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# Who was that masked man?

Which Canadian literally changed the face of hockey?

Most Canadians over the age of 35 know that Jacques Plante of the Montreal Canadiens invented the hockey mask.

But young Canadian sports people have yet to appreciate the courage and daring innovation that characterized the immortal, mobile goalie.

Jacques Plante was a player who dared to be different and wearing protective headgear went against all of the game's "macho" traditions, as did Plante's habit of knitting in the dressing room before games.

The oldest of 11 children in a Shawinigan, Quebec family during the Depression, his youthful education included learning to

cook and sew and make his own sweaters.

A sports columnist recalled seeing Plante in goal for the Montreal Royals at age 22, wearing a toque and jersey he had knit for himself. Plante continued to knit throughout his career and contended that it helped him relax and refine his supple hands.

Throughout his career Plante was considered something of an eccentric and a loner.

Some contended that he was a hypochondriac. In fact, he suffered from asthma, and as a consequence he would often divorce himself from the team to avoid smoke-filled rooms when they were on the road.

Plante also appreciated the stress of goal-tending and he was not

one to mince words. "How would you like it," he once asked, "if you were doing your job in an office and you made a little mistake. Suddenly a bright light flashed on, a loud buzzer went off, and 18,000 people started screaming: Get the bum out of there!"

On the ice, Plante was a study in focus. When a teammate scored on him in practice, he would stare straight ahead, as though the puck had not gone in.

Plante revolutionized the goalie position by pioneering the move behind the net to stop the puck and leaving it for a defencemen or passing off to a teammate along the boards. His risky style outside of the "cage" unsettled coaches and drove fans to distraction.

The goaltenders of that era often suffered from the pressure of "seeing too much rubber," which was a sporting euphemism for laceration, concussion and general contusion by speeding pucks.

Plante's "seeing rubber" turning point came in a game at Madison Square Gardens on Nov. 1, 1959, when a powerful slap-shot by New York Rangers' Andy Bathgate redefined his profile, inflicting a gash that took seven stitches to close.

After receiving a total of 200 previous stitches in the face, Plante decided he had paid his dues to the gods of the sport and stubbornly held to his own against Canadiens coach Toe Blake, who believed a player had to "fight for his life" to play well.

That night, with his face sewn from nose to lip, Plante agreed to return to the ice only if he was allowed to wear his face mask, which he had worn in practices since 1955.

The cream-coloured mask drew a mixture of criticism, admiration and wisecracks. Nevertheless, the team went on to win the game.

To keep his mask, which he was supposed to give up once he healed, Plante outdid himself by leading an 11-game winning streak and eventually the Stanley Cup the following spring.

With a keen sense of showmanship, Plante was well suited in the 1960s to appear in public wearing a plastic or fibreglass mask looking like something from a Frankenstein film. And he made the masks as well!

Today, the goalie face mask is mandatory gear for anyone courageous and agile enough to assume that critical place in the game.

In various ways, Jacques Plante managed to influence and shape the rules of the game. His innovative spirit gave hockey a new face forever.

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## THE WRATH OF GRAPES

WITH **DON CHERRY**



### No wonder Leafs hate replay

Boy, are we and the rest of Canada saps or what! Listen to this one. Dow of Canada had a news conference to announce a \$9.1 million investment into a Quebec plant that meant new 50 jobs for Quebecours.

What they failed to say at the news conference was that Ontario will lose 50 jobs because they are going to close the plant in Richmond Hill. I guess it was just a coincidence that Ontario was against a federal bill called C-91 that would increase patent protection for brand name companies and Quebec for it all the way.

Hence Quebec gets the jobs and all the dough and Ontario loses out again. What else is new?

Oh by the way, did I fail to tell you the name of the company spokesperson? His name is Jean Paul Marson. You gotta give 'em (Quebec) credit; they take care of their own.

\*\*\*

Everybody seems to like replay and I gotta admit that a few years back, the Calgary Flames would've been in the Stanley Cup finals, if Nieuwendyk's goal counts in overtime. On the replay, it was there in the net. It wasn't until next year that they put in the reply.

But you know, if I was a visiting coach, I would wonder who was in charge of the replay. Is he from the city? Is he associated with the home team in any way, etc., etc.

The most ridiculous situation involved the Leafs and Blues. A replay guy stopped the game and awarded the goal to St. Louis. When asked how he knew it was a goal (no TV that night and hence no replay available) he said he was looking through his binoculars. Is this crazy or what?

No wonder Pat Burns and the Leafs have no faith in replay. Besides this joke, they had 11 straight replays go against them.



*The Wrath of Grapes is brought to you each week by the area businesses featured here. Your support of these merchants is appreciated. If you have any comments or questions about an item in this column, you may contact Don at: Wrath of Grapes, The Acton Tanner, P.O. Box 150, Acton, L7J 2M3.*

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