

VOICES OF THE PAST

The Great Falls Gazette is proud to announce Voices of the Past. This column is to remember the history of the area and brought to you by the readers themselves. If you have a story of the past that you would like to share, please email info@gfgazette.com or call (406) 604-8929.

GREAT FALLS AMERICANS - HISTORY OF HOCKEY IN GREAT FALLS

By *JeffCunndf* October 17, 2024 - Great Falls, Mt

The Civic Center was built in 1937. Shortly after its completion, Canadian hockey teams from southern Alberta came to compete in Great Falls. These visiting teams were senior squads with mostly hometown players.

The Great Falls Hockey Club, as it was known in the 1950s and early 1960s, played in the Big Six League and the ABCM League (Alberta, Montana, British Columbia). winning the championship in 1961. Teams included the Lethbridge Native Sons and Coleman Grands, among others. These were all senior men's teams. At that time the Canadian's goal was to win the Allen Cup - the county's top award for senior teams. It wasn't until 1954 that the local team took on the Americans moniker.

That same year the Americans won the senior men's U.S. national championship against Clinton, New York. The next year they again played Clinton but took runner-up honors. Most Great Falls stars were Albertans from Taber, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat. They included Earl Ingarfield (played for 12 years with the New York Rangers, 1958-1971), George "Gabby" Haynes, and William "Uke" Ukrainetz,

Sammy Williamson (Ojibwe Indian from Kenora, Ontario), Con Grisak (goalie). Cal Quam, Dennis Fisher ("Swifty"), and Archie Naismith. Other local skaters were Terry Casey, Joe McCracken, Gary Thompson, John Borgreen, and our black goaltender Kenny Elliott. The Great Falls Americans senior team concluded play in 1963.

The Great Falls Civic Center was the home to the Americans. Prior to that, an AAU team, the Great Falls Hornets played in the rink. The more successful Americans became the main tenant until 1978. Then the Four Seasons Arena was built. Several senior men's teams played there including the Hawks.

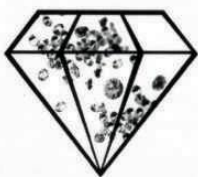
Finally in 1979, the Great Falls Americans major junior team hit the ice. They were a member of the CHL Western Hockey League but only lasted a few months. The team was the Edmonton Oil Kings prior to coming to the Electric City. They then moved on to Spokane to become the Flyers (later the Spokane Chiefs). This short-lived Americans team was coached by Les Jackson, later a co-manager for the NHL Dallas Stars.

Local phenom, Terry Casey, was a

stalwart with the Americans. He played fast pitch softball and quarterbacked the Great Falls Bison. His uncle, Uke Ukrainetz, got him a scholarship to play for the University of North Dakota Sioux. He skated on the college's freshman team. After joining the varsity, he was a three-time letter winner and served as team captain. Casey became a college All-American in 1965 - 1966. At that time there were east coast and west coast All-Americans.

He played on the 1967 U.S. national team with Lou Nanne (GM with the North Stars) and John Cunniff (coach of the New Jersey Devils). The team took fifth in the world championships. Sadly, Casey was killed in a car accident in 1968. This was shortly before he was to report to camp for the 1968 U.S. Olympic team.

The Terry Casey midget/high school tournament was started in 1990 in his honor. It will be in its 25th year this coming February. The local squad is a three-time tourney winner. Terry's #12 Americans jersey is retired locally, just as it also hangs from the rafters in Grand Forks' Ralph Englestad Arena. This is just another story of Great Falls.



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