

REMEMBRANCE DAY NOVEMBER 11

Hockey memorial awards honour sport's war veterans

In a country where hockey is considered by many to be the national sport, it has a military history that includes the creation of memorial awards that honour hockey players who perished in the First World War.

According to the Government of Canada's veterans affairs website, it is believed that hockey actually had its origins in the military.

Military hockey teams were created across Canada early on in the war. There were games between battalions, games between military members and civilians, and well-known matches in which the navy faced the army. Military hockey teams attracted lots of attention, like the 228th Battalion (Northern Fusiliers) who even played in a professional league. As the war dragged on, more and more men were needed on the front lines. Hockey themes were even used in posters to encourage military service! Large numbers of young

men ended up enlisting, creating a void in many arenas and women's hockey suddenly became very popular.

There is no official count on the number of hockey players who served in the Great War, but more than 30 Canadians who perished in that war had significant ties to hockey. Memorial awards were created for many of these men, such as the Abbott Memorial Cup, to honour Edward Lyman Abbott, as well as the George Taylor Richardson Memorial Trophy. The tragic loss of prominent hockey players such as Allan "Scotty" Davidson and George Richardson inspired Captain James Sutherland and businessman Liam Carr to create a trophy to pay tribute to all Canadians who died at war.

The Memorial Cup was first awarded in 1919, one year after the end of the First World War. It is now awarded each year to the junior hockey champions of the Canadian Hockey League. The cup was donated in 1919 by the Ontario Hockey Association.

During the Second World War, many National Hockey League players put their careers on hold to serve in the military. Most players, though, did not enlist as dramatically as Milt Schmidt, Woody Dumart and Bobby Bauer. The three forwards for the Boston Bruins' best line, ironically nicknamed the "Kraut Line" because of their German ancestry, hung up their skates and enlisted together in the Royal Canadian Air

Force on the same day in 1942. All three saw action overseas as aircrew. Fortunately they survived the war and returned to the NHL, but not before they had given up three-and-a-half years of their hockey careers to serve. The teammates helped the Bruins reach the Stanley Cup finals in 1946.

In Toronto, co-owner of the Maple Leafs, Conn Smythe (who had been decorated for bravery in the First World War) enlisted again at age 45. Leading by example, many Maple Leaf players also decided to join the war effort. Smythe was commanding an artillery battery in France when he was wounded in an enemy bombing attack. To this day, the National Hockey League trophy for the most valuable player in the playoffs is named in his honour.

Some players, like Maurice "Rocket" Richard, could not enlist because of injuries they had received during their hockey careers. Other players enlisted but did not make it to the front lines. Having them play hockey either in Canada or in military camps overseas proved to be a pillar of strength for both civilians and the military. Highly competitive regimental hockey teams were formed to keep the men fit and to entertain the serving members on military bases.

Photo and information courtesy of Veterans Affairs Canada, www.veterans.gc.ca





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