



1111 ECHOES

NEWSLETTER OF THE RHODE ISLAND REDS HERITAGE SOCIETY

SUMMER 2023

Not Canadian, and Not American, Either

THE EUROPEANS WHO WORE RED

By Vin Cimini
Heritage Society Vice President

On January 27, 1965 – after almost 60 years of NHL hockey – Sweden’s Ulf Sterner became the first European to play in hockey’s biggest league. However, he left very little of an impression. North American hockey circles thought European players lacked the toughness to compete in the NHL, despite speed and skating ability.

That soon began to change, thanks not only to the Soviets' impressive showing against Team Canada at the 1972 Summit Series but also because of one man who helped prove Europe had talent – Sweden’s Borje Salming.

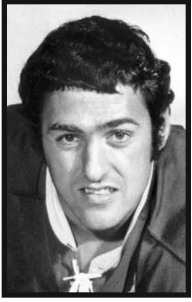
When the WHA was formed in 1972, it turned to Europe, especially Sweden, to fill its rosters. Nine years later, the league merged with the NHL, with many of the European players making the leap.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the eventual melting of the Cold War, the floodgates opened for Eastern Europeans and the Russians. The rest is hockey history and the NHL, as well as the AHL, are now truly global leagues.

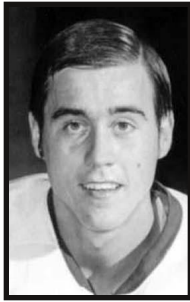
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Legendary sports cartoonist Frank Lanning captured the Reds' Red Johansen in his prime. Johansen, who was born in Oslo, Norway, was one of several Reds players who were born in Europe and made their mark in the AHL and NHL long before the World Hockey Association, and later the NHL, turned their eyes beyond the United States and Canada.



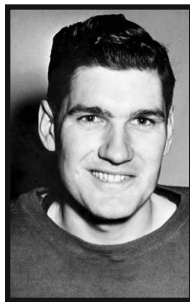
Brian Perry,
(1965-72) born
in Aldershot,
England



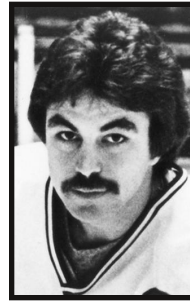
Chris Worthy,
(1969-70) born
in Bristol,
England



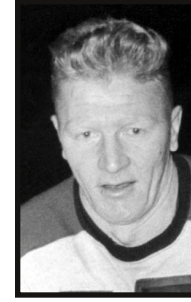
Norm Mann,
(1939-41) born
in Yorkshire,
England



Bob Whitelaw,
(1941-43) born
in Motherwell,
Scotland



Andre Peloffy,
(1971-74) born
in Sete, France



**Bill "Red"
Johansen,**
(1954-57) born
in Oslo, Norway



Joe Lund, (1952)
born in Karijoki,
Finland

Not Canadian, and Not American, Either

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What you may not know is that long before these transitional events, our Providence Reds showcased its own share of European-born talent and few or any were even aware.

Red Johansen developed his skills in Europe, and Andre Peloffy was the first person born in France to play in the NHL.

After his North American career, Peloffy played professionally in Europe for 10 seasons, becoming France's all-time leading scorer in

international play.

Surprisingly, the European nation that sent the largest number of players to the Reds was Great Britain, a country not known for hockey.

Three Englishmen and one Scot came to Providence to wear the red and black.

We Counted on You - and You Delivered!

By Andre Mayer
Heritage Society President

Change is seldom easy. Several months ago, our Board of Directors voted to suspend the collection of membership dues. We chose to count on donations from all of us who enjoyed the Reds as a team and our Newsletters and all the other work the Board does. The idea was to spread the "Story" of the Reds through our Newsletters to as many people as possible. Charging members for the Newsletter, and giving it away to all others for free wouldn't be fair and was not going to happen.

We appealed to our wonderful Hockey Family for help as it takes money to run a Heritage Society with the goal of growing stronger in conjunction with the RI Hockey Hall of Fame.

The initial response was slow but a third period surge has us in a happy locker room.

We, as a Board of Directors, thank you deeply for your financial support of our mission.

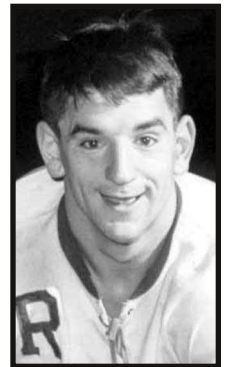
We see your support not only in a financial way but as a way of thanking us for what we do. It inspires us to continue our work.

Please send a donation our way if you haven't already.

Did You Know?

Happy Birthday, Choo-Choo!

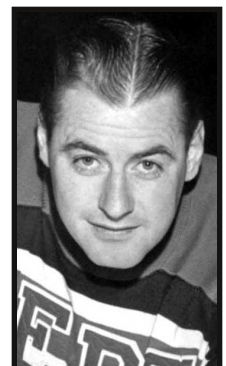
The chant of "Choo-Choo" filled the Auditorium rafters when Jules "Choo-Choo" Bouchard patrolled the blueline for the Reds from 1965 thru 1968. Little known about the fan favorite, who turned 80 on May 1, is that in the season prior to joining the Reds, he set a single-season record with a whopping 408 penalty minutes playing in Canada's Maritime Senior Hockey League.



Jules Bouchard

Ray Powell's Sterling Year

Ray Powell won the Les Cunningham Award (MVP-AHL) in 1952 and led the league in scoring with a 35-62-97 scoring line and only six minutes in penalties. In the playoffs, he then scored 8 more goals and 7 assists while matching his entire regular season mark in PIM with 6. After two seasons with the Reds, he moved on to the Quebec Aces for three seasons, ending his playing career with the Kelowna Packers.



Ray Powell

Jack Bionda

Hockey Star and Lacrosse Hero

By Vin Cimini
Heritage Society Vice President

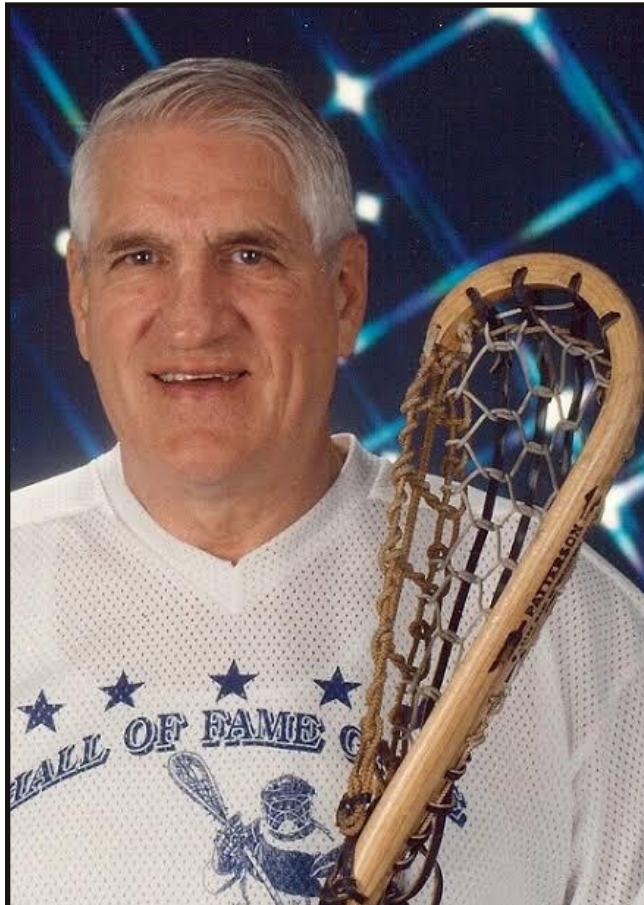
Hockey is Canada's national winter sport. Lacrosse is its national summer sport. And no one played it better than Jack Bionda.

Jack Bionda starred on defense for the Reds in the 1958-59 season. It was one of 11 professional seasons he played on ice, including three with the Boston Bruins. And as talented as he was with a hockey stick, it paled in comparison to his skills with a lacrosse stick, which he wielded like a samurai sword.

Jack was what could be called a double-schedule athlete. His combined hockey-lacrosse commitments totaled over 100 games each year, not including playoff and exhibition games - an average of one game every three days year round.

A native of Huntsville, Ontario, Jack dominated the box lacrosse scene during the 1950s and early '60s. He was the commanding presence of the sport in Canada. Slow afoot but gifted with incredible reflexes, Jack created magic with his lacrosse stick. His powerful shots and pinpoint passes were delivered in so many different ways that defenders often just stood in disbelief.

Bionda's first love was always lacrosse. He practiced four and five hours a day from the age of 11, honing the stick magic that later brought him fame. As for hockey, he didn't even begin skating until he was 14 but still managed a lengthy professional



Jack Bionda spent 11 seasons playing pro hockey, including three with the Bruins, but his first love was lacrosse.

career.

His personal scoring prowess with a lacrosse stick was incredible. He captured six scoring titles - one for each year he played an entire season; his commitments in hockey often restricted his time spent on the lacrosse floor.

Hockey paid the bills but it would never take Bionda into a Hall of Fame. He was an honest journeyman, often described as "gutsy" or "hardrock". That's the way we

remember him in Providence.

It was lacrosse that carried him to glory. In 1974, Jack was inducted into the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame. Eight years later, he became a member of the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame along with another former Boston Bruin, Bobby Orr.

Then, in 1998, Jack was added to the British Columbia Sports Hall of Fame.

Jack Bionda was, indeed, a Canadian lacrosse hero.



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Remembering Curt Ridley

A Spur-of-the-Moment Decision Led to a Career Between the Pipes

By Wayne Forrest
Heritage Society Board

Sometimes a spur-of-the-moment decision works out much better than expected. Take Curt Ridley for example. When the Winnipeg-born 17-year-old tried out for the Portage Terriers in the Manitoba Junior Hockey League in 1968, he admittedly was not in the best physical shape to play defense as he intended.

So when the players were told to separate by position, Curt headed to the goalie group instead, as he told Providence Journal sportswriter Mike Madden in a November 1973 interview. That prescient choice led to a successful 11-year pro career between the pipes for Ridley.

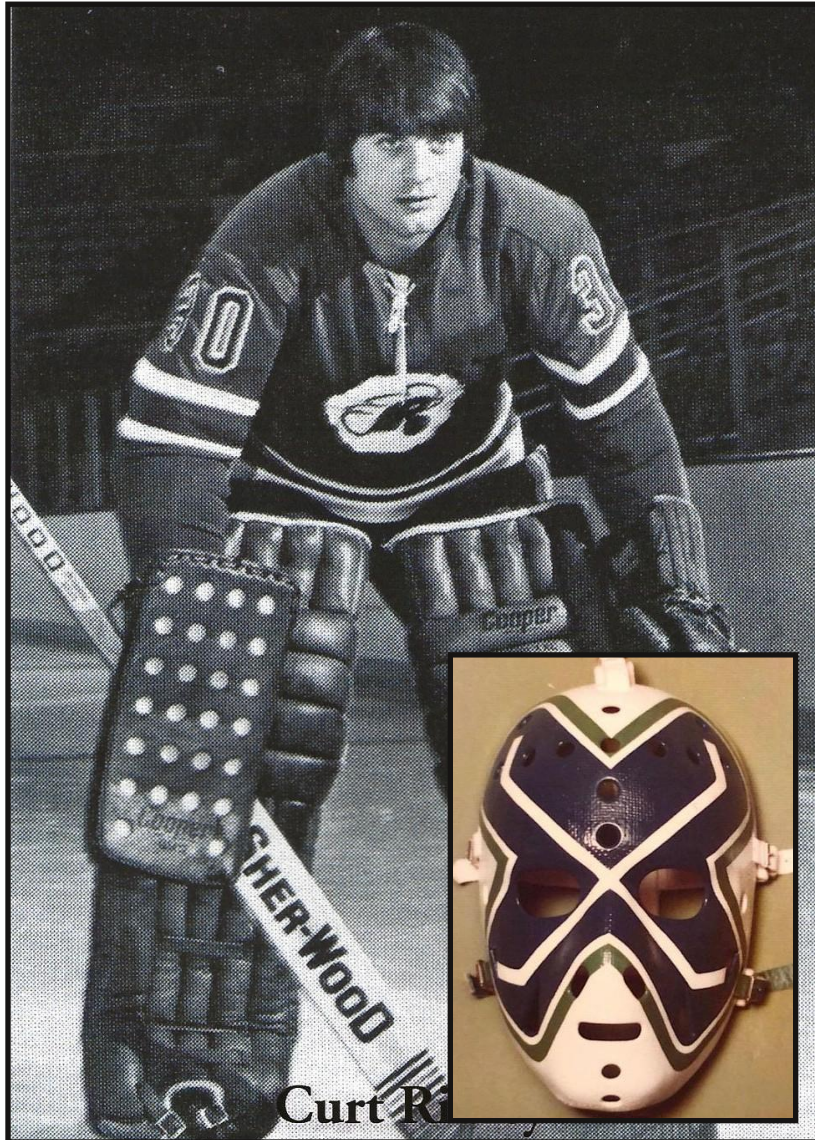
The Boston Bruins were impressed enough with the 6-foot, 180-lb. netminder's juniors stats to select him as the 28th overall pick in the 1971 amateur draft.

After a year with the Oklahoma City Blazers and a season with the Dayton Gems, the Reds and New York Rangers noticed him, too, and nabbed Ridley in the NHL's reverse draft for \$15,000.

The investment quickly paid dividends, as the 22-year-old split goaltending duties with Peter McDuffe during the 1973-74 season, registering a goal-against average of 2.87 and helping the Reds to the Calder Cup finals against the Hershey Bears.

When Curt got his chance to shine as the No. 1 goalie the following season, he notched 32 of the team's 43 wins and a GAA of 3.27, as the Reds captured the AHL's Northern Division title.

Ridley was, however, unenviably stuck behind all-star goalies Gilles



Curt Ridley helped the Reds earn a trip to the Calder Cup finals in 1974 and the AHL Northern Division title the year after. He eventually found a home with the Vancouver Canucks, where he became a fan favorite for his tenacious play and trademark mask.

Villemure and former Red Ed Giacomini on the Rangers' depth chart that same year.

He did get a call-up to New York for two games in December 1974 when the tandem was sidelined within a week of each other. After being trounced in his NHL debut by the Bruins, Curt rebounded to beat the Kansas City Scouts and former teammate McDuffe, 2-1.

At season's end Curt was traded to

Atlanta, but his stay was brief. The Flames soon sent him to the Vancouver Canucks for a first-round draft choice. He became a fan favorite during his four seasons, thanks to his continued tenacious play and novel crossed-sticks goalie mask that honored the Canucks' logo.

Sadly, we lost Curt on Dec. 19, 2021, but he will always be remembered as one of the significant contributors to the Reds' success in the mid-1970s.