

hand, finished in first place. However, the great team had had to be shaken up to get there.



In spite of some bad moments in the NHL, Jacques never stopped enjoying sports during his summer vacations in Quebec. He still felt the need to be active, and to be totally involved in a game – to feed on the electricity generated by competition.

The summer following Jacques Plante's first season with the Rangers, a group of sportsmen decided to revive the traditional Native-American game that had drawn enthusiastic crowds until the 1930s: lacrosse. The game resembles hockey in many ways. The principle is straightforward: the players must catch and hold a leather ball in a net attached to the end of a metre-long stick (the *crosse*) and hurl it into the opposing team's goal. A lacrosse field is the same size as a hockey rink. There are six players: five forwards and the goalkeeper. The players are not as well protected as hockey players: they wear light helmets and running shoes.

There were four teams in the revived organization: the Montreal Nationals, the Caughnawaga Indians, the Ville St. Pierre team, and the Drummondville Athletics. The league needed a star attraction to get off the ground. One of the promoters, who included sportswriters Michel and Gilles Blanchard, had the idea of inviting Jacques Plante to join the Nationals. After all, in his younger days, Jacques had been a champion lacrosse player both in Shawinigan and Quebec City. But how could they lure

a pro like Jacques, who watched his money closely and who was under contract to the New York Rangers? The most courageous of the organizers went ahead and telephoned him. Jacques was enchanted by the proposal. He immediately replied that he would ask Muzz Patrick for the necessary permission. It was granted.

Jacques was willing to do anything for the sake of sports. He agreed to play for the minimum salary, ten dollars a game, and to bring his own soap and towel to the games. He was ready and willing to give all he had in his new role. Of course, goalkeeping in lacrosse is completely different from minding a hockey net. Even if Jacques still wore a mask, he couldn't come out of his net. Also, the lacrosse goalie can't stop the play, but has to relaunch the attack as soon as he catches a shot.

Soon, Jacques was back in the Montreal Forum, tending goal for the Nationals and wearing a sweater that bore an uncanny resemblance to his red, white, and blue uniform of yore. More than just a figurehead, Jacques performed spectacularly for his team.

Gilles Blanchard was impressed by Jacques' generosity and lack of condescension during his stint with the Nationals. After Jacques' death, he wrote:

Plante, the big star, had become a member of the Nationals, and was the best advertisement that the team and the sport could have wished for.

He gave his best in the practices we held in the yard of the Collège Ste. Marie, in the long trips in school buses, and in the endless interviews that he granted.

Plante brought along his soap and towel like the rest of the team members, was paid his ten dollars a game like all the others, and showed the same schoolboy enthusiasm....

And what a professional! He had the statistical low-down on every player, knew their feints, their every strength and weakness. Once the question of salary was out of the way, he dedicated himself, body and soul, to the team, just like in his greatest Stanley Cup years.

I remember very well that when the coach was ready to end to the practice, Jacques would prolong an already exhausting session, saying, "One more ball into the goal and then to the showers."

Then Jacques would block throws over and over again. He knew our playing abilities better than we did ourselves. We would never go back to the dressing-room without his O.K.

The summer after that, Jacques played four games for the Caughnawaga Indians. Unfortunately, the league was soon dissolved, but it certainly wasn't for any lack of dedication on Jacques Plante's part.



The Rangers did not achieve any better results in the 1964-1965 season. Jacques was having new problems.

Living away from home, he felt as if he were struggling through a thick fog, step by uncertain step.