

Chapter 6

ISAACS FAMILY

The historical data of early lacrosse history is incomplete as far as field lacrosse and early Intermediate Box Lacrosse is concerned. We do know that there were six Isaacs brothers of which three played early in the history of box lacrosse.

Although little is known about three of the brothers, Foster, Newton and Warren (Jake) other than Warren played quite a bit of men's softball. Of the three remaining brothers they all appear in the record books, starting with the 1932 season, the second season of organized box lacrosse. Wade Isaacs, the oldest of the three lacrosse playing brothers started the season in the International Professional Lacrosse League playing for the Montreal Maroons. As both Montreal teams, the Maroons and the Canadians dropped out of the league at the half-way point. Wade only managed to dress for four games picking up 1 assist and 4 minutes in penalties before joining the Atlantic City Americans, a barnstorming box lacrosse team that played at least 12 games against teams from the International Professional Lacrosse League: Montreal Canadians and Toronto Tecumsehs; teams from an American Professional lacrosse league, Baltimore Orioles and New York Giants and a team of all-stars from various teams. As far as the history records go, this team never lost a single game during the exhibition schedule and competed in the 1932 Olympics games in Los Angeles, playing field lacrosse representing the United States as a demonstration sport.

Harry 'Tonto' Smith, who later came to Hollywood, California to play in a new professional lacrosse league in southern California, called the Western Professional Lacrosse League, where he met Joe E. Brown, actor and comedian, in 1938 that convinced Harry to try an acting career. The rest is history -- Jay Silverheels acted in many films, but what really made him famous was his role as "Tonto", the Native American partner in the long running TV series "The Lone Ranger". Other members of the Atlantic City Americans were: Scotty Martin, Sid Smith, Leslie Smith, Boots Martin, Don Smith, Russell 'Beef' Smith, Cecil VanEvery, Harry Groat, Andy Martin, Clinton Jacks, Dave Groat and Judy 'Punch' Garlowe.

From records kept of the exhibition schedule, Wade Isaacs was one of the top scorers, potting 20 goals and 10 assists for 30 points and one minor infraction in the ten games he played. The only other time that Wade Isaacs appears in the record books was the 1937 season with the Toronto Marlboros of the O.A.L.A. when he appeared after his brother, Lance, passed away in Maple

Leaf Gardens on Friday, July 23rd during a regularly scheduled game against the Brampton Excelsiors. It would appear that he was brought up to replace his departed brother. Wade appeared in 7 games and contributed 5 goals and 3 assists plus picked up a five-minute fighting major in his short stint with the Marlboros. In two playoff games, he failed to get his name on the scoring summary.

Lance Isaacs first appears in 1932 with the Haldimand Rifles Indian squad in the O.A.L.A. Intermediate Series with his younger brother, Bill, where they led the Rifles to the Ontario championship against Peterborough in the Ontario finals, winning the series in two games straight. Although records are not available for the regular season, Lance picked up one goal in 2 games against the Peterborough squad in the playoffs.

Lance, although overshadowed by his younger superstar brother, Bill, was quite the player in his own right. In 1935, playing for Burlington in the O.A.L.A. Senior A series, he finished 9th in league scoring with 35 goals, 9 assists and 44 points in only 19 games and followed that up with 12 goals and 4 assists in 5 games in the playoffs.

With Hamilton and Burlington joining forces in 1936 as the Combines, Lance had another good year, potting 28 goals, 10 assists for 38 points in only 21 games and fired another 10 goals and 4 assists in 9 playoff games.

In 1937, Lance was on his way of cracking the top 10 scorers in the O.A.L.A. Senior A division when in 14 games he had a record of 23 goals and 9 assists when on July 23, 1937 the tragedy occurred.

The following is taken from the Toronto Globe and Mail from Saturday, July 24, 1937.

LACROSSE STAR FATALLY STICKEN

DEATH CLAIMS ISAACS OF MARLBORO SENIORS; INTERMISSION TRAGEDY

(By Hall Walker)

Extreme Heat and Exertion Cause of Death, States Dr. W.W. Bartlett – Deceased Brother Faints
- GAME IS ABANDONED

Death stalked in the dressing-room of Marlboro Lacrosse Club last night at Maple Leaf Gardens, and its icy fingers reached into a happy group of young athletes and took as its victim 29-year-old Lance Isaacs, clever Indian forward player of the Marlboro team.

Victim of an acute heart attack, Isaacs keeled over backward into the arms of Trainer Archie Campbell, and was pronounced dead a few minutes later by Dr. W. W. Bartlett of Brampton, physician of the team which was engaging the locals in a scheduled O.A.L.A. game.

The tragedy occurred at the end of the second period and Marlboros were leading 7 to 5.

BROTHER COLLAPSES FROM SHOCK

It was only seconds from the time the bell rang to end the period until Isaac's death. He had walked into the dressing room with his team-mates, among them, his 23-year-old brother, Bill, and sat on the edge of the rubbing table, his head lowered and looking very tired. In the midst of the usual dressing-room banter of the athletes, he was seen to stiffen suddenly, gasp for breath, and with a scarcely audible "Hey-hey" rolled backward on the table. Trainer Campbell caught him in his arms. The rest of his mates were unaware that death was in their midst. They sat transfixed, staring, unable to believe their mate had passed on. Dr. Bartlett, who had accompanied the Brampton team to the game, came in response to a hurry-up call, but Lance Isaacs was beyond aid.

Bill Isaacs, younger brother of the unfortunate athlete, was seated on a bench a few feet from where his brother lay breathing his last. He scrambled across the room to give aid and after Dr. Bartlett pronounced his brother dead, he crumpled in a heap. The suddenness of the tragedy left the assembled Marlboro players, Coach Eddie Powers, Manager Johnston and Trainer Campbell speechless, shocked.

Bill Isaacs was given treatment and soon rallied. While his mates took him aside to comfort him in his sorrow, the 23-year-old youth walked away and sat down in a far corner of the room. With the stoic characteristics of his race, he bore up remarkably well. Smiley Young and Max Martin, also Indians, and teammates for years of the deceased, broke into tears when the shock wore off and the tragic aspects dawned on them.

The body was taken from the dressing-room to the Gardens Emergency Hospital and, after examination by Chief Coroner Dr. Smirle Lawson, ordered an autopsy performed on the remains. The Coroner expressed a belief that death was due to a heart condition.

ORDER GAME CANCELLED

Immediately, when news of Isaac's death reached him, Gene Dopp, Secretary of the Ontario Amateur Lacrosse Association, authorized Referees Maxie Peart and Marty Cahill, both

of St. Catharines, to postpone further play. The score of 7 to 5, which favored the Marlboros, will likely go down in the records as a victory for the locals, although but half completed.

Lance Isaacs had scored Marlboros' seventh goal less than a minute before the end of the second quarter, his second marker of the tilt. He had previously tallied early in the same quarter.

The Brampton Club, in a gesture of sterling sportsmanship, asked that the game be awarded Marlboros, so that Lance Isaacs's last goal in life could be a winning one. Conny Smythe was deeply moved by this request and brought the word of it to newspapermen. It's likely the O.A.L.A. will recognize the score as an official victory for the local team. Isaacs's young wife was nearly prostrate with grief when she learned of her husband's passing on arrival at the Gardens. Mrs. Issacs was hurried to the Charlton Street emporium and Ted Johnston, manager of the Marlboros, met her at the door and relayed the sad news. She was consoled by her brother-in-law, Bill Isaacs, and a very sad scene was enacted in the pathway leading to the small room where Lance Isaacs lay cold in death.

Isaacs had not been hit by a stick or injured by bodily contact, as far as is known. He appeared tired and worn from the combined effects of heat, overexertion and overdrinking of cold water. Dr. Bartlett, the Brampton physician who attended Isaacs in the dressing room, said that apparently these things probably brought about the fatal heart condition.

The incident is without parallel in Canadian lacrosse, according to Mike Kelley, President of the Canadian Amateur Lacrosse Association.

AN OUTSTANDING PLAYER

Isaacs was rated as one of the outstanding players in the Ontario Amateur Lacrosse Association and scoring statistics, released yesterday, showed that he had netted 20 goals for the Marlboros and was well up in the goal-scoring race.

He was born on the Six Nations Reserve, near Brantford, Ontario. He attracted attention as a lacrosse player when with Haldimand Rifles, Canadian intermediate champions, and later played with Burlington seniors. Last winter he played in Rochester.

Isaacs is survived by his widow.

Bill Isaacs, born March 18, 1914, the youngest of the lacrosse playing Isaacs brothers was probably the first true superstar of box lacrosse. Like John Tavares a half century after him, Bill Isaacs was a scoring machine winning the O.A.L.A. Senior A scoring crown 7 times in 8 years from 1935 until 1942 except for 1936 when Gord Gair copped the title. In 1938 he also

won the Jim Murphy Trophy as most valuable player in the league. Bill was a member of two Mann Cup winning teams in 1942 with the Mimico-Brampton Combines and in 1948 with the Hamilton Tiger team.

Bill was first noticed in 1932 when he and his brother, Lance, led the Haldimand Rifles Indians team to the O.A.L.A. Ontario Championship title in Intermediate Lacrosse when he managed 11 goals in only two games against the Peterborough Intermediate Lacrosse Club. Bill played Senior A parts of 15 seasons before finally hanging up his stick after the 1949 playoffs. His career included stints with: Burlington, Hamilton-Burlington, Toronto Marlboros, Hamilton Tigers, Mimico-Brampton Combines, and St. Catharines. He still ranks 11th all-time in career regular season goals with 635 and 14th all-time in career goals counting playoffs and Mann Cup play with 777 career goals. Bill passed away on December 27, 1985 from heart failure.

He was inducted into the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame as a charter member.