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ECHOES

NEWSLETTER OF THE RHODE ISLAND REDS HERITAGE SOCIETY

SPRING 2021

Sad News: Reunion Canceled

Sadly, the pandemic has struck again. Our 20th Reunion, cancelled last August for safety reasons due to the pandemic, will have to wait yet another year.

Acting with an abundance of caution while facing the current and yet to be determined safety protocols that may or may not be in place this coming August, the Society has halted plans for this year's planned reunion.

Conversations with players and regular attendees also indicate great hesitancy about attending a large gathering.

It takes many months of planning, fundraising and organizing to hold a reunion.

Presently, the scheduled site of our event and suitable alternative sites are either not yet opened, do not know when they will re-open or what capacity will be allowed.

Most significantly, the travel protocols out of and back into Canada are formidable. Ground travel to the United States is forbidden, and the protocols for air travel include lengthy quarantines at the travelers' own expense both before and after travel. For all intents and purpose, Canada is saying, "Stay in Canada".

We ask you all to "Please stay safe." Soon we will meet again and it will be all the more pleasant for the time we've been apart.

But There's Plenty of Good News In This Issue...



Alton White

He was fast and fearless, and he made history with the Reds.

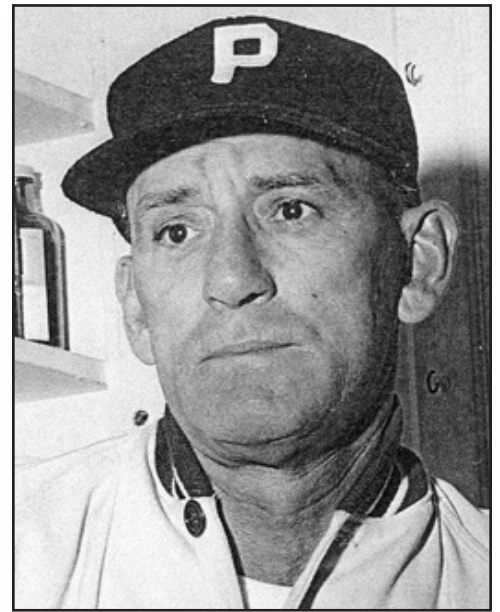
Story op Page 6.



Paying It Forward

Reds players and managers have made a tradition of giving back to the community by coaching kids.

Story op Page 4.



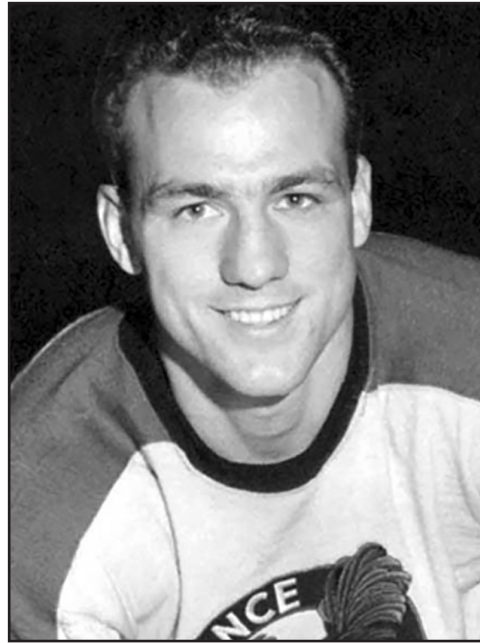
Enshrined

Art Lesieur and George Army will be inducted into the RI Hockey Hall of Fame.

Story op Page 8.



Alf Baccari



Zello Toppazzini



Ray Ceresino

OPERATION MACARONI

A marketing idea that sounded good at the time

By Vin Cimini
Heritage Society Board of Directors

It certainly wouldn't be considered politically correct today, but on the eve of the opening of the Reds 1954-55 season, player/coach Pat Egan announced "Operation Macaroni".

With the consent of Reds' owner Lou Pieri, also of Italian decent,

Egan announced the experiment of teaming fan favorites Zello Toppazzini, the team's top scorer the previous season, and Alf Baccari with newcomer Ray Ceresino, who was acquired from Cleveland over the previous summer.

It was promoted that if it gelled, it would constitute the first all-Italian line in the Reds' 29-year history.

It did not.

By season's end, the trio had accumulated 100 points with Topper accounting for 74 of them and leading the league in assists.

The following season would be different, with Paul Larivee and Camille Henry teaming with Topper to form the greatest line in Reds history and a Calder Cup as the reward.



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Cartoon Memories: Pieri's Pride

In 1956, the Reds had just swept Cleveland in 4 games to capture their 7th league title and just about all the silver in the American Hockey League's trophy case.

Frank Lanning memorialized the feat in his daily sports cartoon the following day featuring proud Reds owner, Lou Pieri admiring his charges: — Scoring Champ Zellio Toppazzini; MVP Johnny Bower; Rookie of the Year Bruce Cline; All-Star Coach Jack Crawford; and AHL goal champ Camille Henry.

— Vin Cimini

Before They Were Reds



Zellio Toppazzini
Hershey Bears
1948



Johnny Bower
Cleveland Barons
1949



Jack Crawford
Boston Bruins
1938



Camille Henry
Quebec Citadels
1951



Bruce Cline
Quebec Citadels
1950

Playing for the Reds & Paying It Forward

By Vin Cimini
Heritage Society Board of Directors

Many ex-RI Reds coached at all levels of the game all over the continent after their time in Providence – names like Schmidt, Polano, Flaman, Blake, Reardon, and Bessone, to name just a few.

Fortunately, many of those Reds we cheered for settled in Rhode Island and paid the favors forward by coaching their children and ours.

There were those like Harvey Bennett, Sr., Serge Boudreault, Ross Brooks, and Zellio Toppazzini, among others, who coached youth teams and held popular coaching clinics over the years. Some went on to coach school teams, as well – Serge at Cumberland, Ross at Lincoln, and Topper at Providence College.

What they all had in common was that each was retired from professional hockey at the time. Remarkably, in the very early years of Reds history, many players actually coached while playing with or managing the Reds.

There were a number of reasons why they would and how they could. The first was to earn another paycheck. Organized pro hockey leagues were still in their infancy and the pay was meager.

Another reason was passion for the game. Art Lesieur, easily the most notable and successful among these multitasking players, was once asked why he took on so much extra responsibility. In the vernacular of the time, he was quoted, “There is a wallop in working with the young fellows and seeing them come along. That’s my line.”

Perhaps the most significant reason Art and others could manage the logistics of coaching a school team while also playing for the Reds was the RI Auditorium. The Arena, home of the Reds since it opened in 1926, was the only indoor rink in the state. Every RI high school and college team practiced and played their games there. There was no travel. The teams came to the Arena.

One of the big beneficiaries was Brown University. Jimmy Gardner, who coached the Reds in its inaugural 1926-27 campaign, also coached Brown that season. The following two seasons, those duties were taken up by Jean Dubuc, the Reds GM at the time and later the team President.

In 1938, the great Lesieur, winner of 5 championship Cups with the Reds and a Stanley Cup with the Montreal Canadiens, negotiated a hat trick of duties playing for the Reds and taking over

Brown’s coaching reigns – while also coaching and launching Mount St. Charles Academy into the history books. (One wonders if he ever took his skates off.)

Indeed, from 1932 to 1940, Lesieur led the legendary schoolboy hockey program to its first five Rhode Island titles, three New England titles, and two National titles. Over that time, he mentored a number of Mounties on their way towards outstanding pro careers, including AHL Hall of Famer Fred Thurier and the Reds’ Roger Bedard.

Providence’s Classical High School reaped the benefits of Reds’ coaching even earlier. In 1926-27, Bernie “Speedy” Brophy, playing for the Reds while under contract with the Montreal Canadiens, guided Classical to a winning season.

The following year, Archie Wilcox, who played here from 1926 thru 1929, replaced Brophy at Classical while teammate Charlie Langlois took the reigns at Moses Brown.

RI owes its rich hockey heritage, in great part, to the tradition of paying it forward begun by the early Reds. It continues to this day as fathers, and, more recently, moms, take the knowledge they learned on the ice and pass it on to the next generation.



National Champs: Serge Boudreault coached his 1984 Edgewood team to the National Midget Championship



Hat Trick: Art Lesieur coached both Brown & Mount St Charles in 1939 while also starring for the Reds

'Fast and Fearless'

Alton White Made History with the Reds

By Vin Cimini

Heritage Society Board of Directors

Black History Month was celebrated that past February. In hockey circles, the Reds hold an important place in that history.

During Buster Clegg's tenure as GM of the team, he secured an affiliate relationship with the Columbus Checkers of the International Hockey League (IHL), by most accounts the next most talented league below the AHL & WHL levels.

In January of 1968, the Reds were on an extended road trip facing off against WHL teams as part of the interlocking schedule between the AHL & WHL. Buster, always looking to infuse the team with new talent, used the time to fly to the Midwest and scout eight IHL clubs.

A game in Columbus was on the last leg of his venture and it turned out to be the most fruitful. "That's when I saw the most dynamic player on my trip," recalled Buster. "It was Alton White. He was fast, fearless, and always seemed to be where he needed to be on the ice."

Buster wondered who had rights to him and was "stunned to learn that no one had claimed him in the NHL's Central Registry." Buster quickly worked to put in a claim for the 23-year-old winger and successfully added him to the Reds' Negotiating List.

Buster resigned his position at the end of the '68 season. Dave Creighton replaced him, adding GM to his player/coach title. Alton was invited to the Reds' next training camp but failed to make the club. He returned to Columbus, tearing up the league with his best season ever. Late in the Reds' campaign, Alton got a call-up to the team that owned his rights and was signed for the Reds' playoff run.

In joining the Reds, Alton became the first and only black player in the team's history. More significantly, he became just the second black player, after Willie O'Ree, to have played on a professional major league hockey team. He soon became one of



Alton White prepares to hit the road with the Reds.

the Reds' most popular players, scoring 84 goals and 174 points with the club from 1969 thru 1972.

Following a 30-goal 1971-72 season with the Reds, Alton was selected by the New York Raiders in the 1972 WHA draft, and then traded to the LA Sharks where he recorded some historical scoring marks.

There he became the first player of African descent to score 20 goals in a single season for a major league team, tallying 21 in his rookie WHA campaign, which also saw him become the first Black player to score a hat trick in a major league game.

Alton, who has graced us with his presence at past Reds Reunions, was enshrined in the Black Ice Hockey & Sports Hall of Fame 2007.

Did You Know?

By Vin Cimini
Heritage Society Board of Directors

Joe Hardy

Did you know...

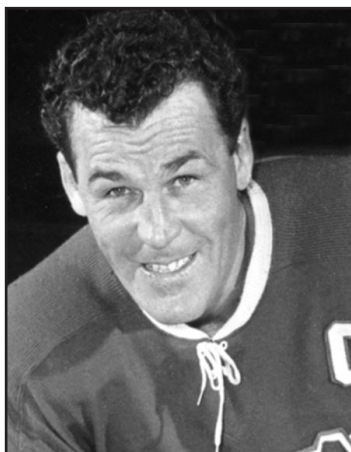
In the 1981-82 season, Wayne Gretzky became the first NHL player to achieve the 200-point plateau in a single season. Little known is that former RI Red, Joe Hardy, was the very first professional player to reach 200 points in one regular season. Jocelyn 'Joe' Hardy played for the Reds in 1969-70, scoring 11 goals and 27 assists in 46 games. He would go on to become one of the greatest to play in the NAHL (North American Hockey League). In 1975-76, with Quebec's Beauce Jaros, Hardy amassed 60 goals and assisted on 148 for an incredible 208 points while also acting as the team's head coach. Not surprisingly, he was also voted the league's MVP.



Butch Bouchard

Did you know...

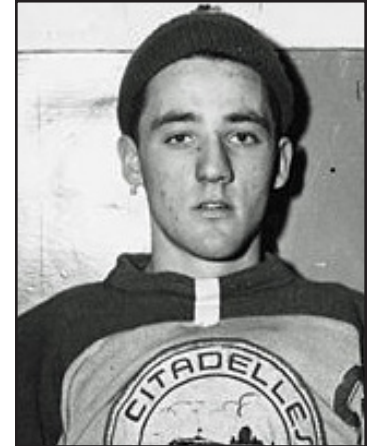
Among the players of the time, Émile "Butch" Bouchard was referred to as "the bee keeper." While still in high school, he came across a bee ranch owned by a priest who had just passed away. He borrowed \$500 and bought it. His apiary reached 200 hives and he eventually earned enough from the sale of honey to buy his parents a home. But like all in his profession, he experienced a mutiny one day - to the tune of 100 bee stings!



Jacques Plante

Did you know...

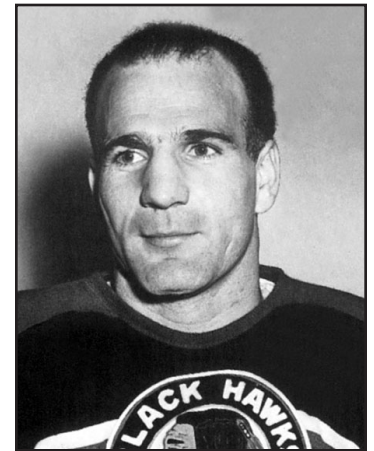
Plante never played for the Reds but that wasn't because they didn't try. And they tried very early. He became well known for his goaltending at age 12 playing against much older boys. While still a very young teenager, he was making a serious name for himself playing in an industrial league and being paid 50 cents a game. He was courted by a number of minor league pro teams. Considered highest among them was the Providence Reds. Despite Lou Pieri's efforts, his parents forbade it, telling Jacques that he could not leave home until age 18, which he did when he joined the Quebec Citadelles in 1947.



Johnny Mariucci

Did you know...

The Hockey Hall of Famer, who played for the Reds before five seasons with the Blackhawks and two in the U.S. Coast Guard, was quite a character. One night, during the war years, he visited Boston Garden as a spectator. During intermission he leaped over the boards, made snowballs and playfully fired them into the crowd. In 1948, he was demoted to the St. Louis Flyers of the AHL. Always ready for a gag, he had a big "A" sewn on the front of his long johns. Whenever he argued with the referee, and was told he had no right to do so, he would lift his sweater to display his badge of "Authority".



Hall of Fame to Enshrine George Army, Art Lesieur

Local television will broadcast ceremonies

By Vin Cimini
Heritage Society Board

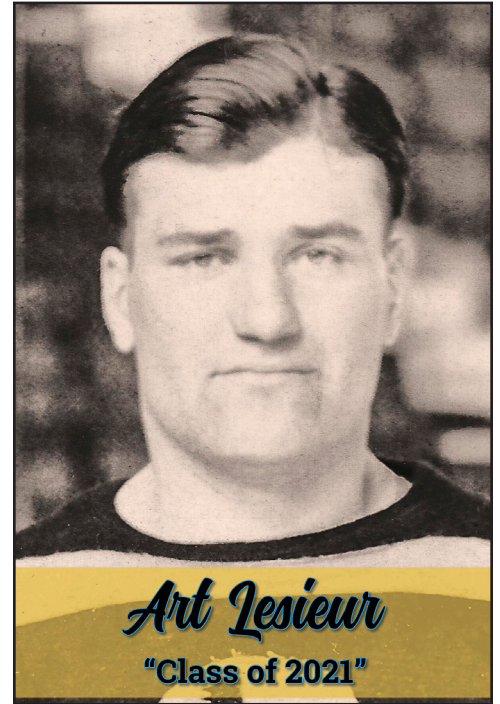
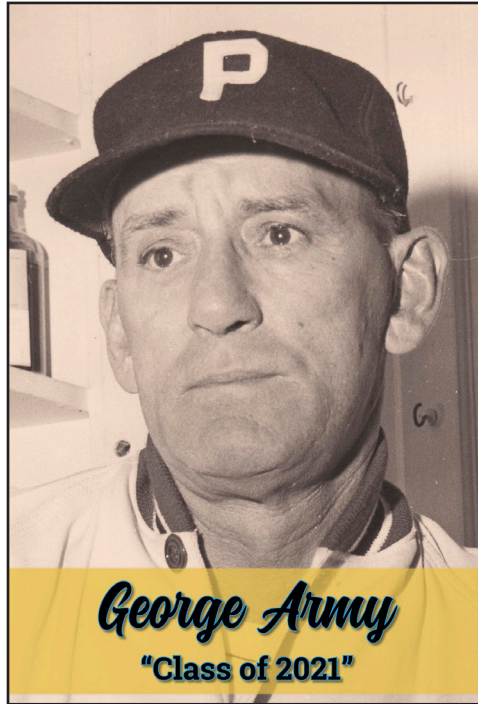
In February, the RI Reds Heritage Society and our hockey community were pleased to learn that legendary Reds trainer George Army and the great Art Lesieur had been elected for enshrinement into the RI Hockey Hall of Fame. The Hall's "Class of 2021" also includes current NY Rangers coach, David Quinn, and former Brown All-American and USA Olympian, Bob Gaudreau.

With their inductions, Army and Lesieur will join former Reds alumni Harvey Bennett, Sr., Zellio Toppazzini, Lou Pieri and Pete Demers as honored members of the RI shrine.

George, patriarch of one of RI's most famous and accomplished hockey families, served 35 years as the self-taught and revered trainer for the Reds. Before joining the Reds, he was a talented Triple A baseball catcher and manager who barnstormed with baseball's best, including Babe Ruth.

Among his proteges are Tom Woodcock and Pete Demers, both of whom have plaques in the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto.

Art lived his entire adult life in



RI. In 1929, he became the first U.S.-born player for the Montreal Canadiens to have his name engraved on the Stanley Cup. Art captained the Reds to 5 league championships.

Remarkably, over that period, he also coached Mount St. Charles to 5 RI state schoolboy titles. Mid-season in 1941, Art became the first U.S.-born professional hockey player to be drafted into the armed forces and served

3+ years in Army combat.

The pair will be formally inducted this coming August in safely pre-recorded ceremonies to be broadcast on Rhode Island's popular PBS station, WSBE TV 36. The program will also be available "On Demand" on all cable carriers and will be posted on "You Tube" to be viewed anywhere in the U.S and Canada.

Ceremonies will also include the induction of the "Class of 2020", whose induction event was also cancelled last year due to the pandemic.

That class includes George Army's grandson, Tim Army, and our own Buster Clegg, recipient of the Malcolm Greene Chace Memorial Trophy for "Lifetime Contributions to the Game of Hockey".