FROM ATLANTIC CITY TO TORONTO:
The Boardwalk Trophy and the Eastern Hockey League
Part 1: The Sea Gulls, the Rovers, the Olympics and the Cutters
By Chuck Miller
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True story - The Atlantic City Boardwalk Trophy, a prize handed from champion to champion of the old Eastern League, was found in a storage shed.

Brian Elwell, a former player/coach for the old Syracuse Blazers, became a successful bar and grille owner after his retirement from hockey. As we talked about the proposed new AHL team for Syracuse, Elwell reminisced about his days in the Eastern Hockey League. "You know," he said to me, "somebody dropped this trophy off at my restaurant. It's been in my storage shed for a while. Seems like I remember seeing this once or twice in my playing days."

I drove to Syracuse, hoping against hope that the pilgrimage wouldn't be just a 150-mile sightseeing journey. And when Elwell brought out a missile-shaped trophy with "THE BOARDWALK CHALLENGE TROPHY," carved into its side, the engravings drowning in a sea of tarnish and dirt, I knew this was something big.

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Our journey begins in the fall of 1930. Lincoln Dickey, manager of the Atlantic City Auditorium, imported some Montreal-based hockey players, set them up against the toughest amateur and professional teams on the East Coast, and the Atlantic City Sea Gulls were born. Led by coach Redvers McKenzie, the Gulls hosted everybody from the New York Rangers to college teams, and by 1932 they were one of the top amateur hockey squads.

At that time, the resort owners and hotel managers of Atlantic City created a brass trophy decorated with eagles and winged angels, to be awarded to the 1932 AAU hockey tournament winner. In the final two-game, total-goal series, the Sea Gulls beat the Lake Placid Athletic Club, 11 goals to 5, and claimed the "Atlantic City Boardwalk Trophy" as their own. The Gulls would repeat as AAU champions in 1933, winning eight games against four teams on their way to the championship.

The Gulls, along with the Hershey B'ars, Baltimore Orioles and Bronx Tigers, formed the Tri-State Hockey League in 1934. Because the TSHL was a non-AAU sanctioned circuit, the Gulls were barred from AAU tournament competition. Stung by this technicality, the Gulls placed the Boardwalk Trophy in storage and continued on with their hockey conquests.

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The Eastern Amateur Hockey League was formed in 1933 by Thomas Lockhart, a Madison Square Garden promoter with a keen sense of publicity. Lockhart had successfully turned Sunday afternoon hockey games at the Garden into a profitable attraction, and was looking for an established league for three of the MSG amateur squads - the St. Nicholas Hockey Club, the Crescent Athletic-Hamilton Club of Brooklyn, and the New York A.C.

Enter the Tri-State Hockey League. Lockhart rode the rails all night to get to Philadelphia in time for the TSHL's organizational meeting. When he arrived, the organizers told him they were not planning any expansion. Lockhart told them he could give them three teams - the three amateur teams - and offered Madison Square Garden as their home ice!

The TSHL, excited about road games in the Garden, tore up their schedule and added Lockhart's teams. The Eastern Amateur Hockey League was born, and Tom Lockhart left the meeting as the EAHL league president.

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True story - Although the 1933-34 schedule divided 48 home games between Lockhart's three teams, Madison Square Garden had only 16 open dates available for Sunday afternoon hockey. So in the tradition of the Plainfield College football team, Lockhart made up phony games and reported their scores to the newspapers. Lest anyone suspect anything fishy, Lockhart inserted this clause in a 1933 program: "EXTRA GAMES WILL BE PLAYED AT THE ASSIGNED PRACTICE HOURS AT THE GARDEN AND WILL NOT BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC."

"I couldn't accommodate all of the extra games," he told author Stan Fischler in Those Were The Days, "so I had to cheat a little. I'd make up phony games; have the Crescents beating the New York A.C. 1-0 and put down somebody's name for scoring the goal and add an assist or two ... If you look
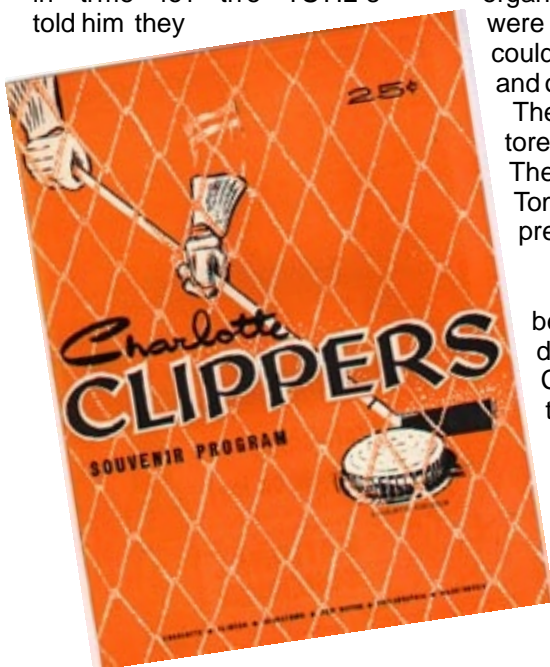
back in the <u>Times</u> you'll find a story about Lockhart's 'dark house' games.  The seats were standing up and cheering.   But it actually happened - 21 games never occurred and the league finished its full schedule of games played in the first year."

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The EAHL was an instant success, and fans purchased the inexpensive tickets in droves (good seats were available at Madison Square Garden for as little as 25 cents apiece).   Soon other people wanted a piece of the golden goose, including Madison Square Garden's primary hockey tenant, the New York Rangers.  "All the fuss over the Sunday afternoon amateur hockey ultimately seeped down to the Rangers' office," said Tom Lockhart, "and pretty soon I got a call from manager Lester Patrick.  He thought we had a good thing going and felt he could help.

"I said, 'Great, what can you do?'

"'Well,' he offered, 'next season I could bring you some good hockey players in from Canada."

Lester Patrick kept his word, bringing some Winnipeg-based players for the start of training camp.  Patrick's acquisitions included Mac and Neil Colville, Alex Shibicky, Murray Patrick, Joe Cooper, and Bert Gardiner - all of whom would become future Rangers.

The Winnipeg-fortified Crescents dominated the EAHL in the 1934-35 season, and Lockhart and Patrick changed the team's name to reflect the working agreement with the New York Rangers.  "We spent half a day trying to name it," said Lockhart.   "We had the Rangers and the [AHL's Philadelphia] Ramblers so we "roved" between them and called it the Rovers."

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True story - By 1950, more than 100 EAHL players spent time in the NHL. 58 of those were ex-Rovers.

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Besides being a successful promoter, Lockhart had an uncanny knack for finding old abandoned hockey trophies.  He recovered the Walker Cup, a hockey chalice named after and donated by New York City mayor James J. Walker in 1926, from a pawn shop.  He also found the Hamilton B. Wills Trophy, a free-standing sculpture of a hockey player, and began a USA-Canada challenge series with that as the prize.  When the Sea Gulls told him they still had the Boardwalk Trophy, Lockhart convinced the Gulls and the AAU to return the trophy to competition.

Between 1938 and 1945, the EAHL had a three-round season.  Teams first played for the Hershey Cup, a spherical award originally given to the Tri-State Hockey League by the candy company.  Then came a tournament for the Boardwalk Trophy.  After all that, the teams played another series for the Walker Cup.  The team with the most cumulative points was declared the league champion.

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True story - Sonja Henie was part of the EAHL.  in the 1930's, Lockhart signed the Olympic figure skater to a performing contract, and between hockey periods she would perform ice ballets and pirouettes for the crowd.  "She was very good at anything she did," remembered Madeline Lockhart, Tom's daughter and secretary of the EAHL.  "What she wanted, she got, and she didn't care what anybody else said about it.  She came in one time and had an argument with my father, he said, 'I don't care what you're doing, I have a hockey team to put out there, I can't be bothered if you want to practice!'"

In another publicity stunt from the 1930's, Lockhart booked an ice-skating grizzly bear as intermission entertainment for a Rovers/Hershey B'ars Sunday afternoon game.  The bear actually performed on roller skates, and the Madison Square Garden staff scrambled to locate ice skates for size 40 paws.  Then the bear's owner wanted skates as well, despite the fact that he couldn't skate.

After the first period of the Rovers/B'ars game, the bear took the ice, with the owner guiding it by the leash.  Suddenly the bear took off, zipping around the ice like a Penske-customized Zamboni, dragging its helpless owner from blueline to blueline.  Lockhart thought the bear's antics would cost him his job, but the fans were so enthralled by the skating bruin that the animal was booked into other Eastern League barns.

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The Boston Olympics joined the Eastern League in 1940, and in 12 years they won the Boardwalk Trophy five times.  Walter Brown, manager of the Boston Garden, loved amateur hockey and promoted it often.  Confident of the burgeoning Beantown hockey talent, Brown created an amateur team of Bostonian skaters and turned them loose on the hockey world.  By 1933, the team had won the World Hockey Championships in Prague.  Brown himself coached the 1936 Olympic hockey team, and the squad that competed in Garmisch-Partenkirchen was primarily stocked with his Boston "Olympics."

By 1941, as the war loomed in Europe, the 'Pics found their talent pool diminishing, and worked out an agreement with the Boston Bruins so that the NHL club would fortify the 'Pics with their rising pre-NHL talent.  The deal proved fruitful, as the 'Pics became one of the dominant teams in the 1940's.  With the iron goaltending of Maurice Courteau and the scoring of Al Palazzari, Russ Kopak, Pentti Lund and Tommy Brennan, Boston won the Boardwalk Trophy and the Walker Cup year after
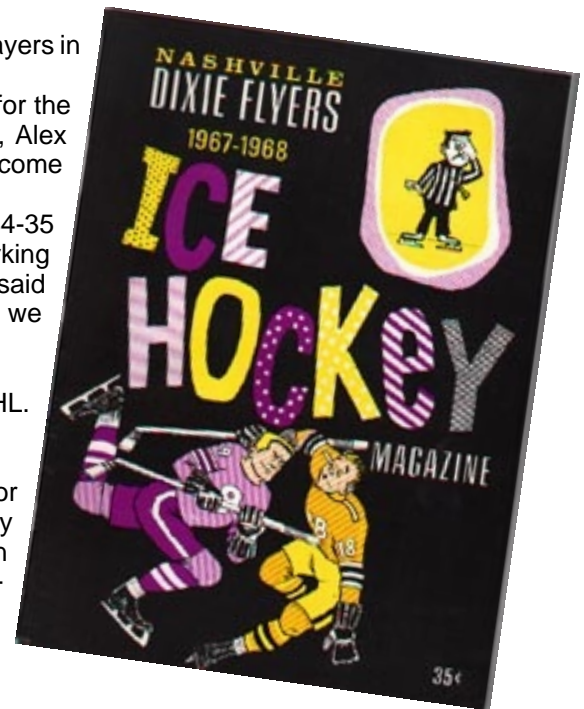
year.

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In 1941, all the able-bodied Canadian skaters went to war. By 1942, the American skaters joined them on the battlefield. Only the Rovers, Olympics and the new Philadelphia Falcons had enough men to field competitive teams.

Yet Lockhart got eight teams into the schedule, and each one completed its season. He brought four teams in through an interlocking series with the Metropolitan League, a Madison Square Garden club circuit. For the eighth team, he looked toward the armed forces.

By coincidence or by design, the most talented American hockey players found themselves stationed at the Curtis Bay naval yard in Baltimore. Lockhart convinced Mel Harwood, a former EAHL player and official, that the Coast Guard could use this hockey talent as a way to boost homefront morale. Harwood stepped behind the bench as coach, and the Coast Guard Cutters were born.

Their roster included former New York Ranger defenseman Art Coulter, Boston Bruin goaltender Frankie "Mr. Zero" Brimsek, and future AHL star left winger Eddie Olsen, who joined the military squad despite being underage. With Olsen at left wing, Joe Kucler at center and token Canadian Bob Gilray at right wing, the "Star Spangled Bangers" won games both in the EAHL and on a two-year exhibition tour. Stan Fischler once called them the greatest All-American squad ever, better than the 1960 or 1980 Olympic teams. But as World War II escalated, the military broke up the Cutters, relocating their skating seamen throughout the hot spots of the Pacific theatre.

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True story - when the Cutters faced the Rovers at Madison Square Garden, an Armed Forces marching band serenaded the visitors with such ditties as "Indian Love Call" and "The Star Spangled Banner." And when the Cutters scored a goal (which was often), the band played "Semper Paratus," the Coast Guard theme.

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Although many players looked at the EAHL as a pipeline to the National or American Hockey Leagues, some skaters actually preferred staying in the amateur ranks. One of them was Ty Andersen, who spent 15 years in the EAHL for the Sea Gulls and the Olympics.

Osborne Ty Andersen was a Norwegian-American from Swampscott, Massachusetts, where he learned hockey through the rough-and-tumble "shinny" games the kids played at the grade school. His raw talent earned him a place on the Boston Hockey Club (forerunner of the Olympics), and as a starting defenseman for the Sea Gulls in 1933, Andersen helped the Gulls repeat as Boardwalk Trophy champions.

Andersen was cheered and respected in almost every arena. One of the most gentlemanly players in EAHL history, Andersen averaged only 11 PIMs per season, while scoring 15 points per year. And on March 9, 1941, while playing for the Olympics, he received a solid gold watch for his tenure on the ice on "Ty Andersen Day." Never mind the fact that Andersen was given the watch by the Rovers - the 'Pics were the visiting team that night.

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In 1949, only the Olympics and Rovers were capable of fielding teams, and Lockhart closed down the EAHL for a year. Boston and New York joined the Quebec Senior Hockey League, which had played an interlocking series with the EAHL for a few years. Unfortunately, the new teams were completely outmatched - Boston dropped out by midseason, and the Rovers finished dead last.

For the first time since the Sea Gulls put it back in circulation, there was no tournament for the Boardwalk Trophy.

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*Sport News*

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SEASON 1944-1945

BOSTON GARDEN

FROM ATLANTIC CITY TO TORONTO:
The Boardwalk Trophy and the Eastern Hockey League
Part 2: The Jets, the Comets, Southern Expansion and Well-Worn Knuckles
By Chuck Miller

True story - March 24, 1952. Lorne Anderson, goaltender for the New York Rovers, was called up by the Rangers for the last game of the season against the Chicago Black Hawks. Anderson stepped into the net like a veteran, and took a 6-2 Ranger lead into the third period. Then Hawks forward Bill Mosienko scored three goals in a row - in only 21 seconds, the fastest hat trick in NHL history. Mosienko's achievement spurred the Black Hawks to a 7-6 victory, and Anderson was sent back to the Eastern League, never to play on NHL ice again.

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By 1953, the Eastern League was almost dead. Expansion to midwestern cities in 1949 proved financially disastrous, and established teams like the New York Rovers, Boston Olympics and Atlantic City Sea Gulls were losing tons of money. By 1953, the only teams left in the league were a Springfield Indians franchise run by former Bruin Eddie Shore, a talent-stripped Washington Lions squad run by the Boston Olympics' Walter Brown, and a team of ex-Rovers in Troy, New York (with the salacious nickname of Uncle Sam's Trojans).

There was also a new team in Johnstown, Pennsylvania - the Jets. Originally created by former NHL-AHL standout Wally Kilrea, and featuring free agents and cast-offs from the EAHL's earlier Western expansion, the Jets won five Walker Cups, five Boardwalk Trophies, and one Amateur Hockey Association championship between 1951 and 1973. At that time, the Jets included Don Hall, a left winger with a sharp eye for the goal, right winger Dick Roberge, who would later become the Jets' coach, and well-traveled goaltender Ivan Walmsley, who blocked the puck every night.

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Comets Hockey Magazine 1957-58
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By 1954, Eastern League president Tom Lockhart searched for new franchises. Despite some ridiculous proposals by some organizing groups - one unnamed party actually thought they could operate a team on an entire budget of $2,500 - Lockhart gathered five teams for the 1954-55 season: Three full-time teams - the Washington Lions, Baltimore Clippers and New Haven Blades - and two part-time teams, the Worcester Warriors and the Clinton (N.Y.) Comets.

While the Warriors were a dismal collection of college graduates from Harvard and Holy Cross, and lost games by double-digit margins, the Clinton Comets were an independent squad since 1928, winning three Amateur Hockey Association championships. The Comets actually played in two leagues simultaneously during the 1954-55 season, the EHL and the Eastern Ontario Senior League. Based on winning percentage, the Comets won the regular-season title, and the Washington Lions won the Boardwalk Trophy in the playoffs. The league was reborn.

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True story - The EHL's southern expansion was caused by an Act of God. The 1955-56 season was halfway completed when on January 23, the Baltimore Clippers' arena burned to the ground. Clippers owner Charles Rock rescheduled his final five home dates for Charlotte, North Carolina, and the rechristened Charlotte Clippers (renamed Checkers in 1962) quickly won the hearts of a whole new breed of hockey fans. In an area where most people perceived ice as something one puts in a drink, a record 169,000 fans followed the Clippers when they won the Boardwalk Trophy in 1957.

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Travel in the Eastern League was an arduous endeavor. In the 1960's, with the league expanding ever southward (to Nashville, Knoxville, Greensboro, Jacksonville and St. Petersburg), buses were used. Teams traveled all day and night, ripping out seats in the back of the bus so players could sleep on mattresses. "We used to get on a bus in Clinton around 10:00 on a Sunday night," recalled Pat Kelly, who coached the Clinton Comets to three straight Walker Cups and four straight Boardwalk Trophies in the late 1960's, "and we'd drive for a day and a half to get to Jacksonville or St. Pete's to play. We'd go right through, no stop. They just changed drivers, two men would take turns driving. I sometimes drove the bus myself, just to help them out."

This was indeed the era of the iron man - a player who could ride all night and still put his all in a game, trying to score goals around a league full of enforcers, policemen - in other words, goons. The Eastern League was the enforcer's breeding ground, and players moved from it to the NHL with bruised knuckles and black eyes.

Imagine yourself as an Eastern League center on a road trip. Your first stop is New Haven, and Blake Ball is on

defense for the Blades.  Ball spent six years as a defensive end in the Canadian Football League before taking up hockey professionally - and accumulating 1,200 penalty minutes from 1965 to 1969.

Now you're at the Long Island Arena, where John Brophy holds court.  Brophy led the EHL in penalty minutes four times between 1960 and 1965 - each time with a different team.

Now for a Southern swing to Knoxville and player/coach Don LaBelle.  LaBelle was so tough, they once said, that during a playoff game it took three Nashville skaters to take him out of the game - and that was when LaBelle was in street clothes and behind the bench.

Heading towards Salem, Virginia - and the Rebels' secret weapon, Dave "The Hammer" Schultz.  Schultz, the muscle behind Philadelphia's Stanley Cup-winning Broad Street Bullies, spent 356 PIMs - almost six hours - in the EHL sin bin one season.

Back through Clinton - and there's Indian Joe Nolan, a full-blood Ojibwa from Sault Ste. Marie who never met a forward he didn't like - to break in half.  The first man to surpass 300 PIMs in an EHL season (he had 352 in 1955-56), Nolan later became a respected linesman.

"Every team had a policeman," said Johnstown Jets player/coach Don Hall, "but most of the time those guys went after each other.  But in the playoffs, you had to watch out for them, because they were trying to win the championship, too."

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True story - In 1952, the New Haven Tomahawks and the Johnstown Jets faced each other in the final round of the playoffs.  During one of the games, New Haven's Joe Desson drew a flagrant penalty, and referee Mickey Slowik motioned for him to take a seat in the penalty box.  Without another word,     Slowik turned his back on Desson, skated over to the off-ice officials and announced the penalty.

Desson slowly moved toward the box, then changed direction, heading toward Slowik.  Without warning, Desson cross-checked Slowik in the back, flipping the referee into the seats.  Both benches emptied, and fists and sticks were flying.  A policeman stepped onto the ice and arrested Desson, who spent the night in jail for starting a riot.  The next day, Lockhart suspended Desson from the Eastern Hockey League - forever.

"Some years after that, I remember two guys walking into the Garden and asking for my father," remembered Madeline Lockhart.  "And they were the FBI!  My father came in, they showed him their badges, they said we're the FBI.  And it turned out that Joe Desson had applied for American citizenship, and that was on the paper that he was barred from hockey.  And they wanted to know why!  My father says, 'I have nothing against him being an American citizen.  I'm just not going to let him go out there and kill anybody on the ice.'  And he got the citizenship, and he sent my father the nicest letter afterward."

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Sometimes the fans could be really tough during a game.  Pat Kelly recalled some of those tough barns.  "The Commack Arena [on Long Island] was a tough one to play in.  The worst part was that you used to come off down one end of the building, and your dressing room was all the way down the other end, and you had to walk between the stands, where all the concessions were, and there were many nights where the players would walk back to back just to protect themselves and get through the crowds so the fans wouldn't take punches at us.  I remember one night we were in New Haven, and something happened, and all of a sudden the chairs come flying on the ice, and there was 14 hockey players in the middle of the ice, trying to dodge chairs.  There were some days in the Clinton Arena that they used to come sailing out at the visiting team, and some nights you'd just pick them up and throw them back."

And many arenas had media facilities that were archaic.  Catherine "Cash" Garvey, who covered four EHL teams for six newspapers in the 1960's, had her own gripes about the buildings.  "The press facilities (at the Utica Memorial Auditorium, the Comets' second home in the 1960's) were bad.  There was one phone and everybody was using it.  And when you got down to the office, there would probably be a line waiting to use the phone down there.  And they had no stairs in the Clinton Arena, so I had to climb a ladder to get up into the press box.  And naturally, when I got up there, I had to get down the same way."

A rough league, indeed.  The average team roster consisted of 14 players - three front lines, four defensemen and one goaltender.  Those men played every game, never sitting out with a sprained wrist or a bum knee.  "The only way you missed a game in the old Eastern League," said Kelly, "was if they had to cut your leg off and it took them one day to get you a new one, so you missed the game that night."

Even though each team had a goon or two, they also had very skilled playmakers, centers and wingers who could take the puck, weave through a defenseman or two, then fake the goaltender out of position for a wrist shot.  Syracuse
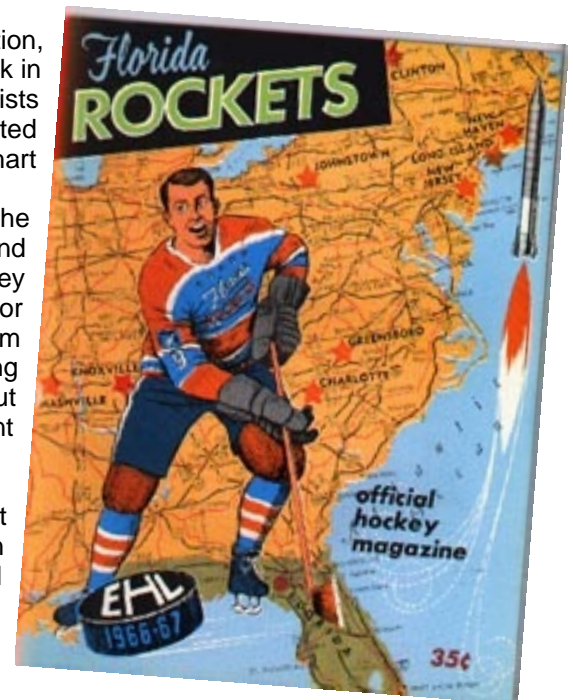
center Ray Adduono scored 100 points five years in a row, a remarkable feat considering that the Blazers were doormats in their first three EHL seasons.  Clinton's Borden Smith scored 400 goals in his career, staying with that team throughout the 1960's and 1970's.  And Jack Martin was an especially adroit stickhandler who bounced through the southern half of the league.  "While playing [for Knoxville] against the Dixie Flyers," said Roland Julian of the <u>Knoxville News-Sentinel,</u> "[Martin] was hit by Flo Pilot in Knoxville's defensive end, flipped over Pilot's back, landed on his feet and continued down the ice controlling the puck.  Later, he was pinned against the end boards, passed the puck between his skates to [teammate] Les Calder, who banged in a goal directly in front of the goalie."

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True story - in 1963, Tom Lockhart convinced the Soviet Union to send their Olympic hockey team to America for some exhibition games, while a U.S. team (coached by Johnstown's Don Hall) toured the Soviet Union.  The Soviets came over for five games against the EHL, and left with a 4-0-1 record against the Americans.  They humbled Greensboro 12-3, and put similar hurts on Johnstown, Philadelphia and Charlotte.  The EHL saved face only when the Knoxville Knights tied the Soviets, 4-4, in the final game of the exhibition tour.   Meanwhile, the EHL All-Stars got creamed on their Eastern Bloc tour.  "We didn't win a game until we got into Czechoslovakia," remarked Don Hall. "They sent their best teams against us.   They didn't    lay down for nobody."

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At the off-season meetings in 1972, Tom Lockhart announced he was stepping down from the EHL presidency, a post he had held for 40 years.  Lockhart, who had run the league through good times and bad since its inception in 1933, felt it was time to retire.  Norman MacLane was chosen has his successor.  But under MacLane's tenure, the league quickly crumbled.

The World Hockey Association came into existence in 1972.  Suddenly EHL teams had WHA teams in their backyards, and the hockey dollar just couldn't stretch far enough.  The New Jersey Devils had enough problems with an NHL team in nearby Philadelphia, but when the WHA put a franchise there, it forced the EHL team to close in 1973.

Other teams saw their lineups ravaged by WHA and NHL raids, as the two major leagues battled with each other for ice talent.  The Clinton Comets, who won four Boardwalk Trophies and three Walker Cups between 1967 and 1970, were raided, player by player, by the WHA, leaving behind a team dead last in the standings and drowning in red ink.

By 1972, the league had expanded from Rhode Island to Florida, and the southern teams felt they had more games scheduled in the North than were necessary.  The Jacksonville Rockets, at one time the league's southern-most city, folded after seven years of killer bus rides against northern teams.  At the end of the 1972-73 season, the EHL's Southern Division seceded, forming their own Southern Hockey League.

The EHL dropped its last puck in 1973, as the Syracuse Blazers won an astounding 63 of 76 games, claiming the Boardwalk Trophy easily and boring through the playoffs.  Any teams left in the EHL competed as the North American Hockey League until 1977.

But the EHL wasn't done yet.  In 1977, the motion picture "Slapshot" premiered.  Based on the Johnstown Jets' 1975 NAHL season, "Slapshot" was a good hockey movie for those who didn't know about the EHL/NAHL, and a riot for those who picked up on all the inside jokes and references.  Many former EHL ice rinks were used in the filming, and some former EHL players had cameos and bit roles in the picture - for example, that's Indian Joe Nolan at the end of the picture, actually wearing war paint on ice for the first time as "Screamin' Buffalo."

Yet the EHL's influence on hockey history goes far beyond a cult classic movie.  Expansion into the southern markets made possible the success of the East Coast Hockey League.  Five cities that started out with EHL franchises (Long Island, Philadelphia, Washington, Tampa Bay/St. Petersburg and New Jersey) currently are in the NHL.  Buffalo coach John Muckler, Vancouver GM Pat Quinn, Toronto/Hampton Roads coach John Brophy, ECHL Commissioner Pat Kelly, and Central League Commissioner Ray Miron all came through the Eastern League, as well as Hall of Famers Frankie Brimsek, Art Coulter, Neil Colville, Bob Dill, Hub Nelson, John Mariucci, referee Bill Chadwick, Boston Olympics owner Walter Brown and EHL President Thomas Lockhart.

And the Boardwalk Trophy, the chalice that disappeared in 1973, finally coming to light in the storage shed of a former player's bar?  It finally joined the Calder Cup - the Turner Cup - even the Stanley Cup - in the Hall of Fame on July 26, 1994.

Home at last.



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