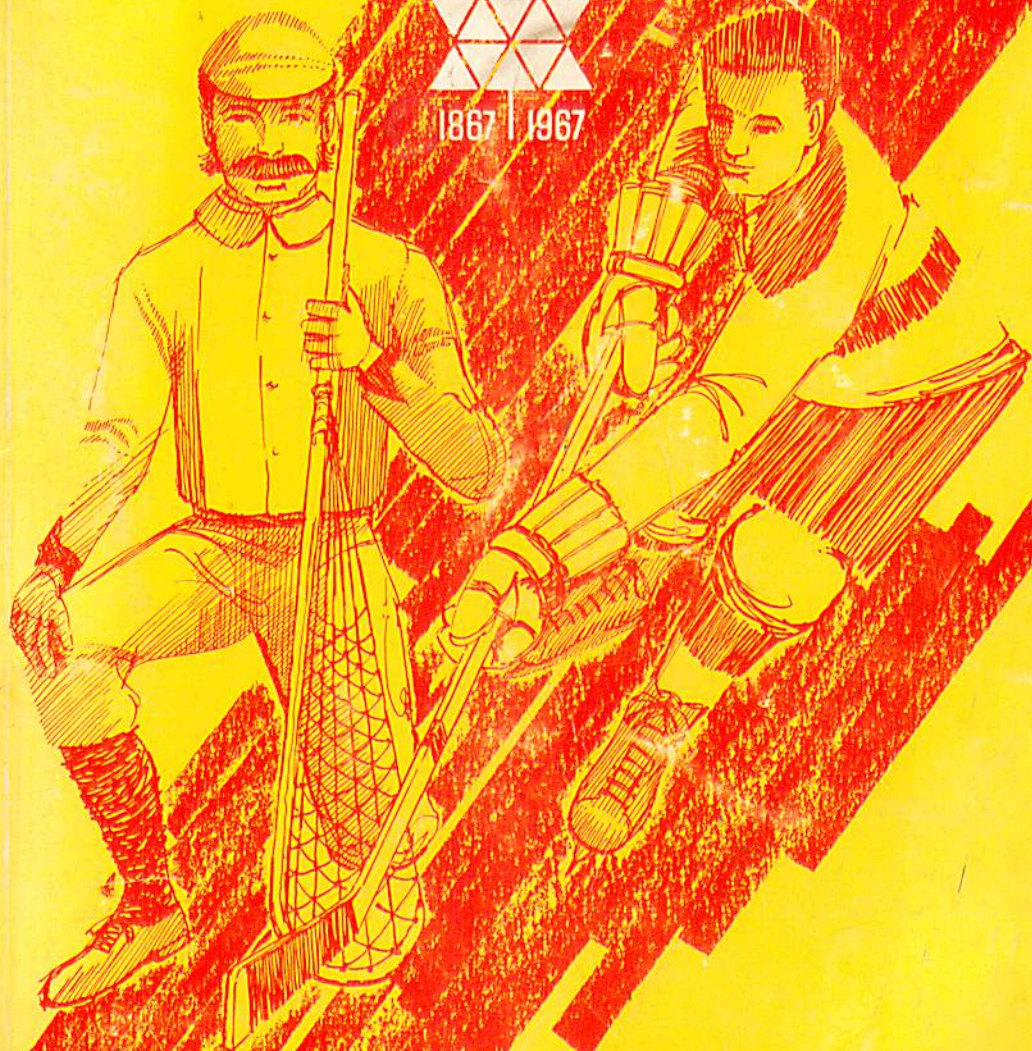


CENTENNIAL SPORTS REVIEW

HAMILTON, CANADA.



1867 | 1967



SPORTS OVER THE CENTURY

Hamilton's Lacrosse Tigers Champions of Canada's National Sport

By Chris Crossen



Bobby Jamleson

As the train drew out, the Hamilton Tigers gave their 'Oskie' yell, which was responded to by the famous Salmonbelly warcry, "Allevepore", coming from the New Westminster party.

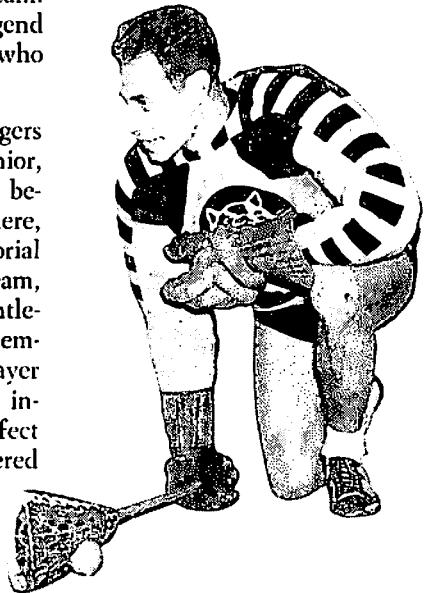
It was 1933, and the Tigers were on their way home with the coveted Mann Cup, the solid gold trophy, emblematic of lacrosse championship in Canada. The team brought glory to Hamilton then, and again in 1948, when it won the national lacrosse championship for the second time.

In the beginning, it was "baggataway"—a game applauded for its wild beauty and originality, and described as "something between a sport and a deadly combat." The name of the game was changed, and some of the rules, but many of the players in recent years think the description still fits fairly well. Pictures of their smiling, toothless faces bear this out. Lacrosse remains one of the roughest, and most rugged of all sports—and one of the most fascinating.

Russell T. Kelley is referred to as the father of lacrosse in eastern Canada. He was President of the Tiger Club, and over the years, developed a team spirit never matched anywhere. To this, as much as to their individual skill and stamina, players attribute the great success of their team. Russell Kelley died in 1951, but he left a legend that will never die—a proud story of athletes who won, and the formula for making winners.

Clyde Gordon was a headliner with the Tigers—a brilliant player who had competed in junior, intermediate, senior and professional lacrosse before coming to Hamilton. During his years here, he was awarded the Jimmy Murphy Memorial Trophy as the most valuable player to his team, and the Querrie Medal, for being the most gentlemanly player on the field and off. He is remembered as being a 'stylist'—a sensational player whose appearance on the field had a steadying influence on his team-mates and a disturbing effect on the opposing team. It is generally considered by lacrosse players, past and present, that Clyde Gordon should be honored with a place in the Sports Hall of Fame.

Bill Isaacs



Stars of the Mann Cup competition of 1933 included the Rohmerites—the four famous Rohmer Brothers who were a strong force on the lacrosse field, and outstanding athletes individually. Ernie managed the team and was a great trainer; Bob was brilliant in goal; Jack was rated one of the most effective players ever; Matt was the 'rover', who at 21, was selected to play lacrosse with the Canadian team in the Olympics of 1932.

The tall Scot, Alex MacPherson was a winner with the Tigers. He was described as the temperamental atom of the team—a strategist with speed and style, who held the high scoring honors for Ontario. Opposing forces were always aware of Dunc Littlefair, the youngest cub in the club, whose fierce attack on the lacrosse field was a far cry from his theology studies at McMaster. Other heroes of the victorious 1933 team were Fat Young, Bill Wilson, Tommy Oliver, Claude Clark, Hugh Kelly and Peck O'Malley. Colorful centre player, Jack Worthy was Captain. He too, played on the Canadian lacrosse team in the 1932 Olympics.

These were the boys who were introduced to the game, at a time when the Bible and the lacrosse yearbook shared equal honors in the family library; the days when players bought their own equipment, and paid their own doctor bills; the days when crowds were so enthusiastic and noisy, referees abandoned whistles in favor of cowbells; the days when a season's split was not likely to be more than \$75.00 per player.

In the old 'field' lacrosse, the crowds were right down on the field, and all around the penalty bench—a situation which proved disastrous on many occasions. An incident is recalled when the Tigers were playing an Indian team at Bright. Hamilton was an injured team and had just the required number of players—no spares. But there were dozens of Indians in the crowd, dressed in uniform, and at every opportunity some of these would run on to the field and mix with the Indian players. There were fights and penalties to break all records, and the game ended with fans, Indians and Tigers in a wild free-for-all.

The sport changed from 'field' to 'box' lacrosse in 1932, and because of the more confined space in which it was played, it was even rougher. It is considered too rough in the United States and in Australia, and the trend in these countries is back to field lacrosse. However, field lacrosse does not have the intense play that is a necessary part of the 'box' game, and consequently, it is not as exciting a spectator sport.

The story of 'how Hamilton won the west' reads like instructions on 'how to do it yourself in five easy lessons'. First there was Orillia. The Orillia team hadn't lost a game all season. They had defeated the Tigers in the first game of the semi-finals, and went into the last game with a five goal lead, so there was justification for the confidence that led the players to pack and make all preparations for their trip west, before the final game. But Hamilton became their Waterloo, as one after another, the Tigers with fierce efficiency, scored 9 goals before Orillia got their first one. The game ended 16 to 7 for Hamilton.

Then there was a series of sudden death games at Fort William, Winnipeg, and Calgary, with the Tigers triumphant all the way. The series for the Mann Cup was played in New Westminster and Vancouver, before crowds up to 13,000. It was a badly battered, but happy band of Tigers who returned home to a Hamilton welcome that year.

HAMILTON TIGERS—1948 MANN CUP CHAMPIONS



Back Row: "Frip" Harrison, Doug Davidson, Bob Grainger, Jack Gair, Eddy Powers, Blain MacDonald, Bill Issacs, Alec Edmunds, Merv McKenzie, Alex McPherson (Manager).

2nd Row: Tommy Love, Doug Favelle, "Tank" Teacher, Joe Cheevers (Coach), Mr. Lyle Barr—Vancouver (President of C.L.A.), Hon. Russell T. Kelley (President of Tigers).

Front Row: Al Doyle, Elmer Lee, George Masters, Barney Welsh, Howie Lee.

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Fifteen years passed before the 'Oskie' yell was again heard across the nation—1948 when the Hamilton Tigers defeated the New Westminster Adanacs—12 to 8—at the Maple Leaf Gardens.

Alex McPherson of the 1933 Tiger triumph was a director of the club in '48. Lefty Jordan was manager, and Joe Cheevers was the playing coach. It was a fired-up team that rallied to victory after losing the first three games of the series in the west.

The Mike Kelley Memorial Medal for the most valuable player went to Tiger Goalie Doug Favelle, and sharing the honors for the Hamilton win that year, were Elmer Lee, Tommy Love, George Masters, Marvin McKenzie, Blain McDonald, Tank Teather, Eddie Power, Jack Gair, Al Doyle and Bill Isaacs, considered to be one of the greatest lacrosse men of all time.

Lacrosse under the Tiger banner was interrupted in 1950. It is making a comeback, and this season fans will be able to watch professional lacrosse from Maple Leaf Gardens every Saturday on Channel 11.

The Westinghouse Old Boys Minor Lacrosse League was organized in Hamilton last year, and is gaining wide support. The kids being trained in this league are the lacrosse Tigers of tomorrow, and like the players of the past, they will undoubtedly be taunted with the query: "How tough is a tiger?" The answer has always been: "Tough enough to command the respect of its greatest foes." Opponents long ago learned to heed the advice of Milt Dunnell, who once wrote: "Never take a breather in front of a tiger. He'll track you down and tear you to tatters. Most persistent of the trailers is the lacrosse Tiger of the Hamilton stripe."