style hockey without getting killed in their own league.

"The little ex-Bruin probably will conceal from the Czechs what he regards as his hidden ace until the shooting at Cortina begins. This is his line of Jack McKenzie at centre, with Paul Knox and Jim Logan on the wings. Bauer is confident this threesome will make sitting ducks of European goalies."[25]



Ken Laufman, leading scorer for the Dutchmen, suffered a serious concussion requiring hospitalization during one of the exhibition games in Prague. Although he played in Cortina, McKenzie believes he had not fully recovered. After Prague, the team travelled to Innsbruck and, from there, took a "white-knuckle" bus ride through the mountain passes to Cortina, a trip that took about 8 hours. When they drove into Cortina (left) they were spellbound.

It was an impressive line, fully capable of putting the puck in the net. But there was much to do before Cortina.

The schedule was tight. They were to depart for Cortina by air on January 20. One objective of the exhibition games was to "give the boys a taste of playing on outdoor rinks," as Bauer said. At Cortina, all their games would be outdoors; some would be in the blinding daytime sun, and others at night under the lights.

Sleep came easily on their lone night in Paisley, but the wake-up call came too soon. As they boarded their KLM flight to communist Czechoslovakia—with a stop in Amsterdam—they looked forward to playing against the Czechs. Two games were scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday.

[25] Ibid.

Chapter 5

Warm Reception in Prague

In Prague, they were even more the centre of attention than in Paisley. On arrival they endured a three-hour security inspection. Aside from that, Rope noted, "It was a wonderful experience."

On the eve of the Olympics, Canada's hockey players were treated like heroes. If Canada was known for anything—aside from its reputation in war and its otherwise peaceful nature—it was dominance in hockey.

"The people there were wonderful," Rope wrote. "We had an excellent reception, with tours of historic sites such as Prague Castle (Pražský hrad)…" He described the crowds, the dark clothing, and how warm and happy people seemed to be to see them. They toured the outdoor rink, walked cobblestone streets, and made their "first adjustment to strange food."[26]

They played two games against the Czech Olympic B team and won both. The main Czech team was in Davos for an exhibition. They would see them in Cortina. Everywhere they went, there were lineups for autographs.

More importantly, the Canadians were getting used to the larger European ice surfaces, even as the refereeing remained vastly different. All told, Prague was a good trip—except for injuries. They lost their scoring star, Ken Laufman, to a concussion. That was the second injury suffered in exhibition play; Charlie Brooker had hurt his left knee in Paisley. Two key players were out, for how long no one knew.

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[26] Don Rope scrapbook. This scrapbook was meticulously kept by Waterloo native and avid Dutchmen fan Connie Archer. Her favourite player was Don Rope, and in 1957, she gave the scrapbook to Rope, writing: "After starting this scrapbook on the Dutchmen's trip to Cortina, I felt that my favourite player should have it…I'm sure it will mean more to you in later years than to me, and will help keep these previous memories alive."

Both injuries looked serious. Laufman had to be taken to the hospital, where he spent the night before being released the next day.

To make matters worse, it was becoming clear that heavy body checking was frowned upon in European hockey, while hooking and holding were common. The Canadians were frustrated that holding infractions weren't being called.

"The games taught us a good lesson and one we won't forget," Bauer said after the two games behind the Iron Curtain. A rule prohibiting most checking beyond the opponent's blue line "really threw us off our stride."

In Prague, every time the Canadians left their hotel wearing their Canadian jackets, they were mobbed by fans, mostly teenagers. "I've never seen anything like it," said 21-year-old Beryl Klinck of Elmira. "As our bus pulled out in front of the hotel, the street filled with smiling and waving kids yelling 'CANADA,' and holding aloft pencils and paper for autographs. It took me about five minutes to worm my way to the door, although it was only a few steps away. Then the kids poured right into the hotel after us, and only quick action by the hotel staff prevented them from going into our rooms."

McKenzie was happy to oblige, but frustrated by the language barrier. "It seems a crime to have all those grand youngsters out there and to only be able to sign autographs and smile instead of talking to them. There was certainly no iron curtain as far as they were concerned."

That night, Bauer put the players through a light workout on the open-air rink and then sent them to bed. They were so sleep-deprived that no one argued. The practice—attended by 2,500 fans—helped "get rid of the kinks" and mitigate the overeating the team had done so far at all the obligatory receptions.

Members of the Dutchmen took in the sights of Prague during their short stay behind the Iron Curtain before heading to Cortina.

But three players—Paul Knox, Buddy Horne, and Billy Colvin—were so weary they slept through the workout. "Dutchmen have had little sleep since they left Malton," one reporter explained.

Their trip behind the Iron Curtain was revelatory in many ways. As welcome as they were made to feel by the Czechs, the Canadians had competition for attention. The vice president of Red China, Gen. Chu Teh, and his entourage arrived by train from Hungary shortly after the Canadians. Reports noted that the Canadians still seemed to win the popularity poll, even as the streets were decorated with banners proclaiming friendship between China and Czechoslovakia. The General was among the 14,000 fans who attended that first exhibition game.

The visit of the Chinese dignitary was a big deal. Factory workers and thousands of schoolchildren were released early to greet the visiting leader in typical communist fashion. Crowds waved flags and chanted slogans as the dignitaries drove in an open car down main streets, welcomed by Premier William Siroky and Antonin Novotny, first secretary of the Communist Party.

Cortina was a “fairlytale” town in the mountains.

- Don Rope photo

But the Canadians didn’t go unnoticed anywhere they went. When they attended the Czechoslovakia–Hungary table tennis matches at the Spartak Kohinoor club, they drew a big round of applause from the gallery.

Their first game against the Czech Olympic B team had been sold out—14,000 seats—for a week. Some in Prague said they could have sold 100,000 tickets for the Canadian matches.

Chapter 6

Cortina d'Ampezzo

The drive from Innsbruck to Cortina was a nightmare.

The Innsbruck → Cortina run in 1956 was a true mountain crossing. The route they took through the Brenner Pass was on a two-lane road over high passes and through narrow valleys.

The Brenner route was a key Alpine crossing, but the modern motorway infrastructure wasn't yet in place: the Brenner Autobahn era (and big structures like the Europabrücke/Europe Bridge, completed in 1963) came later.

Long after 1956, trans-Alpine traffic still relied on older state highways like the Italian SS12, through the Brenner corridor.

Mid-winters were always unpredictable in the Austrian and Italian Alps. On the day and night the Dutchmen bus wound its way through the mountains, they drove slowly as the bus driver held one hand on the steering wheel and tried to scrape ice off the inside of the windshield with the other.

The bus made its way cautiously through the mountains: Brenner → Bolzano → Puster Valley/Dobbiaco → and Cortina. It was the destination they wondered about. Would they ever see it? The headlines would read: "Canadian men's hockey team lost." Or, "Hockey team perishes off side of mountain."

The Canadian Olympic team marches in the Opening Ceremonies parade. The parade of athletes began in the town and moved on to the Olympic Stadium.

With a bus full of men, the ride was brutally uncomfortable, given the weak heaters, the cabin's humidity, and the bitter outside air.

The white-knuckle drive took nearly eight hours with frequent curves, steep grades, and lots of braking and engine work along the way. Conditions changed with every mile, swinging from bare pavement in the valleys to ice and drifting snow on the higher sections. They all remembered it.

"It was long and bumpy," recalled Klinck. He described it as hours of white-knuckle terror."

As bad as it was, the worst of the winter was yet to come. Around the time the Olympics closed in early February, a cold wave hit Western and Southern Europe, producing exceptional, record-setting cold (and, in many places, heavy snow) across large areas.

This was in contrast to Cortina's weather at the beginning of the Games, when insufficient natural snow on the alpine courses meant that the Italian army had to move

snow to keep events viable.

By the time they got to Cortina, in one piece, they had overcome one of their most challenging moments.

Unlike the Soviets, the Canadian team arrived just days before their first game. They had little time to acclimatize to the altitude, ice conditions, and atmosphere. At the Concorida Hotel, they were bunked up three to a room.

But the long and harried mountain drive was worth it once they saw the town in all its winter glory.

"It was a fairytale town in the mountains," said Klinck. "It was beautiful."

Opening Ceremonies, with Jack McKenzie seen at the rear.

Canadians stayed, the men were bunked three to a room.

In Cortina, where the Russians had already settled in, everyone was anticipating the Canadians' arrival. "They are the team to beat," said Russian coach A. Chernykov.

American writer Ernest Hemingway had several stays in Cortina, and could often be seen at the Concordia Hotel.

"However," he added, "the U.S., Czechoslovakia and Sweden also have strong teams. About ourselves, we will know more after our game with Canada."

The Russians were, for all intents, a professional club. Chernykov spoke to a Canadian reporter after his team worked out at the outdoor Cortina rink in what was described as a fast-shooting session. The Russians practiced hard for two hours, showing speed and precision, "and shooting with power seldom seen there."[27]

The Canadians and Americans were regarded as the bully boys of Olympic hockey—bodychecking and playing rougher than European opponents. But Bauer said the way to best the Russians was to beat them at their own game. "We have to go for speed to beat the Russians," Bauer said.

Toronto sportswriter Milt Dunnell didn't agree. A year earlier, Penticton had beaten the Russians and won the world title by "belting them out of the rink with a few perfectly legal body slams," Dunnell wrote.[28]

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[27] Canadian Press.

[28] Dunnell, Toronto Daily Star.

The Concordia Hotel sits on Cortina's main avenue and housed the entire Canadian Olympic team for the 1956 Winter Olympics, becoming the team's "Canada House."

"By the time the last period rolled around…Penticton was in complete charge of the situation. It was the Russians who had the distress signals flying. And they were supposed to be the hardrocks of the tournament then because of their superb physical condition."[29]

The Dutchmen, Dunnell added, had gone to Cortina determined to be salesmen of goodwill—and they had done that. They had taken it easy on the rough stuff in Prague and in Scotland. But Dunnell cautioned, they couldn't win by trying to match the Russians in "pantywaist hockey." Unless the Russians got knocked down a few times, he warned, they would skate and pass the Dutchmen dizzy.[30]

Dunnell, who was in Cortina for the Olympics, understood what Bauer was trying to do. In Prague, Bauer told his team to go lightly. A three-time Lady Bing winner for sportsmanship and clean play, Bauer had the Dutchmen avoid heavy body contact in the months leading up to the Olympics "with an eye toward the overstrict refereeing they'll meet at Cortina, Italy," *Record* sports editor Andy O'Brien wrote.

Not all the players were happy about it. "One member of the Flying Dutchmen who will be glad when coach Bobby Bauer lifts the ban on bodychecking is veteran Art Hurst." When Bauer told his players to show courtesy during the Prague games, Hurst complained: "I feel like a dog that's chained to a tree and told it can bark but can't bite."[31]

Hurst couldn't help but eye the Russians when the two teams were practicing one afternoon, side by side on the outdoor rinks. That scenario occurred only once at Cortina. Because the Russian players couldn't take their eyes off their Canadian opponents, their

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[29] Ibid.

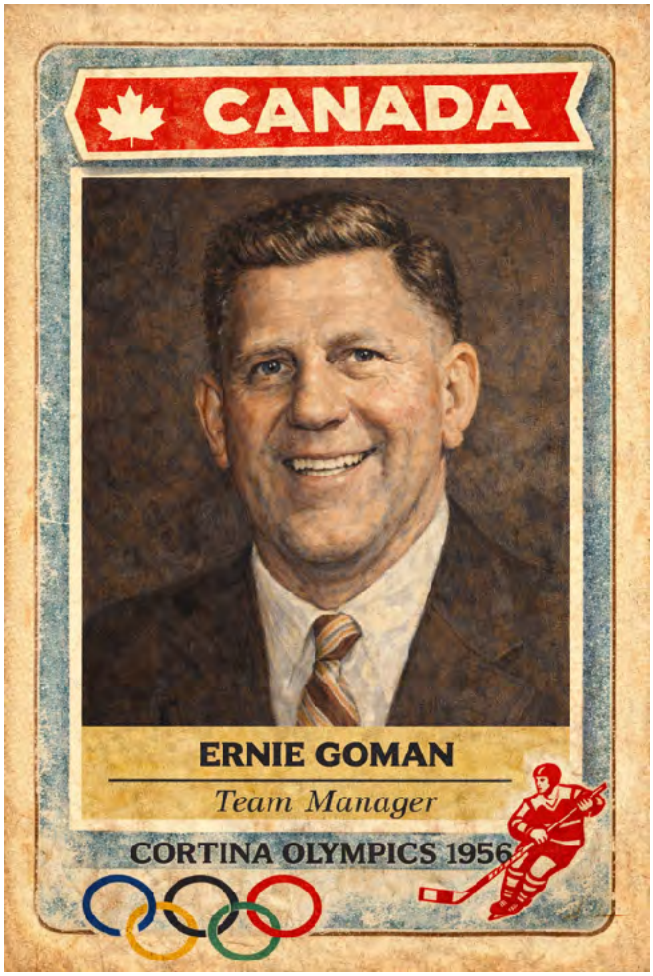
[30] Milt Dunnell, Speaking on Sport, *The Toronto Daily Star,* February 4, 1956.

[31] KW Record.

coach finally gave them a 10-minute break to watch uninterrupted. Bauer didn't have much better luck; his players kept looking over, too, repeatedly stopping and staring in the middle of drills.

"They looked every bit as fast as we've heard they were," McKenzie said.

The consensus of Canadian writers on the scene was that the Russians were shooting harder and more accurately than they had the previous year, when beaten Penticton had beaten them.



As Russian captain Vsevolod Bobrov looked across at the Canadians, he was impressed by their shooting accuracy. As he watched, Bauer and captain McKenzie were feeding pucks to oncoming forwards, who were firing on goalie Keith Woodall.

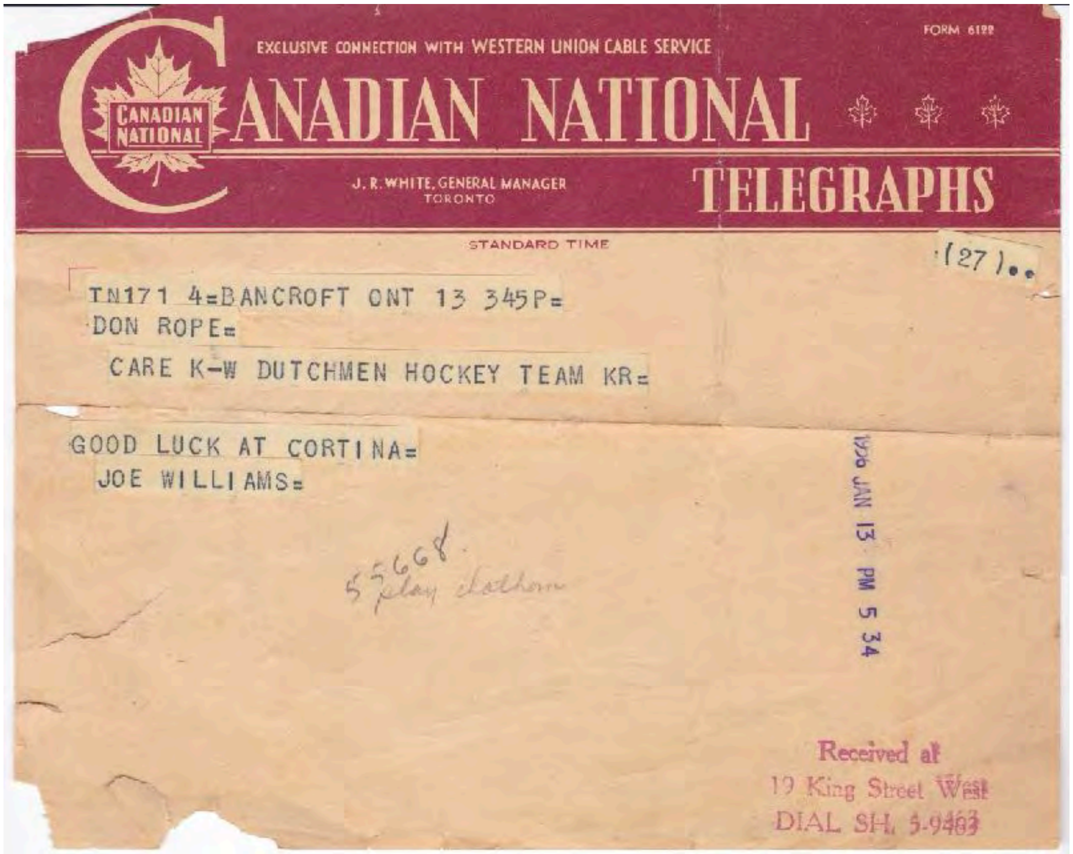
"Puchkov will have a busy time, I think," Bobrov said. He hadn't even seen McKenzie's shot yet. It was world class, at the very least.

Some Europeans warned that Bauer's Canucks were too easygoing, but Dunnell believed Bauer wanted that impression to linger. "What they don't know is that crafty Bauer wants this wrong impression."[32]

The Games began on January 26 and concluded on February 5. The Canadian men's hockey team was regarded as one of the must-see teams at the Games. Indeed, once the team got to Cortina and took to the outdoor ice for practice, all eyes were on them. Hockey was one of the signature sports at the Games, along with downhill skiing and figure skating, and the entire sporting world knew that Canada was the prohibitive favourite.

One of those watching was a Niagara native named Rino Alberton, playing for Italy. He was one of 821 athletes at the Games (687 men, 134 women), in a sport that was just one of 24 sports being contested.

[32] Dunnell, *Toronto Daily Star*, Thursday, January 19, 1956.



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"They (the Dutchmen) look awfully good to me," Alberton said. "They go like bombs when they open up and I think they'll take the Russians without too much trouble."[33]

The Canadian players looked good to many Europeans. McKenzie was the first player approached about coaching abroad.[34] It was a tempting offer to coach the Austrian national team while teaching at the University of Vienna, where he could choose his courses.

The offer was personally conveyed to the Canadian captain by Bruno Holfelt, coach of the Austrian Olympic team, after Canada's convincing 23–0 win the day before. Despite the lopsided score, Austrian netminder Alfred Puels played a good game, turning aside 53 Canadian shots, with another eight hitting goalposts.

McKenzie never seriously considered the offer, although it might have been tempting. "If I had been single and circumstances had been different, then maybe I would have," he

33 KW Record.

34 *KW Record*, Saturday, January 28, 1956.

The beauty of the mountain town of Cortina d'Ampezzo resonated withnthe players long after the Games ended.

said.[35] His future path was set. His main concern at that time, other than winning the tournament, was the pending birth of his first child.

Vienna called, but Preston beckoned him home.

For two weeks, his home base was far from Preston, in Cortina. But more specifically, his home was the de facto Canada House, the Concordia Hotel on the town's main promenade at Corso Italia 28, Cortina d'Ampezzo.

The hotel was within easy walking distance of the rink. Built in 1907 and often referred to as the Concordia Parc Hotel, it was a four-star hotel in classic Cortina (Belle Époque) style, in the centre of town. With roughly 58 rooms, it suited the Canadian contingent—35 athletes plus coaches and officials. It would be Canada's house for the duration of the Games. And long years afterward, it would always be thought of at their home during those two weeks in the Olympic winter of '56.

Between practices and before the Games began, they toured the town, walking and exploring, with goalie Denis Brodeur acting as unofficial photographer.

[35] McKenzie interview.

Lucille Wheeler is shown second from right in this photo that Rope took when the entire Olympic team gathered for official photographs.

- Don Rope photos

Cortina's outdoor stadium was built for the Winter Olympics, nestled within the mountains to create a picture-postcard scene for figure skating and hockey. When Rope returned on a cycling jaunt to Cortina, there were whisperings that the stadium was to be covered. By 2007, when the author visited Cortina, the stadium was completely covered, losing that scenic mountain atmosphere. Cambridge's Linda Ward (Purdy) and partner Neil Carpenter competed at the World Figure Skating Championships at this stadium in 1963, which was the last time the Worlds were held outdoors. The 1963 World Figure Skating Championships were held in Cortina d'Ampezzo (Feb. 28–Mar. 3, 1963). Some skating reportedly continued late into the night due to weather conditions. Ward and Carpenter finished 11th. A year earlier, Canadian Donald Jackson won the world title in Prague, then turned professional.

Chapter 7

Opening of the 1956 Olympic Winter Games

To make it feel more like home, Ray Bauer had given the team a new Red Canadian ensign to put up at the hotel. The team also brought 300 green-and-white felt pennants as gifts from team executive John Rumpel, who made the trip to Italy. The pennants, reading "Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen" and "Canada," in white lettering, were given to opposing teams and others.

Some were given out at the Opening Ceremonies. The 1956 Cortina d'Ampezzo Winter Olympics opened on January 26, 1956, featuring a parade of 32 nations bearing their flags. Delegations paraded through town before entering the Ice Stadium, where hundreds of doves were released. President Giovanni Gronchi officially opened the Games, while speed skater Guido Caroli famously lit the cauldron despite tripping over television cables. McKenzie never forgot that moment—how quickly Caroli recovered. "And the torch remained lit."[36]

Toronto figure skater Robert Norris Bowden, who had also competed in Oslo in 1952, was Canada's flag bearer at the Opening Ceremonies. Alpine skier Giuliana Chenal-Minuzzo became the first woman to recite the Olympic Oath at a Winter Olympics:[37]

"In the name of all competitors, I promise that we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules that govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honour of our teams."[38]

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[36] Ibid.

[37] ibid.

[38] Today, the Olympic Oath has changed: "In the name of all the competitors, I promise that we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, committing ourselves to a sport without doping and without drugs, in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and the honor of our teams."

McKenzie was one of only 35 Canadian athletes at the Games (27 men and eight women) to take the Oath that winter. Although Canada had sent teams to every previous Winter Olympics, its contingent was relatively small aside from hockey.

The Olympic flame had been lit in Rome on January 22 and made its way via gondola in Venice, then was carried by skiers. The ceremony and the cauldron lighting were televised to European audiences before a capacity crowd at the Olympic Ice Stadium—nearly 14,000 people, including several from Kitchener-Waterloo. With Gronchi's declaration, the Games were officially open.

In addition to being the high point of McKenzie and Rope's lives, Cortina marked several Olympic milestones: Chenal-Minuzzo took the Oath as the first woman to do so, and it was the first Winter Games to be broadcast live on television in Europe.

The 1956 Olympics were the first Winter Games ever broadcast on television, a medium then in its infancy. The ceremony also marked the first Winter Olympic appearance for athletes from the Soviet Union, Bolivia, and Iran. Hundreds of doves were released into the stadium as a symbol of peace and friendship.

Another first was the playing of Michał Spisak's Olympic Hymn, which had been officially recognized by the International Olympic Committee a year earlier.

Cortina was the first time the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany competed together as the "United Team of Germany," an arrangement that continued until 1964.

In addition, two new cross-country events made their Olympic Winter Games debut: the men's 30 km and the women's 3 x 5 km relay.

When the Canadians athletes weren't training or competing, they were either at the Concordia Hotel or taking in one of the eight disciplines at various venues in and around the town.

The Concordia, while being one of the town's most prestigious and historic hotels, was notably small compared to the sprawling Olympic villages of the modern era. It also had a connection to writer Ernest Hemingway, who spent long stays in Cortina. During an early visit in the 1920s, Hemingway wrote the short story "Out of Season," which he set in Cortina. In 1948, he famously met Italian writer and translator Fernanda Pivano on the steps of the Hotel Concordia. After Hemingway wrote to say he was in Cortina, she and

her husband took the train to see him; she embraced him on the steps. He was working on his new novel, Across the River and Into the Trees.

Another Cortina hotel with Hemingway ties was the Hotel de la Poste, where the French Olympic team stayed. The two hotels are extremely close in the pedestrian heart of the town—the walk between them is about two minutes along Corso Italia.

The Hotel de la Poste, run by the Manaigo family, was modernized just before the 1956 Games, becoming a prestigious centre of social life in Cortina. During the Games, the Posta Bar—where Hemingway spent time in the years before the Olympics—was the place to be, and remains one of the most iconic spots in the Dolomites.

KITCHENER-WATERLOO RECORD, Thursday, Feb. 9, 1956

Dutchmen To March Along King

Arrival Seen On Schedule

PROGRAM FOR DUTCHMEN'S HOMECOMING

Dutchmen Win Easily Over Army

Why Blame the Players?

Leg Broken in Dutchies' Game

Welcome Home

KITCHENER-WATERLOO RECORD, Friday, Feb. 10, 1956

REACH MONTREAL—Five members of the K-W Dutchmen hockey team are shown on their arrival in Montreal this morning from Europe after the Olympic Games in Italy. Left to right are Gerry Theberge, Keith Woodall, Howie Lee, Jim Logan and Bob White.

STILL SMILING—There were lots of smiles as the Dutchmen arrived in Montreal Coach Bobby Bauer (extreme right) doesn't seem downcast at the loss of the Olympic title to Russia. With him are (left to right) Jack McKenzie, TCA stewardess Ingrid Van Biser, Ernie Goman and Mrs. Bauer.

At Concordia's Canada House in 1956, athletes celebrated Canada's successes, including Lucille Wheeler's bronze medal performance, which earned Canada its first-ever Olympic skiing medal. During lulls in competition, Wheeler and Rope met up for what they called Happy Hour there.

Another hive of activity during the 1956 Olympics was the Press Hotel, reported to be "the last word in organizational efficiency." Its main floor was devoted to a press room with 100 typewriters, printing in six languages. A central pool allowed visiting press to buy photos for wire or air-mail transmission.

"Another large information centre room has 17 comely multi-lingual Italian girls on staff. Still another room receives and sends results from all parts of the course, stadia and ski and

bob runs. These, in the same spot, are permanently put down for the scribes on duplicating machine copies."[39] Each hotel room—typically with two, sometimes three pressmen—had typewriters provided.

"The expenditure has been lavish. For the setup, plus the ice stadium and other new facilities, some 3,500,000 lire were needed. That is $5,600,000." Most of this money came from the Italian soccer pool, of which 20 percent was retained for national sports use.

Within days of the team's arrival, Canadian ambassador Pierre Dupuy held a reception for the entire Canadian delegation, where he presented Wheeler with a diploma for finishing sixth in the women's giant slalom.

On Sunday, January 22, just days before the Opening Ceremonies, the Canadian team gathered outdoors for official photographs. It was a picture-perfect day in the mountains. "We were really bundled up at the start," said Brodeur. "We had on sweaters, overcoats, blazers, and all the trimmings." The trimmings included red toques and galoshes.

Lucille Wheeler was Don Rope's "Happy Hour" companion. Wheeler was one of the stars of the Games, winning Canada's first-ever ski medal, a bronze in the downhill. She would go on to become world champion.

[39] *KW Record.*

After the first round of photos, the athletes peeled off their blazers.

"That's when they started assembling," laughed perky 20-year-old downhill skier Lucille Wheeler of St. Jovite, Quebec. "The more clothes we peeled off, the faster the cameras clicked. By the time we were down to sweaters, there must have been 100 cameras in action."[40]

Record writer Len Taylor reported: "Camera fans wound up disappointed. The striptease ended with the boys in shirtsleeves and the girls in blouses."

In those early days at Cortina, Rope, McKenzie, and Wheeler struck up a friendship, as did many of the Canadian Olympians. Their home base at the Concordia was a refuge—somewhere to unwind. It was also a supportive environment, with athletes from various sports encouraging one another. Everyone had a story.

Wheeler Wins Downhill Bronze

Later there was a buzz in the hotel and around the valley when Wheeler became the first Canadian to win an Olympic skiing medal. Rope and McKenzie were there for the medal presentation, held in the evening.

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[40] Taylor, KW Record, Monday, January 23, 1956.

Rope captured the bobsled competition, and even the unofficial curling, which involved Kitchener officials, including the Kitchener mayor.

As future Olympic Games grew in scope and athletes were sequestered in Olympic Villages, the cultural intimacy Rope and McKenzie found in Cortina, centred in places like the Concordia and the Hotel de la Poste, was gradually lost. Participation in the Winter Games nearly tripled between 1924 and 1956, reflecting the growing global appeal of winter sport.

Winter sports were among the main features of childhood for Rope and McKenzie when they were growing up in Manitoba. Winters were cold and long—perfect for hockey. Temperate weather had not pampered them in their youth.

They embraced those winters on the Prairies. There was no denying their talent. Playing for the Wheat Kings, McKenzie impressed scouts enough to be offered the chance to come east to Toronto to play against the best juniors in Canada. The same held true for Rope, who, as a young teenager, hopped a train like a hobo and crossed Canada to the west coast to visit his father, who had gone there for work.

"Don and I became very close friends," said McKenzie. "He grew up in Winnipeg, and I watched him play hockey. He was good. He was playing junior hockey, and when we came east, he went to St. Mike's and I went to the Marlboros."

Rope and McKenzie, and their teammates, took in many of the Olympic events during their downtime, including ski jumping. These photos were taken by Rope.

-Don Rope photos

McKenzie shone with the junior Marlies, skating on a line with George Armstrong and Danny Lewicki.

Watching Leaf Games with Conn Smythe

"I used to watch some of the Saturday night Leaf games sitting up in Conn Smythe's box in the Gardens. I really enjoyed meeting him because he was such a famous older gentleman, a stalwart."

More than 70 years later, McKenzie can picture the legendary Smythe, the man who built the Maple Leafs and Maple Leaf Gardens, sitting with a warm rug over his legs and an usher to cater to his needs.

The Americans proved worthy opponents and had a hot goaltender who stymied Canadian shooters.
-Don Rope photos

One night Smythe said, "You're getting a few points, Jack."

"Well, yes," McKenzie replied, "look at who I'm playing with—two of the best juniors in Canada."

"Yes, you may be on the same line with them," Smythe said, "but you might be the best player on that line."[41]

"Excuse me, sir," McKenzie replied respectfully, "but you shouldn't say that because you'll spoil me."

Smythe was a keen observer of the game and young players. In 47 games during the 1949–50 OHA Junior A season, McKenzie scored 38 goals and added 36 assists. He was always modest and quick to credit his teammates, and in Armstrong and Lewicki's case, deservedly so.

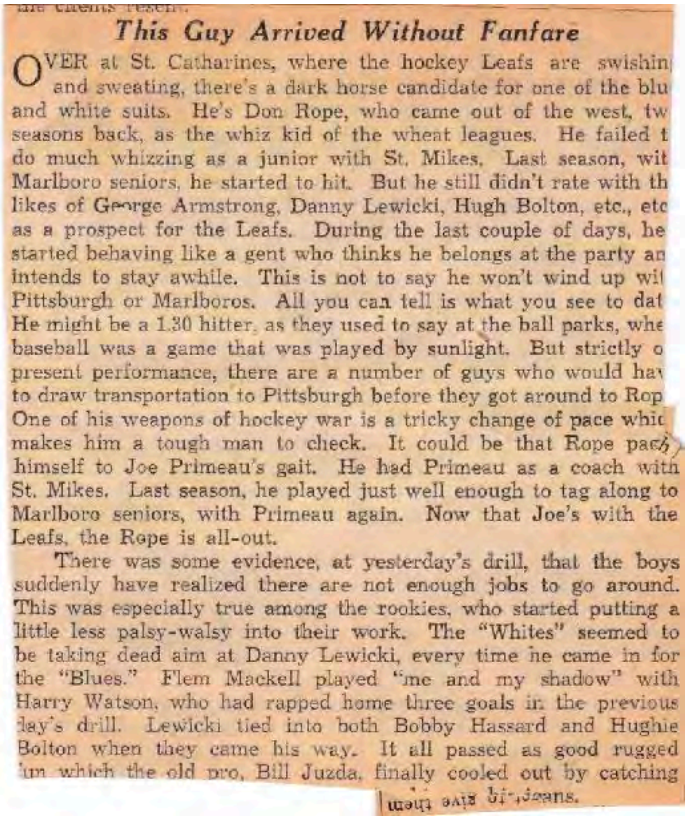
But after the Junior Marlies were beaten out by Windsor, the Senior Marlies called on all three to bolster their Allan Cup bid. And the three juniors didn't disappoint; they helped the team win the Cup along with Rope.

McKenzie owed a lot to the Smythes. Stafford, Conn's son, "was so good to me," he said. "They helped me out so much. If it weren't for them, I could never have been able to afford to go to university."

When McKenzie left the Brandon Wheat Kings Jr. A team to go east, it was to go to the University of Toronto and play hockey. Sometimes he had to pinch himself at his good fortune.

On those memorable Saturday nights in the Smythe box, with Smythe at his side, Smythe would point out all the things that the right-wingers were doing and should be doing.

"I was in awe," admitted McKenzie. "Just to know him was an honour."[42]



This Guy Arrived Without Fanfare

OVER at St. Catharines, where the hockey Leafs are swishin and sweating, there's a dark horse candidate for one of the blu and white suits. He's Don Rope, who came out of the west, tw seasons back, as the whiz kid of the wheat leagues. He failed t do much whizzing as a junior with St. Mikes. Last season, wit Marlboro seniors, he started to hit. But he still didn't rate with th likes of George Armstrong, Danny Lewicki, Hugh Bolton, etc., etc as a prospect for the Leafs. During the last couple of days, he started behaving like a gent who thinks he belongs at the party an intends to stay awhile. This is not to say he won't wind up wit Pittsburgh or Marlboros. All you can tell is what you see to dat He might be a 1.30 hitter, as they used to say at the ball parks, whe baseball was a game that was played by sunlight. But strictly o present performance, there are a number of guys who would hav to draw transportation to Pittsburgh before they got around to Rop One of his weapons of hockey war is a tricky change of pace whic makes him a tough man to check. It could be that Rope pac himself to Joe Primeau's gait. He had Primeau as a coach with St. Mikes. Last season, he played just well enough to tag along to Marlboro seniors, with Primeau again. Now that Joe's with the Leafs, the Rope is all-out.

There was some evidence, at yesterday's drill, that the boys suddenly have realized there are not enough jobs to go around. This was especially true among the rookies, who started putting a little less palsy-walsy into their work. The "Whites" seemed to be taking dead aim at Danny Lewicki, every time he came in for the "Blues." Flem Mackell played "me and my shadow" with Harry Watson, who had rapped home three goals in the previous day's drill. Lewicki tied into both Bobby Hassard and Hughie Bolton when they came his way. It all passed as good rugged fun which the old pro, Bill Juzda, finally cooled out by catching

Don Rope had an impressive Leaf camp, but the reality was that, as a rookie, he would likely have to go to the Leaf farm team in Pittsburgh to start out. He was going to school and wanted to finish his education.

[41] McKenzie interview.

[42] McKenzie interview.

His future was one with unlimited potential, one that would revolve around hockey. And for his part, McKenzie would never abandon the game that had meant so much to him and had already done so much for him.

But he had other dreams, too. He loved the game, but he also wanted to become a teacher. What's more, he had a girlfriend back home in Manitoba whom he wanted to marry, and he envisioned a stable life as a schoolteacher, not as a travelling hockey player.

"I wanted to settle down," he explained.

Teaching those first few years at Preston High School only reinforced his desire to forgo pro hockey. It was the same for Rope.

"Don and I started teaching at the same time," McKenzie recalled. Both graduated from the University of Toronto, though they rarely saw each other while on campus, given that Rope was at St. Michael's College.

McKenzie enjoyed his years in Toronto, spending most of his time on campus at Hart House, where he ate meals. "It was home," he said.

"After graduation, he (Rope) went to Sault Ste. Marie and I went to Preston. And I didn't really have thoughts of turning pro. I got interested in teaching, and I decided that I wasn't going to play pro. At that time, I was Maple Leaf property, so I had to play for a team that the Maple Leafs sponsored, and they wanted me to go to Pittsburgh, which was their farm team, but I decided that I was going to settle down and teach school."


SCHOLES INJURED, BUT BROOKER BACK

Russians Deny Move to Rule Out Dutchies

By LEN TAYLOR

From Page 1

DUTCHIES

Dutchmen Fans Visit Pope Pius

By LEN TAYLOR

Ask Flag Display During Olympics

Will Send Puck Team If Moscow Will Pay

He never regretted it. The town of Preston was small, with about 12,000 people at the time. "My time at Preston was a really good experience. It was a small school, so you knew all the kids. And because Preston was a small town, you knew a lot of people in town. It

The Dutchmen would represent Canada once again at the Squaw Valley Winter Olympics in 1962. Only four years had elapsed since their bronze medal in Cortina, and only a handful of returning players were still on the roster, including Rope, Butch Martin, and Ken Laufman. The team won silver, behind the host Americans. **Top row, left:** BOB McKNIGHT left wing, FRED ETCHER left wing. DON ROPE left wing. CLIFF PENNINGTON centre, KEN LAUFMAN centre captain, BOBBY ATTERSLEY centre, BOBBY ROUSSEAU centre. FLOYD 'Butch' MARTIN right wing, GEORGE SAMOLENKO right wing. **Second row, left;** BOB FORHAN right wing, HARRY WHARNSBY trainer, WREN BLAIR co-ordinator, BOBBY BAUER coach, OSCAR WILES president. ERNIE GOMAN manager, DR. JAMES SPOHN club doctor. GEORGE LAWSON trainer, JIM CONNELLY right wing. **Third row, left:** JACK DOUGLAS defence, DARRYL SLY defence. MURRAY DAVISON defence, CESARE MANIAGO goal, HAROLD HURLEY goal, DON HEAD goal. TED MAKI defence, HARRY SINDEN defence. MAURICE BENOIT defence.

made me forget about playing pro hockey. In Preston, I just decided that I was a teacher and I would stay at it."

Three of them—Howie Lee also came—commuted from Toronto to play for the Dutchmen. They were still going to school, so they would take turns driving while the others studied. The senior Marlies had folded, and they looked for a good team to join. Kitchener's Dutchmen were a strong Senior club in the days when Senior hockey was top-notch. McKenzie, Rope and Howie Lee helped make the team formidable. They made the trip from Toronto to Kitchener two or three times a week that first year.

In addition to the team and its organization, the trio was drawn to the Aud. It was an impressive facility. "Next to Maple Leaf Gardens, it was the best arena in Ontario," he recalled. And, as they soon found out, the local people were devout fans. "They really supported the team. I'd heard Kitchener was a great place to play. The Aud had a lot to do with it. Outside of the Forum and the Gardens, it was the best rink in the country. It was a treat to play here."[43]

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[43] Conaway, *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, September 19, 1992.

Cortina

They could never have imagined that their decision to play in Kitchener would, within a few short years, take them to the Olympics. But circumstances, and winning the Allan Cup, opened up the opportunity of a lifetime.

That opportunity was the Cortina Winter Olympics, the seventh Winter Olympics. The first Winter Olympics were held in Chamonix, France, in 1924, an event often referred to as the I Olympic Winter Games.

By 1956, the Dutchmen were an extremely able Senior team, with a talented and fairly young roster.

"K-W had another strong team," said McKenzie, "and we were expected to win because Canadians had won it every year."

Their first game in Cortina was against Germany, where Canadian troops stationed after the war had helped popularize hockey among German fans. A couple of exhibition games had already been scheduled in Germany following the Olympics, both of which would be televised across Germany. They would play against the RCAF and the Canadian Army teams in new arenas built after the war.

But the newest rink they played in during their Olympic tour was at Cortina. And what an arena it was. The outdoor rink, set against the picturesque backdrop of the Mountains, was, in the opinion of its builders, perfect. Technically, they maintained, the Cortina ice rink, erected specially for the Olympics, was the most modern and perfect structure of its kind.[44]

The Olympic Stadium at Cortina

The Stadio Olimpico del Ghiaccio, which hosted the hockey games, was tailor-made for the 1956 Winter Olympics and used for the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as figure skating. Designed as an open-air "mountain amphitheatre," it was conceived primarily as an outdoor figure-skating arena—one of those classic Winter Games visuals in which the sport sits within the mountainous landscape.

The stadium was planned and approved with the Olympic bid in mind. Plans were already being prepared by Italy's sports body (CONI) and the Olympic-venue planning committee before Cortina was awarded the Games, with final approval coming in April 1952. The architects credited in Italy's architecture census include Mario Ghedina, Francesco Uras, and Riccardo Nelli.

With seating for nearly 8,000, it was large for its time and could be temporarily expanded for the Games to hold 14,000.

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[44] *KW Record*, January 1956. Don Rope's scrapbook.

It became the heart and soul of the Cortina Winter Olympics: the site of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, and the venue for ice hockey and figure skating.

Construction began in 1952, with the surface covering more than 11,000 square yards. The stadium formed a horseshoe-shaped opening to the south, with four covered galleries protected from other directions. The front was wooden, in the region's alpine style, and the roof was covered with copper plates. Inside, the interior was ornate, with a large reception room and two side wings containing offices, bars, first-aid rooms, and other facilities.

The rink accommodated two Olympic hockey surfaces (200 feet by 100 feet), with a reinforced concrete foundation overlaid with asphalt, tarred cardboard, pumice, sand, and many lengths of serpentine freezing tubing. Beneath were three tunnels used for the refrigeration system.

A painting of coach Bobby Bauer with the lucky stick.

There were six heated dressing rooms—two for officials and four for teams—twenty individual rooms for figure skaters, and a large cloakroom for the public. In addition to a presidential box in the second gallery, there were 500 seats for press, radio, and television on the fourth gallery, and ample illumination for night games.

The Canadians welcomed the chance to play at the new outdoor stadium, with the mountains above them. Even though the European game was different, the larger ice surface was challenging, the refereeing was different, and they would be playing at altitude. The teams that had been there the longest, like the Russians, would have several advantages. But they were Canadians, and that spoke for itself.

The Canadians didn't have much time to prepare for their first game after participating in the Opening Ceremonies, which ran roughly an hour and ended by 12:30 p.m. on a beautiful, sunny day. The ceremony had been at the same stadium where they would play, so all the carpets, cables and wires, chairs, and myriad other items used for the ceremony had to be removed, and the ice made ready for the game.

Don Rope was hired to teach at Galt Collegiate Institute, one of the oldest collegiates in Ontario. He wrote a postcard to his male colleagues, reporting that he was having "one heck of a time," but assuring them he was doing his best to serve the country."

The first game of their Olympic tournament took place that same afternoon of January 26, and the Canadians blanked the Germans 4–0.

Not long afterward, McKenzie received a telegram from students at Preston High School. It was signed by all 300 students, each of whom, as Dolores recalled, paid 11 cents to have their names added. McKenzie was moved by the page-long telegram and shared it with his teammates. It gave them a tremendous lift, he recalled.

"It gave us a lift, too," said Dolores. "It made us all feel special."

After their next game, against Austria the following day, a 23–0 victory, Canada was criticized by some who felt the Canadians were pouring it on when they shouldn't have been.

Denis Brodeur, a Montreal native, is shown in goal for for the Dutchmen. Above, he is depicted in a painting. He went on to become a photographer with the Montreal Canadiens.

Then came the host Italians, a 3–1 win, which meant Canada was undefeated heading into the final medal round, where the top two teams from each of the three preliminary pools advanced to a six-team round-robin final. They were unbeaten since leaving Canada nearly two weeks earlier.

Chapter 8

The Medal Round

Canada opened the medal round with a 6–3 win over the Czechs. For their next game, on January 31, they faced the Americans.

So far, the Games had provided the trip—and competition—of a lifetime. It had been characterized by beautiful sunny days in the Italian Alps; the Canadians were optimistic. After the U.S. game, things would get interesting.

On the eve of that game, Rope sent a postcard back to his fellow teachers at Galt Collegiate. On the front was a photo card he'd taken of his friend McKenzie and two other Dutchmen basking in the sunlight on a pristine Cortina winter day during their march in the athletes' parade at the Opening Ceremonies.

"Hello men! I'm doing my best to serve the country," he wrote. "Having one heck of a good time—Glad you're not here!

"Struggle on, men. You can rest assured that if we don't win, there are plenty of dandy cliffs around! Regards to all."[45]

There were few signs of trouble on the horizon. They knew the Russians were the team to beat, but just one year earlier, the Penticton Vees had beaten them 5–0 to win the world title. And though Kitchener had no international experience, they had beaten Penticton to claim the Allan Cup in 1953.

The Dutchmen won the Allan Cup again in the 1954–55 season. What's more, both McKenzie and Rope had played on the 1950 Allan Cup champion Toronto Senior A Marlboros.

They were young, but already they had won three Allan Cups with two different teams. They were, in a very real sense, winners: talented athletes who had chosen education over professional hockey. They were called to teach, but they didn't lack for love of the game.

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[45] Postcard to the GCI male teachers, January 30, 1956.

Even though Russia had lost the world title the year before, their program was not static. They were learning and improving, intent on doing whatever it took to become the best in the world. After their loss to Penticton, they made changes. No NHL team could have made a more focussd effort than they did.

After Russia's stunning 7–2 victory over Canada's East York Lyndhurst, a Sr. B team, at the 1954 World Championship in Stockholm (their first appearance), the Soviet program underwent rapid structural consolidation under coach Anatoli Tarasov, emphasizing centralized training, year-round conditioning, tactical systems, and state-supported preparation through clubs such as HC CSKA Moscow.

Austria's Toni Sailer won three gold medals at Cortina and is regarded as perhaps the greatest skier of all time. He saw the Canadians play, and they saw him downhill ski. His prized possession after the Games, he said, was his signed Canadian hockey stick.

By contrast, Canada's representatives — first the Penticton Vees in 1955 and then the Dutchmen at Cortina — were elite Senior A amateurs whose players held full-time jobs and assembled seasonally. The Vees' 5–0 defeat of the Soviets at the 1955 World Championship was decisive, but it came against a Soviet system still refining its style; within a year, that system had matured dramatically by the time the Cortina Olympics came around.

At Cortina, the Russians were focused on beating Canada and winning the Gold. Canada's mission was the same: to win Gold. But on a personal level, players wanted to enjoy the Olympic experience, and, when possible, see some of the other venues and sports. They might never get that opportunity again.

So Rope and McKenzie—and the rest of the Dutchmen—took in as much of the Olympics as they could between practices and games. They saw Toni Sailer win one of his skiing events and were in awe of his skill and the danger of his sport.

The Blitz from Kitz

Austria's Anton "Toni" Sailer, known as "The Blitz from Kitz," was the greatest alpine skier in Olympic history. His feat of winning all three alpine events at Cortina was matched by Jean-Claude Killy twelve years later, though Sailer's overall performance, many believed, was more impressive.

Just as impressive, at least for the Canadians, was when Lucille Wheeler, their teammate, won Canada's first-ever Olympic skiing medal—bronze—in the downhill. She finished sixth in the giant slalom. Two years later, in 1958, she became a double world champion, the first North American to win a world title in the downhill.

Toni Sailer, the "Blitz from Kitz," at Cortina.

Not to be outdone, Canadian pairs skaters Frances Dafoe and Norris Bowden delivered the performance of their lives but lost the gold to Austria's Elisabeth (Sissy) Schwarz and Kurt Oppelt. Four years earlier, Dafoe and Bowden had finished fifth at the Olympics. In 1953, when they finished second at the Worlds, Bowden had said, "You have to be a runner-up before you can be a winner." Two weeks later, their imaginative moves earned five firsts and a World title.

Rope saw them perform. In his diary, he wrote that he thought they should have won; he was not alone. The fact that they won the world title two weeks later, he felt, "revealed the muddy water in 'subjective' sports."

They saw bobsleigh and ski jumping, and got to know Milt Dunnell. They were also gaining respect for opponents such as the Czech hockey player Vladimir Zábrodský and the Russian Bobrov.

The Olympic experience—and the chance to brush shoulders with world-class athletes—was more than they could have hoped for. And even though the weight of the world was on their shoulders, the Olympics and the Olympic ideal were leaving their imprint on their impressionable young minds. Significantly, those ideals would forever guide their future dealings with student-athletes.

There were lighter moments too. Johnny Sands, the Saskatoon speed skater, fell while leading Helmut Kuhnert of Germany in the 500 metres and ended up with his head buried in a snowbank. That meant he couldn't hear the girl on the public-address system announce: "Sands from Canada has given up."

Devastating Loss to the Americans

On January 31, Canada took to the ice to face the Americans. Some observers thought the U.S. team might be the dark horse of the tournament. The Canadians respected them, but expected to win.

A few minutes in, an American defenceman lofted the puck high from centre ice, sending it floating into the K-W zone. It was windy. Rope skated under it, expecting Brodeur to catch it easily and shovel it out to him. Skating with Rope was an American forward.[46]

Woodall moved out from his net to catch the puck, but lost it in the bright sunlight. It seemed routine, so Rope left his check and moved closer to his goalie.

"The puck bounced off his chest," Rope recalled, "and do you think it would come to me? No. It bounced right onto the stick of the American player, Johnny Mayasich. Denis was out of his net by about 10 or 12 feet. The American just slid it into the open net."[47]

Canadian shooters were stymied for the rest of the game as the American goaltender was outstanding. Canada lost 4–1. U.S. goalie Willard Ikola, a native of Eveleth, Minnesota, was voted the tournament's outstanding goaltender. He was the chief reason for Canada's loss that day.

The Canadians—and the country—were stunned. But it was only one loss, and they still had a chance to win gold. They would have a chance at redemption in their next game, against Germany, on February 2.

U.S. coach John Mariucci believed Canada was still the team to beat, though he predicted Russia's "machine-like team" would be among the best in Cortina.[48]

"Canada, of course, will be tough—probably the favourite, but we can't overlook those Russians."

Montreal Star sportswriter Andy O'Brien called the American win over Canada "a shattering blow." *Toronto Telegram* columnist Bob Hesketh said the Canadian defeat "is the story of a bunch of clean-cut Yankee kids, fresh out of college, with legs, knowledge, drive, hustle and goalkeeper, all combining to smash an illusion called the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen."[49]

McKenzie scored Canada's lone goal, the only Canadian to beat the red-hot Ikola, yet after the game, McKenzie just shook his head. The Canadian players had retreated to their dressing room in shocked disbelief. Many of them were weeping unashamedly.

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[46] Joe Falls, Associated Press, datelined Detroit. "U.S. team may be 'dark horse' of Olympic hockey competition."

[47] Jeff Hicks, *KW Record*, February 2, 2002.

[48] Falls.

[49] Canadian Press, Wednesday, February 1, 1956.

"I don't know how the puck stayed out of the net," McKenzie said, while heaping praise on the American goalie. "I thought I had him beaten at least four times, but every time he came up with the puck. It was uncanny."[50]

Bauer praised the American effort. "Our boys gave everything they had, but it wasn't enough tonight," he said.[51]

Rope took up tennis while at university and kept at it the rest of his life.

Canada responded to that loss with a 10–0 win over the German team the next day, setting up a game against a strong Swedish team on February 3, which Canada won convincingly, 6–2. All was not lost.

Next came the Russians, in what was essentially a game for the gold medal—though Canada had to beat the Russians by three goals to win it all. If they didn't, the best they could do was bronze.

The American squad played brilliantly throughout the tournament, with but one exception. They opened with a 7–2 victory over Germany on January 30, followed by their 4–1 win over Canada, and a 6–1 win over Sweden on February 1. Then they hit a roadblock, losing 4–0 to the Russians on February 3. They bounced back the next day, defeating the Czechs in their final medal-round game, securing at least a medal and perhaps silver.

[50] Ken Metheral, Canadian Press, Wednesday, February 1, 1956.

[51] Ibid.

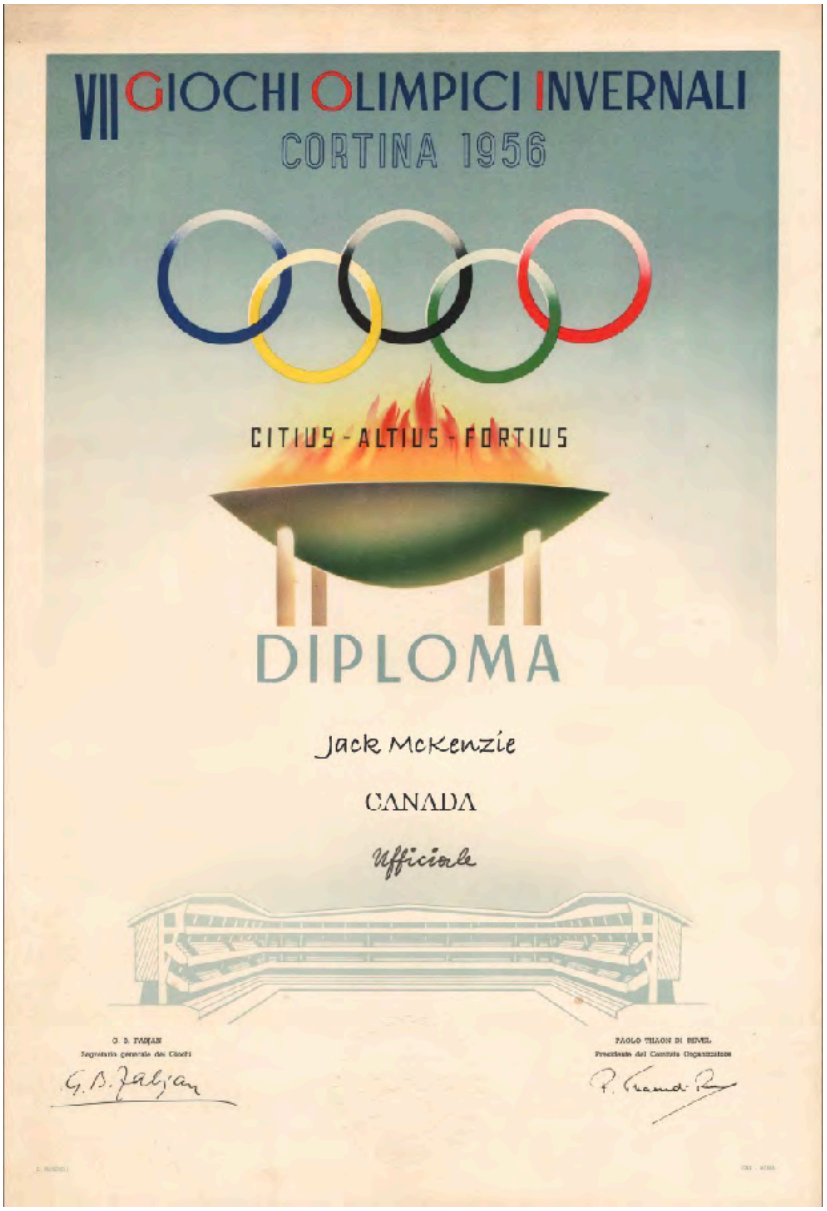
Canada's ultimate placing came down to its final game against the Russians. Win by three goals and the gold was theirs. Lose, and they would leave Cortina with bronze.

Record-Setting Telegram

That Saturday, before the game, Foster Hewitt presented coach Bobby Bauer and captain McKenzie with a lengthy transatlantic cable prepared by the Bay Street office of Canadian National Telegraphs. It was intended as a last-minute pep message from all of Canada.

Hewitt would broadcast the game at 3:15 p.m. on CJBC and at 3:30 p.m. on CKFH. The cable was the idea of CKFH staff members. Each name cost 11 cents. It contained 1,381 names and was 45 feet long.

The record-setting telegram was first announced by John Dinkel at the K-W Junior Chamber of Commerce meeting at the Waterloo Hotel earlier in the week. Dinkel noted it was larger than the one sent the previous year to encourage the Penticton Vees, which carried 1,349 names.



A copy of Jack McKenzie's Olympic diploma from Cortina. The Olympic Stadium where the Dutchmen played all their games is highlighted at the bottom.

A separate K-W telegram arrived in Cortina around the time the Russians were downing the Americans. Canadian fans found themselves cheering for the Russians in that game, given that the Americans had beaten the Canucks.

"With the fate of the Dutchmen hanging in the balance of a U.S. loss, you just had to root for the Red squad," noted the *Record*. But rooting for the Russians would be short-lived. The very next day, Saturday, all of Canada once again viewed them as villains. "Us Red-rooters of today will be hoping they get shellacked, plastered and clobbered, as the Dutchmen go with a vengeance."[52]

Russia's 4–0 win over the Americans was impressive, setting the stage for the Canada–Russia showdown.

On the eve of Canada's biggest game, many writers in Cortina spoke openly about biased refereeing. It was not a new discussion. A *Canadian Press* article, written at CP's request by *Record* sports editor Len Taylor, argued that European officiating endangered further Canadian participation in international competition.

It was nowhere more evident than in Canada's 3–1 win over Italy. "Officiating slackness remains a major problem," Taylor wrote. "It is questionable how long Canadians will come to world events to be humiliated by officials who are obviously not competent."[53]

Indeed, James Dunn, president of the CAHA, noted that the association had voted the previous year against further participation in the world hockey tournament.

Canada received 10 penalties in two periods of the Italian game—"nine of them totally ridiculous"—giving the impression the Canadians were a dirty team. The core issue was the officials' failure to call hooking and holding. On the other hand, body contact, however legitimate, was often penalized.

International writers who witnessed the Italian game were unanimous, Taylor wrote, that the work of German referee Hans Unger was the worst ever seen. As a result of the Canadians' complaint, Unger was removed from the referee list for the final games.

"On reflection, Canadian anger towards the highly partisan Italian fans cooled down with the realization that they are a volatile, excitable crowd. But it was such a contrast to the fairness of the Prague spectators…that the Dutchmen were amazed."[54]

In almost every game at Cortina, the officials seemed to show an uncharitable attitude toward Canada.

"The Russians and Swedes played a really rough game with no disparaging reaction from the crowd," Taylor wrote. "But the Canadians, who have gone out of their way to make good public relations, never got a hand for good play, but drew plenty of boos." And penalties.

Taylor used an example to underscore his argument. In the Italy–Canada game, one of the Italian players skated into Canada's Art Hurst. Hurst saw him coming and stood stock-

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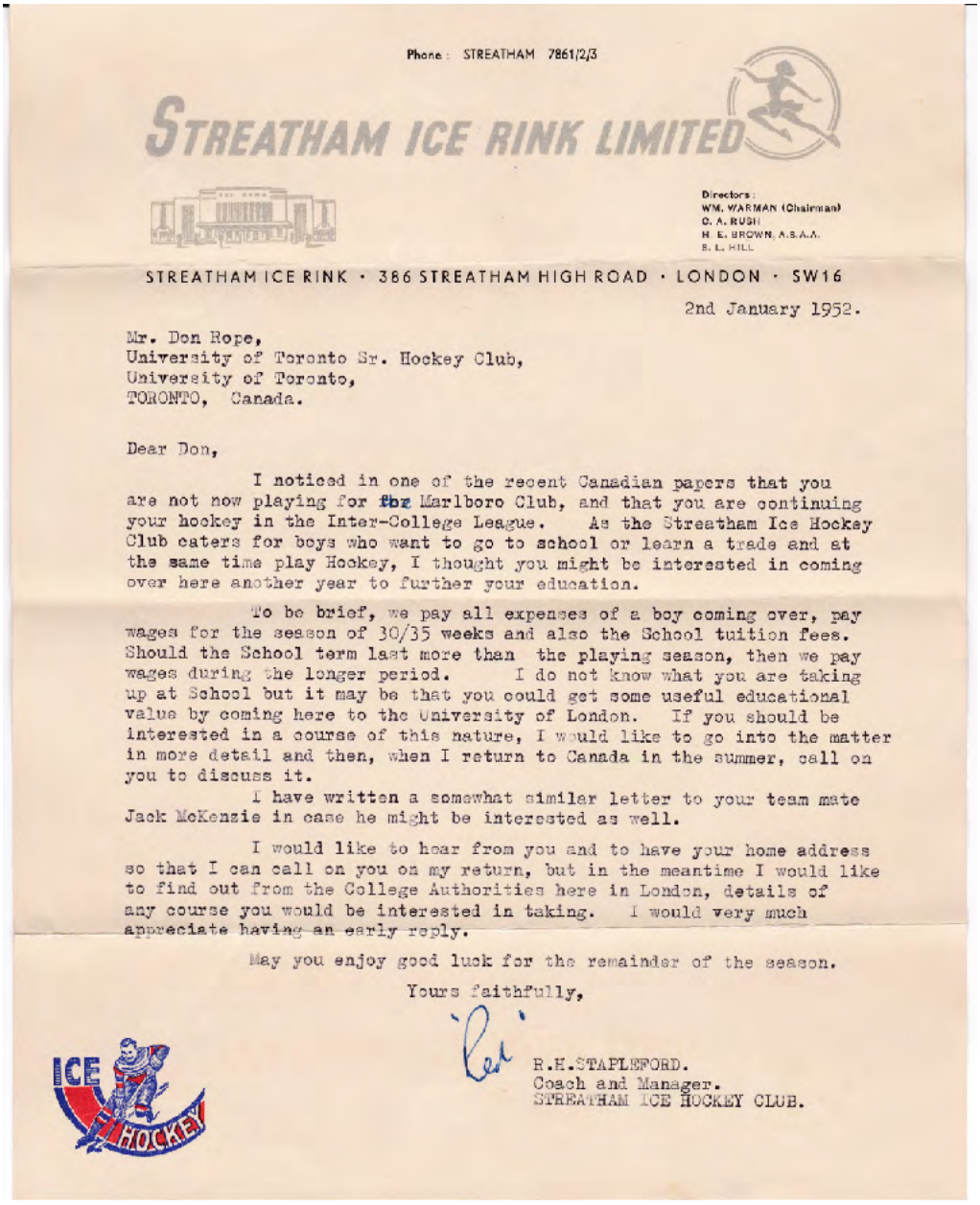
[52] *KW Record* article in Don Rope's scrapbook.

[53] Len Taylor, Canadian Press, Saturday, February 4, 1954. "Refereeing Endangers Ice Meets."

[54] Ibid.

Guido Caroli, an Italian speed skater, lit the Olympic cauldron at the 1956 Cortina Winter Olympics. Caroli died in 2021.



Phone: STREATHAM 7861/2/3

STREATHAM ICE RINK LIMITED

Directors:
WM. WARMAN (Chairman)
C. A. RUSH
H. E. BROWN, A.S.A.A.
S. L. HILL

STREATHAM ICE RINK · 386 STREATHAM HIGH ROAD · LONDON · SW16

2nd January 1952.

Mr. Don Rope,
University of Toronto Sr. Hockey Club,
University of Toronto,
TORONTO, Canada.

Dear Don,

I noticed in one of the recent Canadian papers that you are not now playing for ~~the~~ Marlboro Club, and that you are continuing your hockey in the Inter-College League. As the Streatham Ice Hockey Club caters for boys who want to go to school or learn a trade and at the same time play Hockey, I thought you might be interested in coming over here another year to further your education.

To be brief, we pay all expenses of a boy coming over, pay wages for the season of 30/35 weeks and also the School tuition fees. Should the School term last more than the playing season, then we pay wages during the longer period. I do not know what you are taking up at School but it may be that you could get some useful educational value by coming here to the University of London. If you should be interested in a course of this nature, I would like to go into the matter in more detail and then, when I return to Canada in the summer, call on you to discuss it.

I have written a somewhat similar letter to your team mate Jack McKenzie in case he might be interested as well.

I would like to hear from you and to have your home address so that I can call on you on my return, but in the meantime I would like to find out from the College Authorities here in London, details of any course you would be interested in taking. I would very much appreciate having an early reply.

May you enjoy good luck for the remainder of the season.

Yours faithfully,

R.H.STAPLEFORD.
Coach and Manager.
STREATHAM ICE HOCKEY CLUB.

ICE HOCKEY

Both Jack McKenzie and Don Rope received multiple offers to coach overseas, like this one from the UK's Streatham, in London. This letter played on Rope's desire for education. After graduating from the University of Toronto, he entered law school but continued to play hockey, commuting to Kitchener to play for the Dutchmen, since the Senior Marlies had folded. But he was burning the candle at both ends and opted for teacher's college.

still. The Italian collided with him and fell over. Hurst was called for a penalty.

There were other examples. Canada's Gary Theberge, hooked repeatedly at faceoffs by an Italian forward, finally knocked the stick out of his opponent's hands only to draw a slashing penalty.

One favourite trick of the Europeans was to slide the blade of their stick under an opponent's arm, then scream to the referee, who would often call interference against the victim.

The list of grievances Canada had was long—grievances that nearly led them to walk off. Yet their opponents at Cortina spoke highly of the Canadians as a clean, clever team, the kind Bauer had taken great care to develop.

Chapter 9

Gold Medal Game Against the Russians

Bauer recognized the task at hand. Refereeing aside, Canada's focus was on the Russians that Saturday.

"It's a big task," he said, "but we'll be there fighting to run up the score."

The game marked the third time in three years that Canada and Russia would meet in a showdown for international supremacy.

"At least we are masters of our own fate," Bauer said.

Before presenting the long telegram to Bauer, Foster Hewitt—Canada's hockey broadcaster—was barred from the stadium for 40 minutes due to accreditation issues. Yet the bartender from the Concordia Hotel, whom the Canadians saw every night, somehow secured a prime position behind the Canadian bench!

Dunnell wrote that the Canadian players might have quaffed an occasional beer "rather than see the stuff go flat," and "might have cheated once or twice on curfew to catch the late, late show," but they were there to play. And they were getting plenty of encouragement from people back home.

A few more telegrams were presented to the Dutchmen by well-wishers in Canada before the Russia game. Spiff Evans at Maple Leaf Gardens rounded up good-luck messages from former Marlboros—an organization Howie Lee, McKenzie, and Rope had played for. Dutchmen president Pat Boehmer also played for the Dukes.

Although two of their number were nursing injuries—Brooker and Laufman—Laufman's concussion from Prague had lingering effects. McKenzie knew he wasn't back to his normal self. He was the team's top sniper, just as he had been in Junior hockey with Guelph. Having him at his full power could make a big difference.

After the first period, it was clear they were taking the play to the Russians. Most observers thought Canada outplayed them. The stakes had never been higher.

Bobrov was a legendary athlete in the Soviet Union. He not only played hockey at the 1956 Cortina Olympics, but also competed in soccer for the Soviets at the 1952 Summer Olympics.

Back home, the wives were just happy their husbands were representing Canada at the Olympics. "We don't care what they bring back, as long as they come back all in one piece," said Joyce McKenzie on the eve of departure. She had an emerging family to think about. Expecting their first baby on February 3, she hoped not to enter South Waterloo Memorial Hospital until after Jack returned.

But they had planned for this possibility. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Fred P. Bajus, had come east from Vancouver to be with her.

Margaret Laufman, Ken's wife, had her hands full since her husband had left. The couple had moved into a new home just days before Ken departed. She had been fighting a bad cold since Christmas, and when word came that her husband had suffered a concussion, she wanted only one thing: to have him home safe. Like Joyce, she too was expecting. The couple already had two children.

"I am just tuckered out," she admitted. She didn't go with the motorcade to Malton. Still, she was there in spirit.

The Game: A Final Day Showdown

Going into the final day in Cortina, gold was on the line. Nearly 13,000 fans packed the outdoor Stadio Olimpico del Ghiaccio under the lights. It was a freezing Italian night, and the tension of the Cold War hung heavy over the ice.

Art Hurst came out firing on all cylinders in that final game, hitting hard and often. He felled Russian forwards regularly with hip checks, including several on Russia's big ace, Vsevolod Bobrov, who was flattened three times in the first period alone. Hurt by the punishment, Bobrov didn't return to the game until the third period, when he shifted to right wing to avoid Hurst Alley.

But Russia was not afraid to dish out hard hits, either. A year earlier, Penticton had run roughshod over them, but they had profited from their 1955 mistakes.

In that final game, Canada was assessed seven of the 10 penalties. Canada dominated the opening period, peppering Nikolai Puchkov, but he was a human wall. The period ended 0–0.

In the second period, Canada continued to play well, but a single mistake allowed Yuri Krylov to score, and Canada went to the second intermission down 1–0.

Just 37 seconds into the third, Valentin Kuzin scored again. Although the Canadians were vastly outshooting the Russians, they were stymied by Puchkov's saves. Canadian shots hit five goalposts, including a couple that rang off crossbars behind Puchkov. The game ended 2–0 in favour of the Soviet Union.

Many Canadian players were in tears. They had outplayed and outshot the Russians, but the puck wouldn't go in.

While Denis Brodeur—the father of legendary NHL goalie Martin Brodeur—was Canada's primary goaltender for much of the tournament, Bauer started Keith Woodall for the critical final game. Woodall faced nine shots, allowing goals in the second and third periods to Yuri Krylov and Valentin Kuzin. Despite outshooting the Soviets 23–9—and hitting the goalposts time and again—Canada could not solve Russian goalie Nikolai Puchkov.

Bauer, though bitterly disappointed, praised his opponents. "Russia skated, passed, covered up and went both ways well." He called the new champions the best team his club had ever faced. "They played the game of their lives."

And yet the Canadians played well. Save for several goalposts, the outcome could easily have been different.

Left winger Theberge finished as the tournament's top scorer, tied with Bobrov, though both went scoreless in the final. Jim Logan scored seven goals in the tournament.

McKenzie Top Forward at Olympics

Canadian captain McKenzie—who played mostly on defence—was unanimously named by Olympic hockey officials as the tournament's best forward.

None of that mattered. The mood in the Canadian dressing room was sombre. McKenzie and Rope, and everyone on the team, were disconsolate.

It would take days to process. For some, it would take a lifetime, and even then, for a few, it could never truly be processed. In the meantime, they were scheduled to leave Cortina for Westphalia, Germany on February 8, where they would be guests of the Canadian Army.

They played two exhibition games following Cortina. At Baden-Baden, they beat the RCAF Flyers 15–4 at the Air Force's Sellingen Base, after beating the same team 15–5 a day earlier. Sellingen Base was home to the RCAF's 4th Fighter Wing, part of the Canadian NATO contingent in Germany. The RCAF team was formed to promote goodwill in Europe, and played in a European league.

The Flyers' goalie, jet pilot Ian Ferguson of Angus, Ontario, was outstanding for the airmen in the first two periods. At the base, they were feted as if world champions and given engraved pewter mugs before the game. More than 1,400 Canadians, Germans and Americans watched them play in the newly-built arena.[55]

An army spokesperson said the team was given a royal welcome at the base. They were also scheduled to play an all-star squad from the brigade in a game to be broadcast on German national television.

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[55] *KW Record*, Wednesday, February 9, 1956.

STILL SMILING—There were lots of smiles as the Dutchmen arrived in Montreal. Coach Bobby Bauer (extreme right) doesn't seem downcast at the loss of the Olympic title to Russia. With him are (left to right) Jack McKenzie, TCA stewardess Ernie Bauer. CP Wirephoto

That night in Germany, with Canadian troops trying to ease their disappointment at winning bronze, they couldn't forget their loss to Russia. Although the Olympics were still dominating their thoughts, they weren't thinking about the Olympic Creed; nor were they thinking about the intrinsic value of the struggle they had endured. Only later did they come to understand that the 1956 Games were, in a deep way, a true embodiment of that struggle. Their heartbreaking bronze sparked a national conversation in Canada about the changing nature of international competition.

The ramifications of Cortina—and that one game against the Russians—were monumental. "The situation may never be quite the same again," prophesied Taylor.[56]

Shifting Balance of International Power

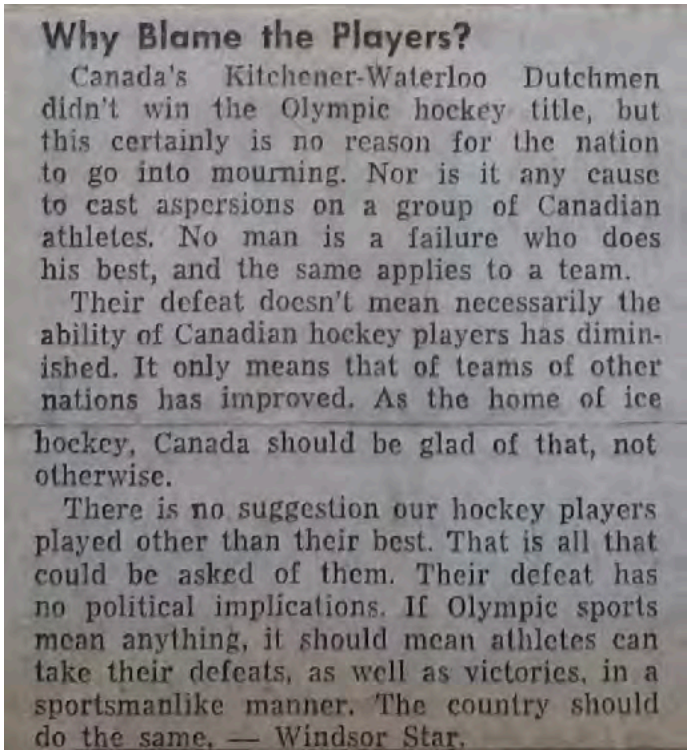
One sign that things might never be the same was when Clarence Campbell, president of the NHL, suggested a North American tour by the Russian team, sponsored by arena managers. Although that did happen within a few years, with the Russians playing top

[56] Taylor, *KW Record*, Monday, February 6, 1956.

Senior and Junior teams, it would be 16 years before the Russians and the NHLers faced off.[57]

But even before that happened, it was clear that Cortina was a turning point for Canadian hockey. Their experience became legendary in Canadian sports history, though bittersweetly, as the Soviets won Olympic gold at their first-ever Winter Games. Dunnell wrote that the Soviets had, indeed, become a first-rate hockey power.

Back in Canada, the loss was treated almost like a national funeral. Many lost sight of how well they had played. They looked at the final score, with blinders on to how good the Dutchmen were and to the fact that Canada's team had played their hearts out.



Why Blame the Players?

Canada's Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen didn't win the Olympic hockey title, but this certainly is no reason for the nation to go into mourning. Nor is it any cause to cast aspersions on a group of Canadian athletes. No man is a failure who does his best, and the same applies to a team.

Their defeat doesn't mean necessarily the ability of Canadian hockey players has diminished. It only means that of teams of other nations has improved. As the home of ice hockey, Canada should be glad of that, not otherwise.

There is no suggestion our hockey players played other than their best. That is all that could be asked of them. Their defeat has no political implications. If Olympic sports mean anything, it should mean athletes can take their defeats, as well as victories, in a sportsmanlike manner. The country should do the same. — Windsor Star.

After the Dutchmen's defeat, the Windsor Star spoke of the defeat in terms of the Olympic ideals of sportsmanship, saying "If Olympic sports mean anything, it should mean athletes can take their defeats, as well as victories, in a sportsmanlike manner."

In Kitchener-Waterloo, a bronze medal was not expected, to be sure, but the community overwhelmingly supported the Dutchmen on their return. There were almost as many supporters at the Malton Airport to welcome them home as there had been to see them off three weeks earlier. And along the streets of KW, they had a parade upon their return. There was no doubt about how they felt about their Dutchmen. Win or lose, they were completely behind them.

But a national debate had been sparked over why Canada was sending a single amateur club—the Dutchmen—to face the USSR's "state-amateur" powerhouse, which operated like a professional team. In time, it helped lead to the creation of a permanent national-team program in the 1960s, led by Father David Bauer, Bobby Bauer's brother.

Canada's two critical losses to the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which relegated them to third place, marked the shift in the balance of global hockey power. True, Canada carried the offensive edge, but sport can be unforgiving. Lady Luck had not gone Canada's way.

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[57] Canadian Press, February 4, 1956.

A long line of vehicles, including three busloads of supporters, returned from the Malton Airport to Kitcheen-Waterloo when the team returned home.

Few thought back to that lucky stick that was not permitted to fly with the team. As it turned out, they could have used some luck. The Russians fired only nine shots at Woodall; their first real drive on the Canadian net did not come until 16:20 of the first period. So aside from not being able to beat the Russian goalie and ringing shot after shot off the goalpost, the Dutchman had done something right.

But the Soviets won the game and the gold. Canada's hockey team hadn't found the answer to the Russian team, but everyone else in Canada, especially the sportswriters and hockey people, offered solutions.

Toronto sportswriter Milt Dunnell, who was at the game in Cortina, filed his story immediately after the loss, making clear what he believed Canada had to do to right its hockey woes.

"Unless they begin tossing their weight around, and letting on they know who's boss, those red-skirted Ruskies are going to skate right over them."[58]

Whereas Bauer believed speed and shooting were needed to beat the Russians. Dunnell believed brawn was called for. No one asked Lady Luck to lend her hand. Maybe they should have let the lucky stick fly after all.

That stick brought a lifetime of enjoyment and inspiration to its high school Hockey Queen. It connected her to teacher Jack McKenzie and Canada's team, and that unforgettable Olympic year. Joyce Shackelton was not a hockey fan per se. She saw the stick as a connection to a glorious athletic event and to the team that represented Canada at the Olympic Games, when the entire student body cheered on their teacher and their team. In

[58] Milt Dunnell, *Toronto Daily Star*, Saturday, February 4, 1956.

Jack McKenzie is welcomed home by his father, C. R. McKenzie (left) of Brandon, Man., and his sister, Mrs. Merle Vaughan of Toronto, who looks at some of the medals and pins he brought home from Italy.

her mind the team had been successful. They had won the bronze. Unlike many others, she didn't see Cortina as a disappointment.

Her view, from the eyes of a girl, was markedly different from what Jack McKenzie saw. "There were a lot of disappointed people in K-W because they had really supported us," he said.

But sometimes seeing things from the eyes of a child, or a young girl, is the vantage point that offers the greatest truth.

What McKenzie and Rope saw as the truth, at that time, was that they had accepted the call to play for their country and had embraced the challenge willingly. Now they accepted responsibility for the result. They carried the weight of knowing Canada's defeats by the Americans (4–1) and Soviets (2–0) and their resulting bronze was Canada's lowest placement since hockey was added to the Olympic program.

There were critics, of course, but the overwhelming majority of fans in Waterloo County remained behind them, win or lose. They were a credit to their city and their country. When they returned the crowd greeting them at the Malton Airport was almost as large as

the one that had seen them off. And when they returned to KW, there was a parade of well-wishers, thanking them for representing Canada.

One fellow Olympian who was behind them all the way was Austrian skier Toni Sailer—three-time gold medalist at Cortina, and later called the greatest skier in history—who counted among his prized possessions a hockey stick autographed by the Canadians.

Bronze medalists treated like heroes

Byrle Klinck holds the bronze medal he won at Cortina in 1956.

▶ Thumper continued from A1

"I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't believe it," he said. "The Olympics were The Olympics."

Today, at 78, Klinck still looks like he could go into the boards if he had to, and he keeps fit with daily walks and plenty of snow shovelling. But many of his Kitchener neighbours probably have no idea he's an Olympian — he's more likely to talk about his grandkids than the time he chased gold for Canada.

As Canada's hockey teams take to the ice in Sochi, Russia, Klinck can't help but think back to that winter in 1956. He recently pulled out the Olympic medal he keeps underneath his coffee table and shared some memories of that special time in his life.

"You know it was a once-in-a-lifetime thing. It was special. It was almost overwhelming," he said.

In the lead up to the Games, the excitement around the team was palpable. Crowds packed rinks around Ontario to get a look at the Dutchmen who would represent Canada.

After exhibition game in Prague, Czechoslovakia, Klinck was so excited, he charged out onto the ice with his skate guards still on, and promptly did a swan dive.

Their arrival in Italy was less than glamorous. The team took a white-knuckle bus ride from Innsbruck, Austria, to Cortina d'Ampezzo, bumping along a snowy mountain pass as the driver tried to scrape off the ice that was forming on the inside of the windshield, with one hand on the wheel.

The site of the '56 Winter Olympics was a "fairy tale" setting — a beautiful Italian mountain resort town surrounded by the Alps, Klinck said. The Canadians were bunked up three to a room and had a few days to acclimatize before they started playing.

Outfitted in matching red toques and fur-collared jackets, they toured the town with goalie Denis Brodeur acting as the team's unofficial photographer.

It didn't feel real for Klinck until the Games officially began. At the Opening Ceremonies, he watched the torch bearer come into the stadium — and saw him promptly trip on an electrical wire.

"When I got to see the Opening Ceremonies, it finally registered, this is really happening," he said.

The hockey games were all played outdoors, in daylight and sometimes in the snow, inside the cavernous but roofless Stadio Olimpico Del Ghiaccio. The whistling European fans were some of the most deafening he'd ever heard.

Canada dominated their pool, beating Germany 4-0, Austria 23-0 and Italy 5-1. They advanced and defeated Czechoslovakia, Sweden and the Germans again.

Klinck's game wasn't a finesse one, and he played his tough-guy role to the best of his ability. The Europeans played cleaner, more wide-open style, and he had barely more than his strong legs and exceptional skating ability.

"Back home, it was just crash, bam, let's do it, ma'am," he said. "But there, you couldn't afford stupidity. You had to adjust."

Coached by Bobby Bauer, the Canadians came into the Games with high expectations, having won gold in five of the past six Winter Olympics. And they had four of the tournament's top five goal scorers, in James Logan, Paul Knox, Jerry Theberge and Jack McKenzie.

But the Dutchmen were upset by the Americans, falling 6-1, for their first loss. When they were stonewalled 2-0 four days later by an impenetrable Soviet goalie, it was all over. The Canadians, with a 6-2 record in the tournament, had to settle for bronze.

"One of my teammates piped up in the dressing room afterward and said, 'Don't worry guys, no one will remember this in five years.'" Klinck said. "It was a disappointment. We thought, 'what will the fans think? What will Canada think?'"

But the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen were surprised when they came home to a hero's welcome. Thousands of fans lined King Street from Erb Street in Waterloo all the way to Kitchener's old city hall to cheer their parade procession.

"It was wall-to-wall with people. It made us feel awesome," he said. "We represented Canada the best we could. We just came up a little short."

After the Olympics, Klinck's time with the Dutchmen was short-lived. By the next season, he was playing senior hockey in Stratford, then moved to Woodstock and finally Oakville before hanging up his skates in 1970.

Offline, he'd go on to be the founding president of the Region of Waterloo Swim Club and have a long career in human resources for local firms, including Electrohome and Maryland Engineering.

He's had a good life, Klinck likes to say, and is enjoying retirement. He hasn't laced up in years, and gets his hockey fix now watching his grandsons play local minor hockey.

But those games he played nearly six decades ago with that maple leaf on his chest, he'll never forget. "Before, playing hockey, it was a job. Now the Olympics, that was not a job. It was different," he said. "It was something special."

Byrle Klinck (second from right in the back row) with the K-W Dutchmen team that represented Canada at the 1956 Winter Olympics.

On the very night of their last game, McKenzie stood on the podium to receive bronze from IOC president Avery Brundage. His teammates were there, as were the victorious Russians.

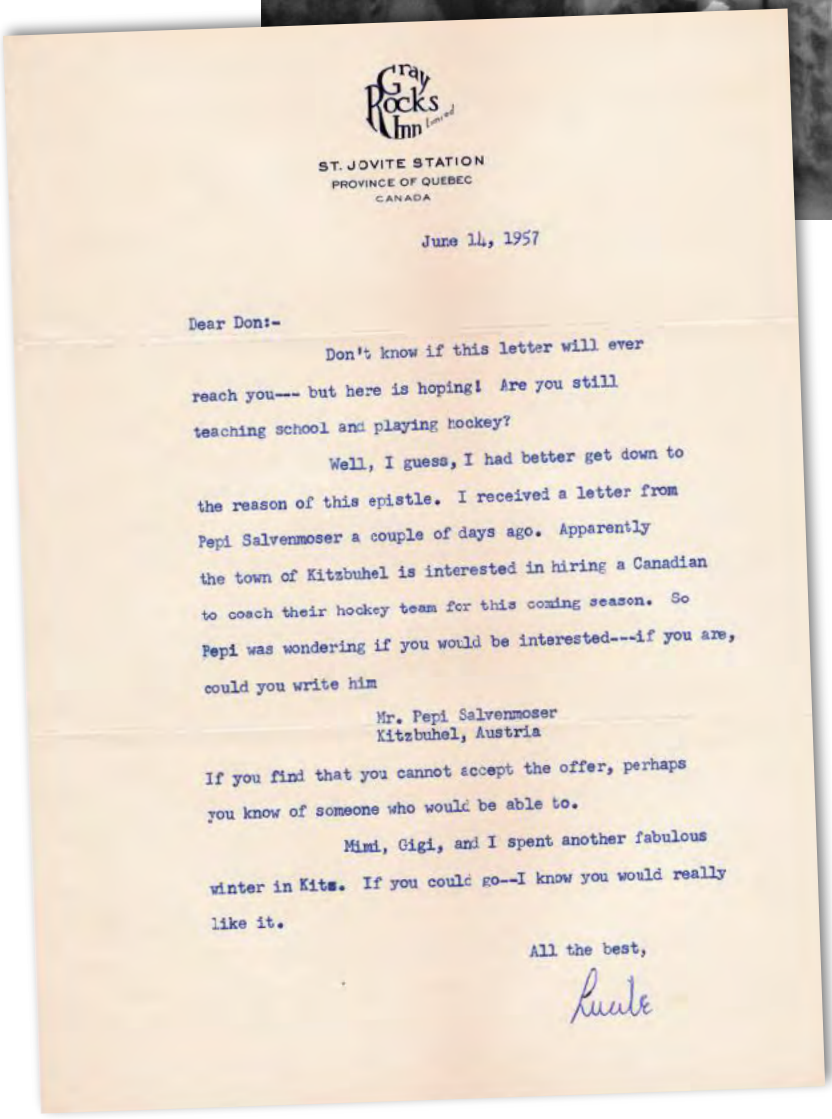
Afterward, disquiet hung over the Concordia Hotel on Corso Italia—in stark contrast to the celebration at the Grand Hotel Miramonti, where the Russians stayed outside of town,

Tears and gloomy faces prevailed in the Canadian dressing room under the outdoor stadium after their 2-0 loss to the Soviets in the gold medal game at Cortina. McKenzie has his head in his hands. Rope, at far right, stares dejectedly into space.

isolated from other athletes. The Soviets had requested separate housing to maintain strict routines and security. If there was one team they wanted to beat, it was the Canadians.

The Canadian hotel remained quiet long into that Cortina night.

The players awoke the next morning in the Dolomites to a stark realization that the Soviet "state-amateur" system had proven victorious.



Gray Rocks Inn Limited
ST. JOVITE STATION
PROVINCE OF QUEBEC
CANADA

June 14, 1957

Dear Don:-

Don't know if this letter will ever reach you--- but here is hoping! Are you still teaching school and playing hockey?

Well, I guess, I had better get down to the reason of this epistle. I received a letter from Pepi Salvenmoser a couple of days ago. Apparently the town of Kitzbuhel is interested in hiring a Canadian to coach their hockey team for this coming season. So Pepi was wondering if you would be interested---if you are, could you write him

Mr. Pepi Salvenmoser
Kitzbuhel, Austria

If you find that you cannot accept the offer, perhaps you know of someone who would be able to.

Mimi, Gigi, and I spent another fabulous winter in Kits. If you could go--I know you would really like it.

All the best,

Lucile

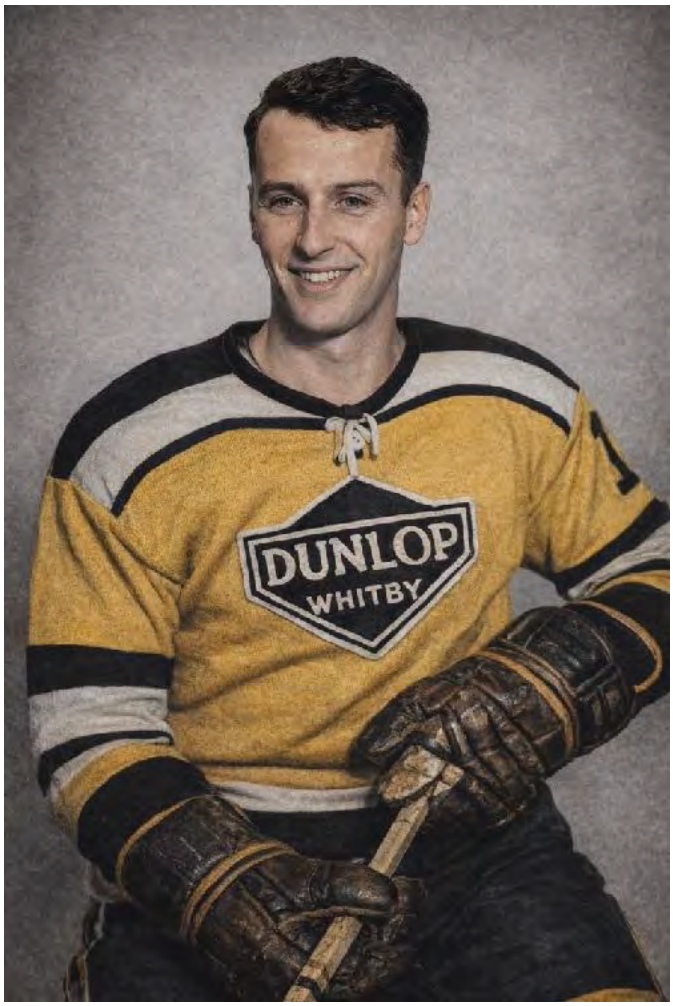
By 1957, Don Rope was no longer single. He'd met and married Benita (at right in this Niagara Falls photo), a Soo native, and they began a family that eventually included three girls, all athletes: Laurie, Patti, and Marnie.

Two weeks earlier, when the USSR had arrived, the hockey world was different. The Soviets were a mystery. Canada soon realized it wasn't playing against factory workers or soldiers who skated for fun, but a state-sponsored machine. The Russians didn't raffle cars to fund travel. They didn't work all day and try to squeeze training and practices into the evening. Hockey was their job, even if they were nominally in the Red Army. This loophole allowed the USSR to bypass Olympic amateur rules by "enlisting" players as soldiers—lieutenants and captains on paper,

athletes in reality—training 11 months a year at the Central Red Army Sports Club (CSKA Moscow).

For players like Rope and McKenzie, balancing full-time jobs and coaching with practices, travel, and games was nearly impossible. They were spread thin, and yet they came very close to victory in Cortina. Bronze stung because they truly believed they had the team to win gold.

Even 16 years later, despite Soviet dominance, Canadian players and media underestimated their foes heading into the 1972 Summit Series. As Canada's NHL superstars were preparing to play the Russians, many sportswriters gave the Soviets little chance. It was the same overconfidence that had been on display in 1956.



McKenzie was asked to join the Whitby Dunlops for their World title run in 1958. There, he got revenge for the loss at Cortina as Whitby won the World Championship.

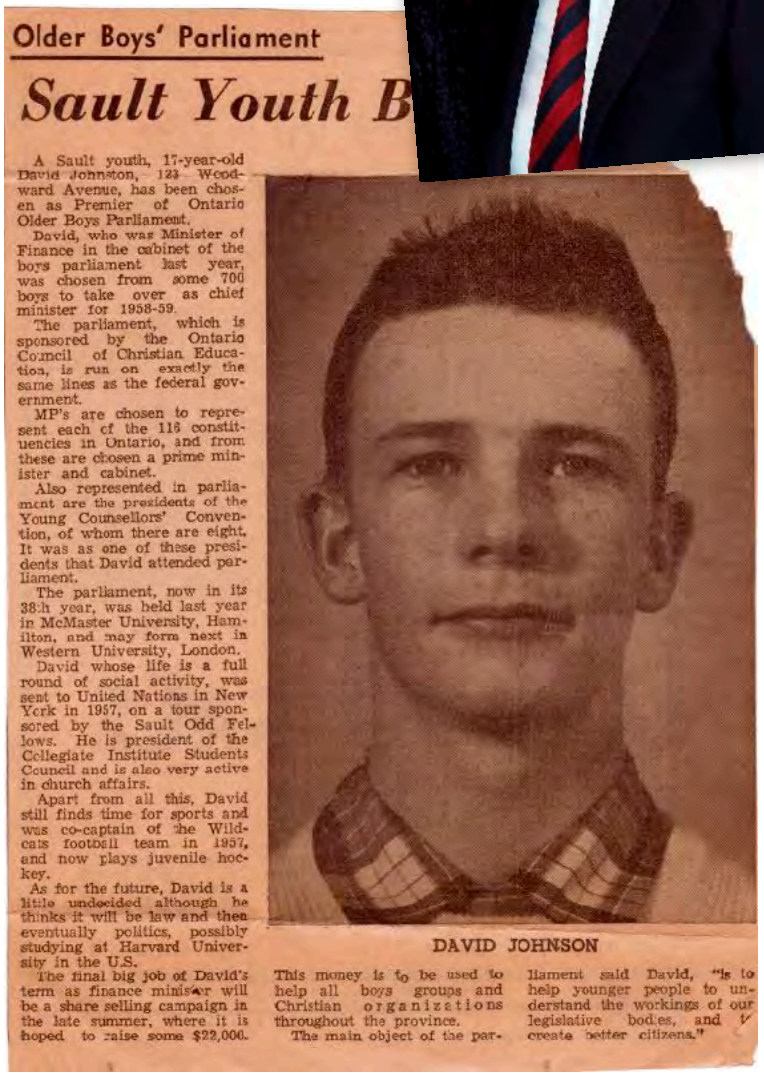
By 1972, Russia's visionary coach Anatoli Tarasov, had been replaced by Bobrov after the Winter Olympics in 1972, even though the Russians won Gold. The dictatorial Tarasov, who built his system using a Canadian template—The Hockey Handbook by Lloyd Percival—a book some Canadian coaches had laughed off or ignored, sat on the sidelines while Bobrov coached Russia in its most epic series.

While Canadian hockey tended to emphasize grit and a dump-and-chase style, the Soviets embraced puck possession, weaving, and circular patterns. Bauer focused on speed and passing in 1956. But there were other issues too: larger ice surfaces and European officiating. Bodychecking was not favoured in Cortina, and as someone quipped at the time, Canada couldn't hit what it couldn't catch.

Cortina wasn't simply a disappointment. It signalled the end of the club-team era, which for decades had served Canada well. Canada had typically sent the Allan Cup champion to represent the nation. After 1956, critics argued that a single town's team—like the Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen—could no longer compete with Soviet "state amateurs" whose only job was hockey. In time, that helped lead to the creation of Canada's permanent national team program in 1963, under Father David Bauer, Bobby's brother.

Canada's loss at Cortina sparked a long struggle over the definition of what constituted an amateur. Canada believed the Soviets were professionals in all but name. Resentment built until it culminated in the 1972 Summit Series, when Canada finally sent its NHL stars to face the USSR to settle the argument. The NHLers won, but only by a hair.

The 1956 Soviets introduced a style—fluid skating, weaving passes, tactical discipline—that was alien to the Canadian approach. It forced Canada to modernize coaching and training to keep pace.



Older Boys' Parliament

Sault Youth B

A Sault youth, 17-year-old David Johnston, 123 Woodward Avenue, has been chosen as Premier of Ontario Older Boys Parliament.

David, who was Minister of Finance in the cabinet of the boys parliament last year, was chosen from some 700 boys to take over as chief minister for 1958-59.

The parliament, which is sponsored by the Ontario Council of Christian Education, is run on exactly the same lines as the federal government.

MP's are chosen to represent each of the 116 constituencies in Ontario, and from these are chosen a prime minister and cabinet.

Also represented in parliament are the presidents of the Young Counsellors' Convention, of whom there are eight. It was as one of these presidents that David attended parliament.

The parliament, now in its 38th year, was held last year in McMaster University, Hamilton, and may form next in Western University, London.

David whose life is a full round of social activity, was sent to United Nations in New York in 1957, on a tour sponsored by the Sault Odd Fellows. He is president of the Collegiate Institute Students Council and is also very active in church affairs.

Apart from all this, David still finds time for sports and was co-captain of the Wildcats football team in 1957, and now plays juvenile hockey.

As for the future, David is a little undecided although he thinks it will be law and then eventually politics, possibly studying at Harvard University in the U.S.

The final big job of David's term as finance minister will be a share selling campaign in the late summer, where it is hoped to raise some $22,000. This money is to be used to help all boys groups and Christian organizations throughout the province.

The main object of the parliament said David, "is to help younger people to understand the workings of our legislative bodies, and create better citizens."

DAVID JOHNSON

Don Rope taught David Johnston, future Governor-General of Canada, in his first year as a teacher, at Sault Ste. Marie. Johnston was an outstanding student-athlete, quarterbacking the football team. He went on to Harvard, where he played hockey.

At the 1956 Winter Olympics, the Soviets' gold-medal victory over the Canadians reflected a program already operating with the cohesion, conditioning, and tactical rehearsal of professionals in all but name. The many goalposts Canada hit in that game underscored how narrow the margin was, yet also highlights the scale of the task: a community-based Allan Cup champion confronting a centrally trained, state-backed machine singularly focused on world supremacy. In that

Arrival at Malton airport yesterday. Team manager Ernie Goman (extreme left) was greeting y his wife and Beryl Klimek (extreme right) and Mary Lou Weins study a book on London during the bus trip to Kitchener.

light, their performance appears not as a failure, but as a formidable stand by part-time amateurs against a system rapidly redefining international hockey.

They were good—oh, were they good—but they were not professionals who spent every waking day dedicated to their sport. They had other careers and occupations to which they were dedicated. Imagine giving them a year of state-sponsored hockey, with hockey as their lone focus, and see what they could do.

Four years after Cortina, the Dutchmen again represented Canada at the Olympics, becoming the only self-contained club team to do so at two Games. Those Olympics were in Squaw Valley. McKenzie had retired by then, but Rope was there. Once again, gold eluded them. Coach Bauer summed up the 1960 result: "We lost by one goal. I couldn't apologize for anything. I'm very proud of the Dutchmen. They came away with silver, one goal short." But that is another story.

A major overhaul was underway. No longer would one city represent Canada at the world's most prestigious sporting event. Bauer's brother, Father David Bauer, preached practical patriotism, wrote Greg Oliver.[59]

In 1956, when the Dutchmen entered the Olympics largely unaware of their opponents, there were few scouting reports, few inklings of the international tide that was coming. Jim

[59] Greg Oliver, Father Bauer and the great Experiment, ECW Press, Toronto, 2017, P. 32.

DUTCHIES CLIP FLYERS, PLAY ARMY CLUB NEXT

BADEN - BADEN, Germany (Banners)—The Canadian Olympic hockey team defeated the RCAF Flyers 13-4 yesterday in an exhibition game played at the air force's Sellingen base here.

Period scores were 4-1, 3-2, 6-1. The Olympic team, Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen, beat the same air force squad 13-5 Monday.

Sellingen base is occupied by the RCAF's 4th Fighter Wing, part of the Canadian NATO contingent in Germany. The RCAF team was formed to promote goodwill in Europe and is playing in a European league.

WILT IN THIRD

After holding the Dutchmen in check for two fast periods, the Flyers wilted in the last period when the Olympic players netted nine goals.

The Flyers' goalie, ace pilot Ian Ferguson of Angus, Ont., was outstanding for the airmen in the first two periods, stopping a deluge of Kitchener shots.

Buddy Horne, Jim Logan, George Scholes, Jack McKenzie and Jerry Theberge scored two goals apiece for the Dutchmen, with Butch Martin, Art Hurst, Billy Calvin, Ken Laufman and Paul Knox adding singletons.

RCAF scorers were Yves Garand and Garry Edmonds of Ottawa, Johnny Johnson and Jim Gebhardt.

RECEIVE PEWTER MUGS

The Flyers presented each of the Dutchmen with engraved pewter mugs before the game. More than 1,000 Canadians, Germans and Americans watched in the newly-built rink.

The RCAF today will fly the Kitchener team to Soest, northwest Germany, for a game against the Canadian army team. Tomorrow the team will fly from Duesseldorf to London and then home.

Hockey Horizon

A lot of national chest-beaters seem to be suggesting that Canada match the Russian system in picking, practising and polishing a hockey squad for next year's tourney.

It's a natural reaction, but that assembly-line approach would be a mite alien to us.

* * *

OR, as Art Hurst was quoted after the Russian game: "I am a carpenter by profession. I love my job, my hockey as a sideline, my family and my way of life. I would want no part of the Russian approach to hockey. It shouldn't be that important."

Coming from a go-go guy like Art, that's worth thinking about.

Hockey for Public Relations

SQUADRON LEADER BILL LEE, an old Tiger follower from Hamilton, is one of the sharpest public relations men in uniform. Pushes brochure and a complete set of pictures of his beloved hockey Flyers into your mitt the instant the door of your plane opens. "We push sport over here," Bill explains, half apologetically. "It helps to keep personnel happy, and we find it improves public relations with Europeans. That's why I was sorry to hear a nice bunch of boys like the Dutchmen lost at Cortina. Our Flyers have a slogan: 'Win if you can, but not at any cost.' Our team has dropped good players who couldn't seem to get the idea."

The Canadian airmen seem to outdo the Europeans in their interpretation of European rules. They practically avoid bodily contact. Maybe they don't represent the sport as it's played back home, but they realize there's something more important there than the score. "We know we carry the good name of Canada and of the RCAF on our shoulders," Flying Officer Bud White of Toronto explains. "All the fans over here want good, clean, fast hockey without the rugged bodily contact that is standard in United States and Canada. That's what we try to give them." The team was started in 1951 by Flying Officer Pete Cunningham of Ottawa. Cunningham was killed in a jet crash, but his successors seem to be carrying on the tradition. They're pretty smart lads those Canadian kids you've sent over here. Anyone who has played even side-street shinny knows it's a tough test for a goodwill peddler.

GETTING THE BIRD—The plump and shivering pigeons of St. Mark's Square in Venice, Italy, assault a trio of Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen supporters unfortunate enough to have purchased a package of pigeon food. Left to right are Ernie Goman, James Dunn and Walter Bianchi.

For Dutchie Fans It's Case Of 'See Venice and Freeze'

By LEN TAYLOR
Record Sports Editor

VENICE, Italy — "See Naples and Die" is the claim of an old Italian travel agency shill. "See Venice and Freeze" is our reply.

We landed in the canal city when the inhabitants were busy shivering and shovelling snow or contemplating the latter action.

Venice in winter must be about the coldest spot on earth when it snows. The whole city is geared to warm nights, soft lights and the smell of corroding garbage in the Grand Canal.

The garbage was there, but it looked as if it had been put through a quick freeze and anyone who tried to smell anything might have lost a nose to frostbite.

IT'S ALWAYS UNUSUAL

Venetians assured us it was unusual weather. Every place we go we are assured the present situation is unusual.

In Prague it looked and felt like spring in January. "Very unusual," said the Prague citizens. "Usually we have deep snow and much frost."

"Very unusual," said the Venetians. "Usually we have snow no more than once a year and it melts away before noon."

They were still shovelling when we left at 6 p.m.

However, the claims to unusual met no challenge from the group of Kitchener-Waterloo Dutchmen fans visiting this corner of sunny Italy.

After team manager Ernie Goman had paid 500 lira (less than 50 cents) for four passages from the Via Nova to St. Mark's Square, we boarded a large water taxi.

PIGEONS SHUDDER

This is nothing more than a sea-going trolley-bus with the canal for a roadbed instead of asphalt. Not many minutes later we were almost being blown off the quay at the disembarkation point near St. Mark's Square.

The pigeons were there, shuddering slightly and looking for tourists who might be induced to buy some corn from a grey-haired feminine vendor of pigeon food.

There was snow in the courtyard, but a guide popped up from behind a large drift and offered his services for 400 lira. We nodded in agreement at which he added quickly, "Each." It was too late to answer that one for he had already started to tell us about the grand staircase, a marble structure from the courtyard to the main entrance of the palace.

IGNORES QUESTIONS

For the next 90 minutes we got the grand tour. All the rooms, the big paintings, the little ones, the prisons, the torture chambers, the secret execution room for erring "politicos." The guide, stopping occasionally to wipe his nose, sniffed and continued ignoring repeated questions of how the Doges kept warm in the winter.

Eventually we exhausted the Doge's palace, but the guide led off at a dog trot to the "glass factory." It turned out to be an ornate store full of glassblower products.

The factory was a one-man affair and the worker was making a small duck. No labor troubles in that sort of industry.

That's where the real shilling began.

"I must go now," said the guide. "You pay me. Take look at the glass, if you like him you can buy."

The proprietor of the shop obligingly held off his lunch hour while we purchased some trinkets at what turned out to be twice the price of almost any other store in town.

"LUCKEE FOR YOU"

"I'd like to find a store where I can get something for my wife," said an associate as the glass merchant counted his take.

"How luckee for you, I know just the place," said glass merchant. "Good store, good stuck." He hauled us out by the arms and led us to another establishment a few yards away.

Out in the open someone became bold enough to say it was lunch time.

"How fortunate," came the voice of a newspaper vendor from a corner 50 yards away. "I know a very fine cafe, you follow me."

After leaving 6,000 lire with another relative of the relative of the relative, we started along the streets. "I'd like to find a good hat store," said Goman.

ALMOST ESCAPE

"Come with me please, mister," said a passer-by. "Just around the corner. Please come with me."

We fled into the nearest entrance, a store offering ladies' wear. Making a pretence at buying something to shake off the shill waiting outside, someone finally asked for children's clothes.

"We don't sell them," said the clerk. We all breathed deeply.

"But there is a fine store around the corner," she added. "Wait and our girl will take you there."

Logan, who played on both the ’56 and ’60 Olympic teams, put it simply: “We didn’t know anything. We weren’t familiar with any of the teams. We just dropped the puck, and away you go.”[60]

Exchanging Sticks with Bobrov

After Russia defeated Canada in Cortina and eliminated Canada from gold, the captains exchanged sticks. Vsevolod Bobrov—spelled variously in older English sources—signed his stick and gave it to McKenzie, and McKenzie did likewise.

McKenzie, prevented from bringing his lucky floral stick to Cortina, brought Bobrov’s stick home. No one objected. But on returning to Preston, he learned one of his students was seriously ill with pleurisy. Tom Conaway had followed his teacher-coach through the Olympics while recovering. McKenzie brought the stick to him.

Conaway still has Bobrov’s stick, and years later—when McKenzie returned to Preston for a reunion—McKenzie signed it. Today it bears the signatures of both captains.

Conaway never forgot the gesture. “That gave me the perfect boost.”

For Bobrov, Cortina was his second Olympics. He had been part of the favoured Soviet soccer team at the 1952 Summer Games, scoring five goals and played in the famous USSR–Yugoslavia match—a dramatic 5–5 comeback, followed by a replay loss. A legend in the Soviet Union, he was one of those rare larger-than-life figures who excelled in multiple sports and competed in both Summer and Winter Olympics.

After winning silver in Squaw Valley, Bauer said something extraordinary, something that echoed the Olympic Creed: “There’s more to competing than just winning.”

A Poetic Footnote: The Brodeur Connection

There is a poetic footnote to that 1956 Canada–Russia game, one that unfolded 16 years later when Denis Brodeur returned to Canada–USSR hockey—not as a goalie, but as a photographer for the Montreal Canadiens during the 1972 Summit Series.

On September 28, 1972, with 34 seconds left, Paul Henderson scored the most famous goal in Canadian hockey history. Brodeur was at ice level, shoulder-to-shoulder with Frank Lennon of the *Toronto Star*. He captured an iconic image of Paul Henderson’s winning goal. It was his way of finally “winning” a battle that began in the cold mountain air of Cortina.

Both shot the moment Henderson scored—Henderson airborne, hugged by Yvan Cournoyer, Soviet goalie Vladislav Tretiak sprawled on the ice. The photos were almost identical. Lennon’s won a National Newspaper Award and ran on front pages across the

[60] Oliver, P. 28.

Homecoming: Ernie Goman is welcomed home by his wife and their son, left. At right, scoring star Ken Laufman, right, is welcomed home by his expectant wife. For both men, there would be one more Olympic Games, four years later at Squaw Valley. In 1956, players and members of the Dutchmen organization were welcomed home by a large crowd in Malton, almost as large as the one that sent them off three weeks earlier. Whenn theyarrived back home in Waterloo County, there was a parade through the Twin Cities. They might have felt they let down their country and hometown fans, but they were treated as heroes, something McKenzie, Rope and the others never forgot.

country. Brodeur's, taken from a slightly different angle, can be told apart only by the position of Soviet defender Yuri Lyapkin's stick.)

When Denis's son Martin Brodeur won Olympic gold for Canada in 2002, he had "Cortina 1956" and "Salt Lake City 2002" painted on his mask to honour his father's struggle and his own triumph.

Denis, along with Rope, McKenzie, and the rest of the K-W Dutchmen, were the last self-contained team to wear the maple leaf at the Olympics before the move to a permanent national program.

Cortina Memories

When the Winter Olympics returned to Cortina in 2026, McKenzie was watching. With the new Olympiad, the 1956 Olympic Games came into focus as the world's best athletes

Denis Brodeur was surrounded by fans when he returned home. As one fan stated: "They made friends for Canada everywhere."

gathered once again. The hotels Concordia and the Posta again told stories and helped set the stage for new ones.

The Posta Bar, considered one of the "world's temples of good drinking" and a historic Italian institution, was the soul of Cortina. A post office before it was a cocktail lounge, it served in 1835 as a refreshment stop for postal coaches travelling between Lienz and Dobbiaco. The Manaigo family, who still own it today, managed the horses and the mail.

In the early 1950s, Hemingway was a regular, staying in Room 107 and spending hours at a corner table beneath the large clock. There, he finished his novel "Across the River and Into the Trees"; his typewriter is still preserved by the hotel.

Visitors to the 2026 Olympics can see a statue of the Three Wise Monkeys—"see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil"—symbolizing the staff's legendary discretion, a rule that allowed celebrities like Elizabeth Taylor, Henry Fonda, and Brigitte Bardot to drink in peace.

For more than 50 years, the bar was defined by Antonio Di Franco, a celebrity in the Alps, credited with creating the "Puccini" (a mimosa-like cocktail) and serving the "Dolce Vita" jet set of the 1950s and '60s.

Postscript

In his retirement, Don Rope took university archaeology courses at Wilfrid Laurier University and cycled all over the world, exploring history and visiting a network of friends around the globe. Here he is setting out from Vancouver on his cross-Canada cycling trip.

The open-air ice stadium at Cortina—so vivid in Rope and McKenzie's memory—continues its Olympic history. Open to the Dolomites in 1956, it was later enclosed, with a modern roof and glass wall added in 2003.

Only once did McKenzie think back to the lucky stick that had not made the trip to Cortina. It was decades later that he was reminded of it. He smiled, musing about chance and luck and whether the stick could have made any difference.

In Cortina 2026, 70 years after the Games, it is the curling venue for the Milan–Cortina Games, under the event name "Cortina Curling Olympic Stadium."

After their 1956 Gold medal, the Soviets continued their rise. Bobrov went on to coach Russia in the 1972 Summit Series. Cortina marked the beginning of a shift in Canada's view of its place in the hockey world.

Tom Conaway, the boy McKenzie visited in the hospital, never forgot his teacher. McKenzie taught him physical education but also English. He once encouraged Conaway's writing, awarding him 10 out of 10 on an essay. He became a sportswriter.

Don Rope, ;left, proudly wearing a Canada shirt, with his cycling friends on his “Tour de France,” in ?

Don Rope soon followed his friend McKenzie to the altar. He married a woman he met while teaching in Sault Ste. Marie—Benita. The wedding was in the Soo. McKenzie was his best man. Rope had three children, all girls, all standout athletes. McKenzie had four children—two boys and two girls.

Letter from Lucille

In 1957, Rope received an air mail letter from his old Olympic friend, downhill ski champion Lucille Wheeler.

Dated June 14, 1957, from Quebec, Wheeler began:

“Dear Don:

Don't know if this letter will ever reach you— but here is hoping! Are you still teaching school and playing hockey?

Well, I guess I had better get down to the reason of this epistle. I received a letter from Pepi Salvenmoser a couple of days ago. Apparently, the town of Kitzbühel is interested in hiring a Canadian to coach their hockey team for this coming season. So Pepi was wondering if you would be interested--if you are, could you write him: Mr. Pepi Salvenmoser, Kitzbuhel, Austria.

He led Canada's men's hockey team to bronze at 1956 Olympics in Italy

For Jack McKenzie of the K-W Dutchmen, the way it ended still stings

BRAYDON HOLMYARD
TORONTO STAR

HUNTSVILLE It's been 70 years since the loss that broke his heart, but Jack McKenzie hasn't gotten over it.

As he sits on his couch at home in Huntsville, his three-year-old dog Beige tucked into his lap, the memories of the 1956 Winter Olympics in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, remain as strong as a fresh cup of espresso.

McKenzie remembers the opening ceremony, where an Italian skater tripped over a television cable while carrying the Olympic torch.

SEE MCKENZIE, A2

Jack McKenzie captain of Canada's men Olympic hocke team in 1956, is pictured in his home in Huntsville with his dog, Beige.

BRAYDON HOLMYARD
TORONTO STAR

FULL INDEX A2

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This article about Jack McKenzie appeared in the *Toronto Star* and the *Waterloo Region Record* as the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics were drawing to a close.

If you find that you cannot accept the offer, perhaps you know of someone who would be able to.

Mimi, Gigi, and I spent another fabulous winter in Kits. If you could go--I know you would really like it.

All the best, Lucille."

As it had been for McKenzie a year earlier, the offer must have been tempting. But he, too, had responsibilities at home and was no longer single. He was preparing to start a family, and given that he was at the outset of his teaching career, the timing was all wrong.

Although he didn't go to Austria in 1957, he did travel throughout Europe after his retirement from teaching, often cycling in various locales around the world, looking up old acquaintances along the way. He seemed to know people everywhere in Canada and in Europe.

Rope led a remarkable life, becoming a leading citizen in Galt. When he came to Galt, a columnist in the Soo wrote that he hoped the good people of Galt knew the calibre of man they were getting in Rope.

In 1973, Galt amalgamated with Preston and Hespeler to form the city of Cambridge. Rope and his wife founded the Cambridge Kips gymnastics club and developed world-class gymnasts and Olympians. Their daughter, Patti, represented Canada at the 1976 Montreal Olympics.

Choosing to teach rather than chase professional hockey did not mark the end of his hockey dream as his Allan Cups and medals attest. He lived his hockey ambitions fully while building a distinguished career in education and coaching.

Among the many young people he influenced was David Johnston, who later served as Canada's 28th governor general. In 1976, the Ropes hosted a little-known Romanian gymnastics team for a pre-Olympic training camp in Cambridge. He hosted a quiet young athlete soon to be known worldwide: Nadia Comăneci.

In later years Rope cycled across Canada and Europe and helped establish the Cambridge Tour de Grand. His name lives on annually through the Don and Benita Rope Award, presented to Cambridge's sports contributor of the year. Once, riding through Germany's Black Forest, a faulty defibrillator shocked him and catapulted him off his bike. The surgeon who replaced it happened to know Patti and her husband, John Portis. Rope recovered at the physician's home, where he was received like an old friend.

Cortina remained the sporting summit of his life. He won bronze there in 1956, silver at Squaw Valley in 1960, and a world championship silver in 1962 with the Galt Terriers. Three Allan Cups crowned his senior career. Not even in defeat did he and his teammates believe they had been outplayed.

In 1983, during bypass surgery in Toronto, his anesthetist—a native of Prague—told him he had seen Rope and McKenzie play before the Olympics. Another story, one of many, recalled Rope relaxing in a European bar after a long day of cycling. While chatting with a fellow patron, he mentioned he was from Ontario, to which the gentleman replied, "I only know of one person from there, a man by the name of Don Rope." Rope introduced himself. It was that kind of life.

When the Winter Olympics came to Calgary in 1988, Rope took part in the torch ceremony. In 1992, he returned to Cortina, cycling through the Dolomites and revisiting the arena of his youth. There, perspective finally replaced burden.

"How Lucky We Were"

"The weight of losing and letting Canada down, the fans in Kitchener down, weighed heavily on my shoulders," he said. "But after many years, I realized how lucky we were just to be there competing for Canada. It was my greatest personal sporting experience."

Jack McKenzie, father of four, also won three Allan Cups and captained Canada's bronze-medal team at Cortina, where he was voted the tournament's best forward. Two years later he won a world championship with the Whitby Dunlops in Norway. He cherished that victory.

Like Rope, McKenzie became a teacher, later a vice-principal in Huntsville, carrying himself with quiet purpose. The two men and their families remained close; their lives intertwined long after the final whistle in Italy.

Both men inspired generations as teachers, coaches, and citizens.

They Left an Olympic Legacy

In youth, they had gone to Italy in search of gold. Bronze felt, at first, like something less than fulfillment. Decades passed before the frame widened.

When it did, they perhaps unwittingly revisited Pierre de Coubertin's words of more than a century earlier:

"The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part… The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well."

In Cortina, that truth was almost impossible for young men built for victory to comprehend. They had not gone to "take part." They had gone to win for Kitchener-Waterloo and for Canada.

Olympian Patti Rope, Don and Benita's daughter, with some young gymnastics admirers.

Time, however, has a way of clarifying what youth resists. When Rope returned to Cortina—around the time the old stadium appeared in the Bond film For Your Eyes Only—he understood that the real defeat would have been giving less than he was capable of giving, or allowing bitterness to define a life so richly lived.

He had returned to his mountain, like a mountain man to his hill, because he remembered he had forgotten so much.

Don Rope died July 28, 2009, one month before his Olympic friend from Cortina, the legendary Austrian skier Toni Sailer, died at Innsbruck.

McKenzie, competitor to the core, never entirely shed the sting of falling short of gold. Yet even he came to see that the worth of their Olympic moment had never depended on the colour of the medal.

That winter of '56 left its mark on them, as they left their mark on that winter. They had stood at a hinge point in Canadian sports history. As one observer wrote at the time, "The situation may never be quite the same again."

Beyond youth, and its steely determination to win, stood the Olympic Creed. Long after games are won and lost—after those who played them are gone—the Creed endures and holds true.

Hemingway's Cortina, with its Concordia and la Poste Hotels, was a place to hunt for one true sentence. Coubertin had already written one for the sporting world, and time has kept it intact—the essential thing is not to have conquered, but to have fought well.

In the end, Cortina gifted them that truth, along with the bronze medal.

They were Olympians.

They would always be Olympians.

Don Rope arrives home in Cambridge after cycling across Canada from Vancouver.

Acknowledgements

Photo Credits and Sources

The author and publisher are grateful to the late Don Rope and his family, especially daughter Marnie, for many of the materials that made this book possible, including a scrapbook, written notes, newspaper clippings, and original photographs taken during the 1956

Cortina
and the Olympic Winter of 1956

Olympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo.

The Kitchener Public Library, and in particular, the Grace Schmidt Room, has also been very helpful, as has the City of Cambridge Archives, and Bill Bartels and Tom Conaway, both of whom were former students of McKenzie and played on the Preston High School hockey team he coached.

The author also thanks Jack McKenzie for sharing his many memories of Cortina from 1956.

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Newspaper Clippings and Scrapbook Material

Many images and reproduced clippings originate from newspapers of the period and were preserved in both the Grace Schmidt Room at the Kitchener Public Library and Don Rope's scrapbook. Where publication details are known, they are credited in captions or listed below.

Among the newspapers accessed and utilized are the Kitchener Record, the Waterloo Region Record, Cambridge Reporter, The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star, and the Windsor Star, mostly from January and February 1956. The February Waterloo Region Record from Saturday, February 21, 2026, was also used,in particular, the photograph of the story as it appeared on the Record's front page.

Author Artwork

About the Author

David Menary is a former teacher and award-winning sportswriter whose most recent book, *100 Years of Galt Arena Gardens: A History of the Most Storied Arena in the World*, was published in the fall of 2025.

His first book, *Terrier Town: Summer of '49,* was published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press in 2003 and won Honourable Mention in the historical fiction category at Forward Magazine's Book of the Year Awards in Chicago. The book that won the category was Mark Twain's sequel to Huckleberry Finn, co-written by Lee Nelson.

Since then, Menary has written many books, including *BlackWhite: Hometown Memories*, a collection showcasing his black-and-white photographic portfolio. Other books include *The River and the Railroad, Gordie Howe: A Year in Galt, Brothers of the Wind, Galt's Quest for the Stanley Cup,* and *Great Trees of Canada,* as well as editing Siemens Canada's 100th anniversary book.

An artist, he is preparing a book of his artwork.

His books and art can be seen and purchased at: www.ItHappenedinCambridge.com

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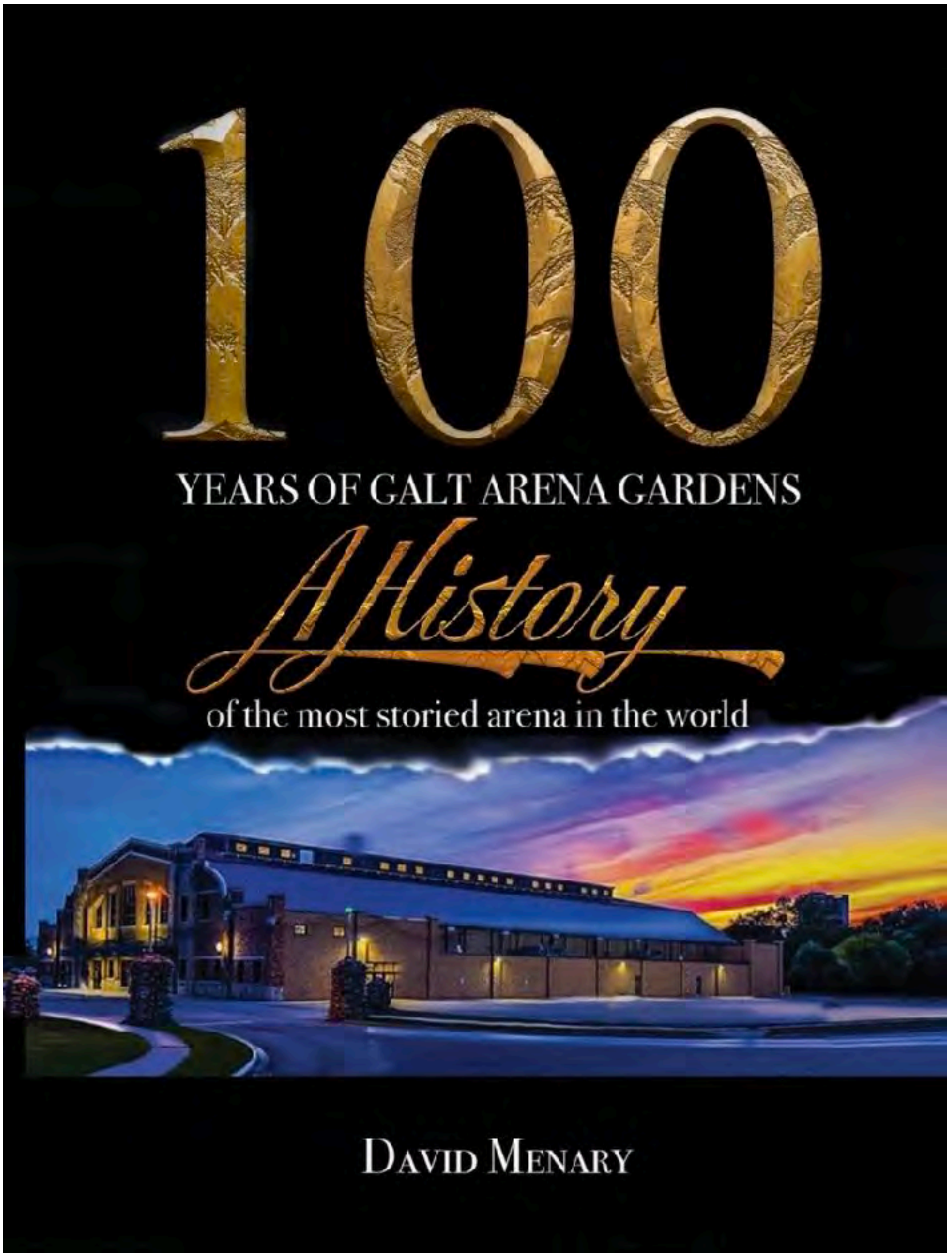
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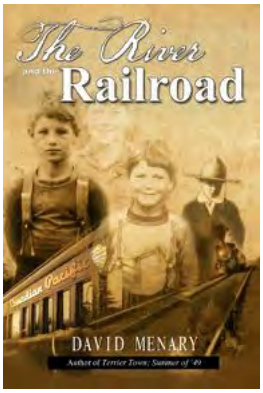
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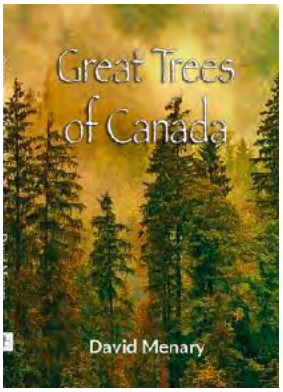
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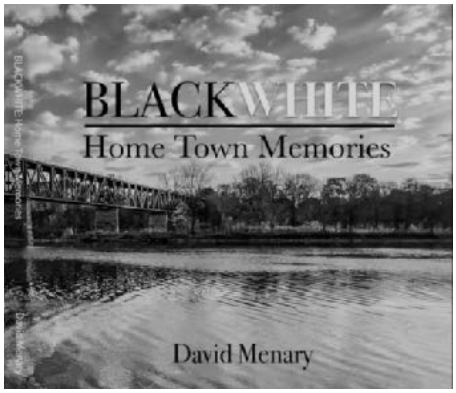
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