

SPORTS & LEISURE

Latest version of Fox whistle pays tribute to John McCauley

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Staff Writer

It's the rare sports official who is remembered for the good things they've done during their careers, let alone have a unique tribute paid to them long after passing.

To mark the 25th anniversary of its wildly successful Hamilton-based business, Fox 40 International has come out with the "Rolls Royce" model of a pea-less whistle named "The Caul" in honour of late Georgetown resident John McCauley.

McCauley was a well-respected on-ice official in the National Hockey League for many years before becoming its Director of Officiating from 1986 until his sudden death from surgical complications in 1989.

Fox 40 founder Ron Foxcroft said recently in an interview that the idea for the tribute came from lengthy discussions he'd had with McCauley at NHL games in Toronto during the mid-1980s about coming up with a whistle that didn't fail to blow in a crucial game situation.

"Since John was way ahead of his time with respect to how hockey should be officiated, we've spent the last 25 years developing a prototype for a whistle that reflects the way he approached his job," Foxcroft said, noting it's the first time any Fox 40 product has been named after an official.

"We've got 20 new projects in the vault that we could have celebrated our anniversary with, but we concluded that there was only one real name we could put on it."

Foxcroft, himself a well-known basketball referee, was the first Canadian to work NCAA games. During the men's basketball gold medal game at the 1976

Summer Olympics in Montreal, a Yugoslavian player elbowed his American counterpart and though Foxcroft tried to blow his whistle, the pea was jammed in its chamber and no sound was audible for the 18,000 booing fans who thought he'd missed calling the obvious foul.

Subsequently, Foxcroft's business venture and personal mission to come up with a pea-less whistle saw him sink some \$150,000 into debt.

"My family and friends wouldn't talk to me because they thought I was crazy, spending all this money on a whistle," mused Foxcroft.

"I got a lot of negative feedback in the beginning. The first pea-less whistle was available in 35 other countries before we even sold one in Canada. I thought this was something that needed a big name to promote it."

He asked the advice of good friend Don Cherry in his research and while the long-time *Hockey Night In Canada* commentator didn't have much time for many officials in any sport, he told Foxcroft, "There is one official I like and respect, and that's John McCauley."

Foxcroft had only heard of McCauley's well-regarded reputation in the hockey world before meeting with him at Maple Leaf Gardens one evening in 1987 for about three hours.

"Quite frankly, I was numb with respect for this man when we first met. For a famous guy, he was just an amazing, grounded person who was sincerely interested in what I had to say and what I was attempting to do. He loved the idea of a pea-less whistle and we had several long conversations about it. Unfortunately, he passed before we could come together on a project, but those meetings and discussions

were riveted in my mind."

Fox 40 held a contest to come up with a name for the anniversary



Caul to youth referees when conducting officiating clinics near his home in Maine.

Two of Wes's three children, Riley, 11, and Emma, 9, will start officiating youth hockey games this winter:

"If you look at dad's officiating numbers (442 regular-season on-ice games over 15 years), he wasn't around as long as some of the veteran referees because when he got his eye injury, he was just

going into what should have been the prime of his career," said Wes, referring to the incident in 1979 after a game between the NHL All-Stars and the Soviet Union when John McCauley was assaulted by a fan, causing serious damage to the right eye that forced his retirement in 1981.

"So to think that he's been gone for 20-plus years now and people still talk about him, it's pretty humbling. This is a really nice tribute."

The Caul is a dual-chamber design with a flexible finger grip, cushioned mouthpiece and made of material that stays warm in cold arenas, making a sound of 110 decibels. The Fox 40 brand is available in 140 countries and usage of its whistles has expanded well beyond the sporting field in areas such as water safety, search and rescue, personal security and animal training.

whistle and among the many submissions, a man from Saskatchewan suggested "The Call" as a possible moniker for the product.

Foxcroft loved the idea and simply altered the spelling to pay tribute to McCauley, whose actual nickname was Gus.

In 2003, as owner of the American Hockey League's Hamilton Bulldogs, Foxcroft's memories of his conversations with McCauley were triggered again when he watched Wes McCauley skate out onto the Copps Coliseum ice to officiate a game.

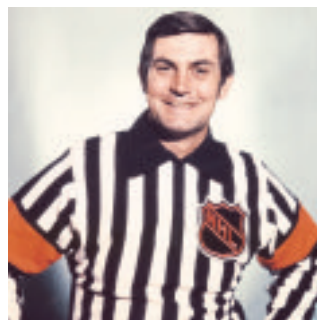
Wes, now 40, made his NHL debut in 2007 and has emerged as one of the league's top referees, having officiated third-round playoff games this year for the first time.

McCauley said that his family is deeply honoured by the Fox 40 tribute and while he hasn't used the whistle in live action yet, he plans to test it in an NHL exhibition game in September and has been distributing The

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—Wes McCauley



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