

Hockey Heritage Honors A Great

The irascible Red Asseltine...



'...a night to remember'

By MIKE TURNER
Herald Sports Editor

The 11th recipient of the Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award was appropriately honored with a gala dinner Monday night, and there can be no doubt that Walter "Red" Asseltine is more than deserving of such an honor.

Surrounded by family and friends, Red was presented with a wide variety of plaques and special gifts in recognition of his service to the Georgetown hockey community.

"It was a nice evening," Red said as he was congratulated by the last few well-wishers at the end of the evening. "A very, very nice evening, I didn't know what to expect, but I enjoyed every minute of it."

There were a few surprises for Red throughout the evening. One of the biggest was a letter read by Bob Hooper, congratulating him on his being named for the award. It was from Frank Bishop of Manitoba, who came to know Red through the International Bantam Tournament back in the early '60s and has been a friend ever since. The letter began: "Congratulations you old bugger!" And it was at that point that Red knew exactly who it was from.

Bill Watters, renowned in professional hockey as a player agent, was guest speaker for the dinner, and it was only appropriate. Red has known Watters for many years,

after having served with his father overseas in the Second World War.

The Asseltine clan filled a large table, and then some at the dinner. All of Red's immediate family was there, except for his daughter Judy Francis, and her family who were unable to attend from British Columbia.

There were many people on hand who Red hadn't seen for a number of years, people he had seen grow up in the hockey ranks, and others he had worked with during his hockey years.

"The whole night was terrific," Red said. "There were a lot of memories. That's why I kind of got choked up. There were more things going through my mind in five minutes..."

Tributes were paid to Red in the form of special gifts throughout the evening. Locally, he was honored by Georgetown Minor Hockey, the Junior B Gemini, Halton Hills Mayor Russ Miller, and Ken Beilamy of the Georgetown Independent.

Don Brander, publisher of the Herald, presented the photo portrait to Red, which will eventually be hung in the Alcott Arena, along with the portraits of other recipients.

Other presenters included Peter Pomeroy, Halton Regional Chairman; Al Norton, acting on behalf of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney; Scotty Morrison, President of the

NHL Hall of Fame; MPP Walt Elliot, and representatives from the OHA and the OMHA.

In accepting the accolades, Red spoke of his rewards in working with hockey in Georgetown. His involvement in the organization of the Bantam Tournament has helped him make "a lot of friends, coast to coast."

"One man couldn't have made a thing like that go, without a hell of a lot of help. And I had a hell of a lot of help."

There was a price to pay through the years, but Red never quibbled about it. "I had a good wife, and an understanding family, and I missed a lot of them growing up."

Ron MacLean of Hockey Night in Canada, who was serving as emcee for the evening, summed it up well when he paid tribute to Red.

"I only have to listen to you once to know why you are perceived as such an important cog in this community," he said. "This (dinner) is a marvelous thing, and tonight it's yours."

If there was anything that could be considered a disappointment in the evening, it was the announcement that Red and Jean will leave Georgetown in May to live at Elliot Lake. The community will lose two stellar citizens in the Asseltines.

But no one wishes them anything but the very best.



A big bug for the Man of the Hour, from wife, Jean.



Scotty Morrison, President of the NHL Hall of Fame offers congratulations to Red.

Not-so-still Watters

When Bill Watters speaks about the game of hockey, he does so with a lot of authority.

But that's not to say he has all the answers, and he certainly wouldn't try to lead anyone to believe he does.

As guest speaker of the 11th Annual Georgetown Hockey Heritage Dinner Monday night, Watters offered his analytical opinion on several matters, from an "outsider's" perspective.

Watters was in Calgary for the recent Olympic games, where Canada's fourth place finish in hockey was termed by many as a disappointment. No stranger himself to international hockey, Watters has definite ideas on what course the Canadian Olympic hockey program should take.

"I'm familiar with the frustrations of playing, and being beaten by the Soviets," he said. "I felt badly when we were unable to compete at the same level (as the Soviets)."

Watters has the utmost respect for Team Canada coach Dave King, and sees him as one of the brightest men in hockey today.

But as far as he's concerned, the four-year Olympic program should be scuttled, and there should be more of an NHL influence to bolster the power of the Olympic team.

To close down the NHL for a period during the Olympics is totally unrealistic, according to Watters, but there could be an allotment of being compensated for their services.

The far greater amount of money dished out for the four-year plan could then be put to other use, Watters said.

"I think it would be a more competitive program, and something the NHL could live with."

The other hockey focal point Watters keyed on was the dismal situation the Toronto Maple Leafs are currently facing, again as an interested observer.

The club's biggest problem, according to Watters, is a "total lack of communication."

"There are two sets of rules in Toronto," he says. "One for (Wendel) Clark, (Dave) Semenko, and (Al) Secord, and one for the others."

Watters has distinct ideas about where the troubles lie, and he's even indicated them to the person at the centre of it all - Leaf coach John Brophy.

"John Brophy is a hard working coach, and I've never seen a coach who works harder," Watters says. "But either the players can't comprehend, or they aren't being told anything. I don't see the best chemistry. I wish them nothing but the best, but there have to be major changes."

Two people who no doubt listened to Watters' comments with great interest were Brad Smith and Greg Terrion of the Maple Leafs. Smith has been working back into shape after being out most of the season, and Terrion was taking a few games rest for a groin injury.

Addressing the audience, Smith said "with respect to Bill's tirade, I think Bill's a genius to tell you the truth."

Then, with tongue in cheek, Smith informed the group that "a new Japanese coach" had been enlisted by the Leafs to help them out of their tailspin.

"Win One Soon" was expected to be on hand for the Leafs' game Tuesday in St. Louis.

Warmth from the West

Among the accolades received by Red Asseltine Monday night, none was more heartfelt than a letter that came from the community of Beausejour, Manitoba.

Frank Bishop first met Red in 1962, when he brought his Winnipeg Ambassador Hockey Club to the Georgetown International Bantam Hockey Tournament.

Since that time, they've been close friends, and were it not for prior travel plans, Frank would undoubtedly have been at the Heritage Dinner to offer his congratulations in person.

Frank remembers his introduction to the irascible Red.

"When we first walked into the arena and he was there to meet us, I thought, I'm never going to get along with this guy. But we became great friends."

It obviously didn't take Frank long to see through Red's facade.

"The way I see Red, he was the biggest bluff in the world," Frank says. "I know he's tough, his war record shows that. But when it comes to his kids and his family, he's a pussycat."

Frank has fond memories of the several years he brought a team to the Bantam tournament. Georgetown will remember the Ambassador players for their distinctive red hats, set off by white feathers. They were worn so the coach could collect them all at night.

"It was the biggest tournament in Canada, and the best run," Frank says. "We always knew where we stood. Once you were put out, you had to get out. But the people in Georgetown kept our kids the whole week, because we'd come so far. They really treated our kids well."

With Frank's permission, his letter to Red is reprinted here: 88 02 17

Dear Red:

Congratulations you old bugger!

Little did I realize when I walked into the Georgetown Arena in the early 60's towing 20 fourteen-year-olds that the tough talking, red haired gentleman that met us would become, along with his wife Jean and four kids, a life long friend.

The wonderful way that the people of Georgetown welcomed us and took care of our kids each year was, I am sure, a tribute to Red and what he was doing for their town.

I would love to be with you tonight but we have previous plans and will probably be suffering from "Montezuma's Revenge" about this time.

Once again Red, congratulations and hope to see you in the near future.

As ever,
Frank Bishop
Coach - Winnipeg Ambassador Hockey Club



Bill Watters pauses for a thoughtful moment.



MPP Walt Elliot extends warm congratulations to Red.



Mayor Russ Miller presents a plaque to Red, on behalf of Halton Hills.



Ron MacLean served as the very capable emcee for the evening.



Bill Watters (right) talks hockey with Toronto Maple

Leafs' players Greg Terrion (left), and Brad (Motor City Smilty) Smith.



Don Brander, publisher of the Herald, presents a photo portrait to Red, which will hang in the Alcott Arena along with portraits of other recipients.