



A History of Professional Hockey in Ottawa

The city of Ottawa is considered by many to be synonymous with the history of hockey in Canada, with the city's hockey roots dating back to 1852. Harry Walker, of the Carleton Saga, once wrote, "according to an old newspaper item, the origin of hockey in Canada dated from a shinny match played between Bytown (Ottawa) and New Edinburgh on the Ottawa River ice on Christmas day."

The popularity of hockey in Ottawa during the late part of the 19th century is remembered even today through the presentation of the Stanley Cup. While holding the post as Governor General of Canada, and residing in Ottawa, Lord Stanley of Preston enthusiastically watched his sons, and the Rideau Rebels, challenge for the Canadian Championship in 1892 against the Ottawa City Club.

At a banquet given in honour of the victorious Ottawa City Club, Lord Kilcoursie, then aide to Lord Stanley, responded to a toast for the Governor General. In his reply he read a personal letter from the Governor General outlining the framework for a challenge cup, which would be held from year to year by the leading hockey club in Canada. The proposal was enthusiastically received with cheers, after which, Lord Stanley dispatched Captain Coville, another aide stationed in England to visit the best silversmith in London. A gold-lined silver bowl, standing on an ebony base was ordered at a cost of ten guineas or \$48.67.

Ironically, Lord Stanley, never saw a Stanley Cup game. His term as Governor General expired in May of 1893, returning him to England ten months prior to the first playoff game.

The Ottawa Senators were born in 1901 after joining the new Canadian Amateur Hockey League (CAHL) with the likes of the Montreal Shamrocks, and the reigning Stanley Cup Champion, Montreal Victorias.

THE SILVER SEVEN

In 1903 the Senators became Stanley Cup Champions for the first time, and gained the nickname, "The Silver Seven." The team received the nickname when manager A.J. Smith gave all seven players a silver nugget as a token of their victory. The Seven successfully defended the Cup during the 1904, and 1905 seasons, thereby establishing the first dynasty in hockey's history. This dynasty earned the Silver Seven the honour of being Canada's most outstanding hockey team in the first half century.

Throughout the years many challenges arose for the Stanley Cup, but probably the most unusual challenge was issued in 1905 to the Silver Seven by a team from Dawson City (located in the Canadian north). In order to get to the series, the team from Dawson City traveled for four weeks and 4,000 miles using all modes of transportation including dogsled, boat, and train. In the first game of the rugged series, the Silver Seven won by a margin of 9-2. During the second game, one-eyed Frank McGee established himself as one of sports first superstars as he scored a remarkable fourteen goals, pacing Ottawa to a 23-2 destruction of Dawson City.

After successfully defending the Cup in 1905, and during a night of celebrating their victory, the Silver Seven felt it was necessary to see if one of them could kick the Stanley Cup into the Rideau Canal. True to their competitive ways, the Cup was given a good kick and landed right in the canal where it stayed until the next day.

In 1908-09, the Senators revisited hockey supremacy as they captured the Stanley Cup once again, with a team that consisted of only nine players. This team included the legendary defenceman Fred 'Cyclone' Taylor (inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1945).

The Senators rebounded from losing 'Cyclone' Taylor to a rival team by capturing the Stanley Cup during the 1910-1911 season finishing first in the newly formed National Hockey Association (NHA).



A NEW BEGINNING

After the owners of the respective teams of the NHA began feuding, the league disbanded, clearing the way for the "National Hockey League" (NHL) in 1917-18. The NHL was comprised of the Senators, Montreal Wanderers, Montreal Canadiens, and Toronto Arenas. On January 2, 1918 the Montreal Arena, where the Wanderers and Canadiens both played, burned down, leaving both teams homeless. The Wanderers subsequently withdrew from the league, but the Canadiens moved into the much smaller Jubilee rink. During this first season in the NHL, the Senators finished in third place (in the three-team league) after winning only 9 of 22 games. The first Stanley Cup in NHL history was awarded to the Toronto Arenas, as they defeated the Canadiens in the finals.

During the 1920s the Senators dominated the NHL. To begin the decade, the Senators won both halves of the 24 game season, foregoing the need for a playoff, and advancing directly to the Stanley Cup Final against the Pacific Hockey Association Champions, Seattle Metro-politans. Ottawa defeated Seattle three games to two to once again claim the Cup.

The following year, the Senators split the two half seasons with the Toronto St. Patricks (formerly the Toronto Arenas), but then defeated the St. Pats in the playoffs to earn the right to play the Vancouver Millionaires for the Cup. Ottawa defeated Vancouver in the fifth and deciding game 2-1 on two goals by Jack Darragh (inducted in 1962), keeping the Cup in Ottawa.

The 1922-23 season brought glory back to Ottawa as the Senators fought through three playoff series versus the Montreal Canadiens, Vancouver Millionaires, and Edmonton Eskimos capturing the cup once again. In the final game against Edmonton, Ottawa's second year defenceman Frank 'King' Clancy (inducted 1958), played in every position, including goaltender, during the 1-0 victory.

During the 1923-24 season a fierce and often bloody rivalry began to develop between the Senators and the Canadiens. This bitterness continued into the playoffs where the Canadiens defeated the league champion Senators. The season was memorable for the league as the Dr. Hart Trophy was introduced, and was to be

awarded to the player judged most useful to his team during the regular season. The first recipient of the Hart Trophy was long-time Senator Frank Nighbor (inducted in 1945). The 'Pembroke Peach,' as he was called, was known for his shifty stickhandling ability, and use of the poke check.

In 1925-26, the NHL had grown to ten teams, split into the Canadian division, and the American Division, with the Senators finishing in first place of the Canadian division. This set up a series with the rival Montreal Canadiens in the division championship. Ottawa soundly defeated the Canadiens and advanced to face the Boston Bruins in the Stanley Cup finals. The Senators proceeded to defeat the Bruins, and gave Ottawa its ninth and final Stanley Cup.

The great stock market crash of 1929 affected the Senators in a manner that would quickly lead to the deterioration of the franchise. The slowdown in the economy caused a slump in attendance so great, that management was forced to transfer a scheduled game to Atlantic City.

The drop in attendance continued during the 1930-31 season with some games attracting only 4,000 spectators. The poor returns at the box office lead the team to sell off some of their best players including King Clancy, and Syd Howe (inducted 1965). The Senators won only ten games in the 1930-31 season and fell to last place in the Canadian Division. The franchise was then granted a one-year suspension.

After the one year off, the team returned only to struggle for two more years during the height of the depression. The Senators played their final game in Ottawa against the New York Americans who defeated the home side 3-2 before 6,500 fans. On May 12, 1934 the NHL agreed to move the franchise to St. Louis, and Ottawa had played its last game.

THE NEW ERA

In March 1988, after a game of pick-up hockey, members of the Ottawa based, Terrace Investments Limited, a real estate development firm, were shooting the breeze in the dressing room. With three senior executives (Bruce Firestone, Randy Sexton, and Cyril Leeder) remaining in the room a revelation was unveiled. Firestone confided, "Fellas, every ten years or so the NHL has gone through a major expansion. They will expand in the next three or four years and when they do, Ottawa is



going to bid for a team, and we're going to be the ones bidding!"

In September 1988, Firestone's strategy for acquiring the team was revealed, "Buy a site, win the franchise, build the building." In order for the NHL to award a franchise to Ottawa, owning an appropriate site at the outset of the bid was critical. After months of searching for a perfect site, the group was finally able to purchase a plot of land just outside Ottawa in Kanata.

On December 6, 1990, after a year of meetings, discussions and lobbying, the National Hockey League's Board of Governors granted an expansion franchise to Ottawa. A dream born in a hockey arena dressing room two years prior had finally come true. A team was also granted to a group of investors from Tampa Bay.

June 1992 was a special time for the 'New' Ottawa Senators Hockey Club, as a number of momentous occasions occurred. During the month, first ground was broken on the team's new home arena, the Palladium. The Senators, new state of the art facility was designed to hold 18,500 spectators, with 150 luxury suites, and restaurant seating for 800 patrons.

During the middle of June, the 'New' Senators joined the ranks of the NHL by filling out their roster at the Expansion Draft. The Senators first player selected was goaltender Peter Sidorkiewicz, who was left unprotected by the Hartford Whalers.

Two days after the Expansion Draft, Ottawa joined other members of the NHL at the 1992 NHL Entry Draft. The Sens first round pick, 2nd overall, was an 18-year old Russian forward named Alexei Yashin. Yashin was seen as a powerful skater, who worked well under pressure, and had quick hands around the net.

On September 18, 1992, the Ottawa Senators stepped onto the ice at the Hartford Civic Centre to participate in their first NHL exhibition game in 58 years. Neil Brady made history at 18:46 of the second period as he shoveled a loose puck into a yawning Hartford cage. Brady's goal led the way to a 1-1 tie with the Whalers and put Ottawa back on the hockey map.

Even though the Senators had finished their exhibition schedule, there was still a buzz around the city as Opening Night fast approached. On October 8, 1992, over 10,000 spectators took in the first regular season game at the Ottawa Civic

Centre in 58 years against the Senators fiercest rival, the Montreal Canadiens. History repeated itself as Neil Brady took a pass from Jody Hull and redirected it past Canadiens goaltender, Patrick Roy, only 26 seconds into the second period for the first Senators goal of the new era. A rivalry had been renewed. Brady's goal led the way, as the Senators made a successful return to the NHL with a 5-3 victory.

Prior to the game, the past was brought into the present as the club retired Senator great Frank Finnigan's number 8, the only number retired by the Senators to this day. Frank was credited with the last Senator goal prior to 1992.

The Senators ended their 1992 season with as many wins as when they left the NHL in 1934 (10).

The first couple of years of the Senators' franchise were turbulent to say the least. In 1995-96 they recorded the highest point total since their inception with 41 points (18 wins, 59 losses, 5 ties). Sens rookie sensation Daniel Alfredsson topped off the most successful year to date with being awarded the Calder Trophy for rookie of the year.

The 1995-96 season was not only a milestone year for wins, it also marked the year that the Senators new home, 'the Palladium' (now renamed 'the Corel Centre'), opened to the public on January 15, 1996 with Canadian Rock Star Bryan Adams playing to a sold out crowd. Several days later, unlike opening night in 1992, the Canadiens fought off wave after wave of Senator attacks to scrape out a 3-0 victory.

The 1996-97 year realized the success that the team and city had been anticipating since the team left for St. Louis 58 years previously. After a brilliant stretch drive at the end of the regular season the Senators secured the seventh position in the conference, and a playoff spot, by defeating the Buffalo Sabres 2-1 before a crowd that reached a pandemonium pitch when the final horn sounded. Oddly enough, a few nights later the Sens met the Sabres in the first round of the playoffs, taking the Sabres to the maximum seven games before bowing out in overtime.

In 1997-98, the Senators continued their winning ways and had their first winning season with a record of 34 wins, 33 losses, and 15 ties. This record was good enough to get the Senators into the playoffs once again, this time as the eighth seed. The Senators now had to face the first place New Jersey Devils. In a shocking and exciting series, the underdog Senators defeated the Devils (who many



believed would win the Stanley Cup) in six games, and advanced to the second round of the playoffs against the Washington Capitals. In the second round, the Capitals defeated Ottawa in five games.

The 1998-99 season marked more milestones in the Senators' maturity and rise to the top of the league. The Sens reached team highs in wins (44), total points (103) and were rewarded with the 2nd seed in the conference. During the season, the league recognized the skill level of the players and team by selecting two Senators to the All-Star game in Tampa Bay, Senator captain Alexei Yashin, and goaltender Ron Tugnutt. In the first round of the playoffs, Ottawa unfortunately ran into the hot goaltending of Dominik Hasek, and the stifling defence of the Buffalo Sabres. Hasek and the Sabres swept the seven game series in four straight games.

During the 1999 NHL Awards ceremony, the league recognized the Senators as one of the premier teams in the league as Coach Jacques Martin was awarded the Jack Adams Trophy for coach of the year.

The Senators finished the 1999-2000 season with their second consecutive 40 win season with 40-30-11-2, including a new franchise record for most home wins (24). Seven players set career highs, including Radek Bonk (60 points), Marian Hossa (56 points) and Wade Redden (36 points). In June, the Senators selected Martin in the first round (26th overall) of the NHL entry draft.

The 2000-2001 season was a record breaking one for team. The Senators collected a franchise high of 109 points with their 48-21-9-4 record on the way to capturing their 2nd Northeast Division title in 3 seasons. They also set a club record for sell-outs(18), goals scored (274), as well a club record for hat tricks (6). Radek Bonk and Marian Hossa were both named to the World All-Star team with coach Jacques Martin being named head coach. Martin Havlat was named the NHL rookie of the month for March and was a runner up for the Calder Trophy, while Jacques Martin was runner up for the Jack Adams Trophy as coach of the year.

With another solid season in 2001-2002, the Senators with 94 points found themselves in 7th place in the Eastern Conference. This was their lowest point total since the 1997-1998 season, yet it was their sixth consecutive trip to the post-season. The Senators had the most regular season wins of any Canadian team over the last six seasons and they were the only Canadian team to make the playoffs for each of the last 6 seasons. Daniel Alfredsson set a career high and led the team in goals with 37, and Patrick Lalime surpassed Ron Tugnutt on the Senators all time wins list for goaltenders recording his 73rd win. Coaching legend Roger Neilson also went behind the bench for two games to go over the 1,000 game plateau as a head coach in the NHL.

In the 2002-2003 season, the Ottawa Senators finished the regular season with a 52-21-8-1 record, collecting a franchise-high 113 points. Ottawa was awarded the President's Trophy and the Eastern Conference title for the first time in team history. The Senators players dominated other teams and they featured 6 twenty-goal scorers (Hossa, Alfredsson, White, Havlat, Bonk and Smolinski). Through the season, Ottawa went 24 consecutive games without allowing more than three goals against. This was the longest streak of its kind since the 1955 Montreal Canadiens went 25 consecutive games.

In the playoffs, the Senators reached the 3rd round for the first time in franchise history. Beating the New York Islanders and Philadelphia Flyers in the first two rounds, the Senators faced the New Jersey Devils in the conference finals. Ottawa battled hard to overcome a 3-1 series deficit but fell just short in game 7 where the Devils won 3-2 and went on to win the Stanley Cup.

The rise and fall of the 'Old' Ottawa Senators, as well as the rise of the 'New' Senators is quite evident from looking at the past. If the recent past is any indication of the future, then the success of the Senators will bring fan enthusiasm and a winning attitude to new heights in the very near future.

If you would like more information on the history of the Ottawa Senators Hockey Club please write to " The Ottawa Senators Hockey Club, 1000 promenade Palladium Dr., Suite 110, Kanata, ON, Canada K2V 1A5" stating the desired information.