

SPORTS & LEISURE

Bob Hooper named Hockey Heritage Award winner

EAMONN MAHER
Staff Writer

As someone who achieved success as a minor hockey coach, and later as an executive member of the great Georgetown Raiders' Intermediate hockey teams of the 1970s and '80s, the 2007 recipient of the Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award had the ideal background to become commissioner of the world's largest junior hockey league.

Glen Williams native Bob Hooper has overseen operations of the OHA Provincial Jr. A Hockey League for the past decade and now says that his years as a club president and treasurer in Georgetown prepared him well for his current job. With no shortage of rule-testers and daily matters to attend to, the 67-year-old Hooper helped expand the struggling Central Jr. B loop from 10 franchises into what's now a 35-team, \$7-million-per-year operation.

"People try to pull the wool over your eyes, but after all the experience I've had—and I was one of the wool-pullers at one time—there's really not too much new out there that we haven't seen," said Hooper. "It's surprising how well everything works when people find out that there are rules and that's how it's going to be. No arguments. A lot of new owners and general managers think they're going to do it their way until they discover that that won't work. Everything is done by fines in our league because we've found everyone understands money. They don't understand threats."

Retired for four years now after selling his successful Etobicoke-based import/export meat business, Hooper refuses to be paid as OPJHL commissioner—the only league boss out of all the Canadian Tier II Junior A leagues who doesn't receive a salary—explaining that he never wanted it to be a full-time job, even though he's occupied with hockey business almost every day from mid-August until the end of May.

Hooper helped co-ordinate Georgetown's hosting of the Dudley Hewitt Cup Ontario Jr. A championship tournament in 2005 and was recognized by the Ontario Hockey Federation in 2002 with the inaugural Junior Hockey Award, presented to an administrator who has had a hand as a builder and promoter of the sport.

The treasurer and sometimes president for nearly 20 years with Georgetown Intermediate, Junior and Senior teams, Hooper authorized expenses for the community-run clubs and presided over a volunteer executive that consisted of 50 to 60 people in its peak years, highlighted by the Raiders' Hardy Cup Canadian championship run in 1982. His people skills and ability to assign tasks to those volunteers from behind the scenes while keeping an elite-level franchise

from ever going into debt was a big reason that the Raiders were named the Ontario Hockey Association's Team of the Decade for the 1970s.

"Bob was great at getting people to do the hard work that generated revenue for the team because it was difficult to find them, and when you found those people, he was able to keep them motivated and sold the

greater cause of the team," said Finn Poulstrup, fund-raising vice president for the '82 Raiders. "One of his qualities as a leader was that he led by example. He didn't expect anyone to do anything he wouldn't, but he definitely expected you to do whatever job you were assigned. He just knows how to manage people."

During their glory years, when the Raiders either won provincial titles or were OHA finalists six out of times, players with professional experience were often brought in during the late stages of the season for another playoff push. Gerry Inglis was the head coach for many of those teams and Dave Kentner, who would become Hooper's right-hand man, served as general manager.

"They were the heart of the team and the decision-makers and they were incredible as a group," said former Raider captain John

Boyce. "Even though they weren't in the dressing room with us, we respected them like players, but in a different capacity. Not until I finished playing and got into other aspects of hockey did I realize that Hoop was the guy who made things tick financially. They didn't need recognition for it, they just wanted to see Georgetown be successful."

And while some of the players were often well-compensated for signing with Georgetown, the reward for executive members and team staff after a successful season was a Raider jacket and the feeling of pride derived from being a part of a winning organization.

"(Bob) always told

"Georgetown was the only team in the history of the Hardy Cup that at the end of the series paid all the bills and walked away without owing any money, and we did it in the smallest rink that Hockey Canada has ever played out of," Hooper said. "It was a lot of work and a lot of fun and we had a pretty good run with the Intermediates. I met a lot of great people who gave me a wealth of experience on how the hockey world operated."

As a footnote to that series, Quesnel presented a dubious-looking receipt totaling \$24,000 for their return-trip B.C. flight. A volunteer with the Raiders who worked in the airline industry thought that figure was suspicious. Hooper conducted his own investigation and found the actual cost of the trip to be half of what the Kangaroos claimed. After a raucous meeting, in which Hooper shut his briefcase and left the room, announcing that no one was getting any money, the Quesnel team ended up receiving about one-third of its initial request.

Hooper got his start in the sport as a player coming up through the Georgetown minor system, making the all-stars as a Pee wee. He began coaching Novice house league as a 19-year-old and soon moved up to the Pee wee all-stars, having success at that level for a couple of years before being asked by Bantam rep coach Ron Dixon to be his general manager. That squad would later go undefeated for two seasons and was the only Georgetown team to ever win the grand championship of Georgetown's International Bantam Tournament. But the hatred of losing and the criticism of parents drove Hooper away from being an on-ice staff member for a team again, so he took up father-in-law Frank King's invitation to become treasurer for the new Intermediate B team in Georgetown.

"I had to not coach. I was just too tense behind the bench and even as a GM you were still on the ice at practice," he said. "Winning was everything and we couldn't stand losing. When I played hockey, football or lacrosse, it was the same way. There was never any excuse for losing a game and I wanted everyone around me to win."

Hooper has been married to Elaine, a local native, for 44 years and the couple has two children, Rob and Christine. He was the first treasurer of the Georgetown Hockey Heritage Council 30 years ago and is referred to as the "silent seventh" founding member, guiding several fund-raising projects through the years.



Bob Hooper has been named the Hockey Heritage Award winner for 2007.

Photo by Eamonn Maher

me different things pertaining to fund-raising and jobs within the organization, and one thing that stood out was when he told me that if something seemed easy to do, it was probably a lot harder than it looked," said booster club chairman Ron Faulkner. "But still you loved doing it for him."

One of Hooper's most remarkable achievements was the 1982 Hardy Cup victory, and not just for the team's on-ice domination of the Quesnel, B.C. Kangaroos. As hosts for the series, the Raiders were responsible for covering the opposition's expenses, including airfare, food and accommodation—not to mention what it cost to put together their own four-line juggernaut.

GEORGETOWN



TOYOTA SALES

The All-New 2007 Camry LE

LEASE FOR **\$349** | **\$25,800** MSRP

PER MONTH FOR 48 MONTHS WITH \$2,291 FREIGHT AND P.D.E. INCLUDED
HWY 6.5L/100 KM (43 MPG)† CITY 9.8L/100 KM (29 MPG)†

•2.4L, 158 hp engine • 5-speed automatic transmission • Air • Power windows, locks & mirrors • Cruise control • Optitron electronic gauges • Keyless entry with trunk release • AM/FM stereo CD MP3, auxiliary input jack & more.



PURCHASE FINANCING **3.9%** APR* FOR 36 MONTHS

*Payments are plus taxes. All leases are 24,000 km per year with an excess mileage charge of 7¢ per km. See dealer for full details.

15 MOUNTAINVIEW RD. N.,

GEORGETOWN

905-877-2296

TOR. 416-874-4276

WEBSITE at

www.georgetowntoyota.com

or email at

info@georgetowntoyota.com