

Pinkie Davie: A Life In Hockey – By Ty Dilello



Bob “Pinkie” Davie was born in Beausejour, a small town 40 kilometres northeast of Winnipeg, Manitoba, on September 12th, 1912.

The Davie family moved to the Winnipeg suburb of Transcona when young Bob was just a few years old as his father had landed a job at the CNR (Canadian National Railway) Transcona Shops. They lived on Ravelston Avenue, which at the time was on the edge of the prairie.

Davie’s father helped pioneer Transcona and stuck it out when the town all but faded away during the depression years. He was active in the railway and the police and was a mighty fine athlete in his younger days.

Pinkie grew up learning to play hockey in moccasins on the back lanes in Transcona. He received his first pair of used skates to keep for himself at age 15.

Pinkie was also a splendid goalkeeper in soccer and, at the age of 17, was playing in local senior competition. He played for the Fort Rouge Rangers and later with the Monarchs in the short-lived outlaw City League at Osborne Stadium. He also played baseball as a pitcher and was an ardent piper.

Although a great local player in the Transcona ranks, Davie never played organized hockey until Charlie Krupp coaxed him to sign on as a defenceman with the Winnipeg Monarchs junior team for the 1930-31 season. That year, the Monarchs lost out to the Elmwood Millionaires, who went on to win the Memorial Cup.

For the 1931-32 season, W.J. Holmes, who owned the Amphitheatre, but what was left of the Millionaires together with the Monarchs to form a junior hockey “super team.” Davie became teammates with future NHLers George Brown and Bryan Hextall, with the latter going on to a Hockey Hall of Fame career with the New York Rangers. The Monarchs went 11-0-1 in the regular season and

captured the Winnipeg and District Junior Hockey League title by beating the Kenora Thistles two games to zero.

The Monarchs then went on to win the provincial championship over the Brandon Native Sons in three straight games to put them in the Memorial Cup playoffs. The Monarchs continued their undefeated run by knocking out both Port Arthur and Saskatoon in two games to put them in the Memorial Cup final with the Sudbury Cub Wolves.

The 1932 Memorial Cup final was a best-of-three series held at Shea's Amphitheatre, a 6,000-seat arena in downtown Winnipeg that at one point was the only artificial ice surface between Toronto and Vancouver.

Pinkie rushed in alone and went through the entire Sudbury team to score the game-winning goal to lift the Monarchs to a 4-3 win in Game 1. Things were looking good, but unfortunately, the Monarchs lost the next two games by a single goal to give the Memorial Cup to the legendary Toe Blake and the rest of the Sudbury Cub Wolves.



1931-32 Winnipeg Monarchs (Pinkie Davie is third from the right)

Although losing in the Memorial Cup final must have been tough, it was during that series where Davie was seen for the first time by NHL scouts. Notably, the Boston Bruins were courting him and invited Davie to the clubs' training camp held in Quebec City in the fall of 1932.

Davie attended the training camp, and afterwards, was sent to the Boston Cubs of the Canadian-American Hockey League (CAHL) to get accustomed to the pro game. He spent the entire 1932-33

campaign with the Cubs as they went on to win the league championship, with Davie scoring the championship-winning goal. Not a bad start to Pinkie's professional career.

Going into the following season, a Boston newspaper wrote that, "Young Davie is an excellent hockey prospect, and Art Ross believes one more season with the Cubs should find Pinkie ready for big-league service. And don't forget the tall defence boy loves tough and rugged hockey which he will get in full measure in the Can-Am loop."

The 6'0", 180-pound Davie made the Boston Bruins out of training camp to begin the 1933-34 season. As a Bruins rookie, and given the fact that in that era, teams, including the Bruins, often dressed only two lines (to save on salary expenditures), Pinkie played the majority of his games with the minor league Boston Cubs. He would be called up to the Bruins when they were dressing three lines, which was mainly important games and playoffs. In 1933-34, Davie played the first four games with the Bruins before being sent back down to the Cubs. He was recalled for five more games later in the season before returning to the Cubs to complete the season.

For the 1934-35 season, Davie and his new wife that he had met in the summer of 1933, moved to Boston together. Just a week before departing for training camp, Davie married Henrietta Thompson in Transcona on September 12th (Pinkie's birthday).

Davie began the year with the Cubs but was called up to the Bruins after Christmas because of his strong play. Cubs coach Lionel Hitchman had been using the lanky Davie at both defence and right wing throughout the early parts of the season.

Davie was called up along with fellow defenseman Bert McInenly, and the pair spent the remainder of the season with the big club. After the pair's first game of the season against the New York Rangers, a Boston paper wrote that "The new substitute defenceman of the Bruins, Bert McInenly and Bob Davie, recently promoted from the Cubs, drew the favour and applause of the customers. These two athletes showed body checking, such as no other Bruins points have contributed. They stepped or tried to step into every Blueshirt who came their way, and the Rangers, as a result, were somewhat hampered at times. As for the fans, they first thought that the Bruins were employing ringers, then were satisfied that there were Boston defencemen who could drop a rival."

Another paper wrote, "These two boys stepped into the Rangers on any and every opportunity with noticeable success. That they were fooled completely on the visitors' second goal can be readily excused. The rest of their performance was exemplary, and they were given a genuine tribute by the fans."

"Defensively, the Bruins have improved because of the discovery that Bob Davie and Bert McInenly on the Cubs, could hand out bodychecks. Davie and McInenly made a good impression when they appeared as Bruins for the first time Tuesday night, and they must have been equally effective on the road, for the opposition has scored only three goals in three games."

It was tough early on for Davie to get playing time with the Bruins as two Hall of Fame defensemen Eddie Shore and Babe Siebert, played most of the game together. Davie and McInenly would basically sub in when they were tired.

Davie appeared to get more playing time by the time the Bruins played the Rangers on February 24th. A few nights later in a game with the St. Louis Eagles, Davie was involved in a scrap with big Vernon Ayres in the third period. The fight almost turned into a riot at the Boston Garden.

Ayres, pushed into the boards by Davie, retaliated by elbowing Davie in the mouth. Davie and Ayres then started throwing punches. The action was near the boards, and four or five front-line spectators joined in on the scrap.

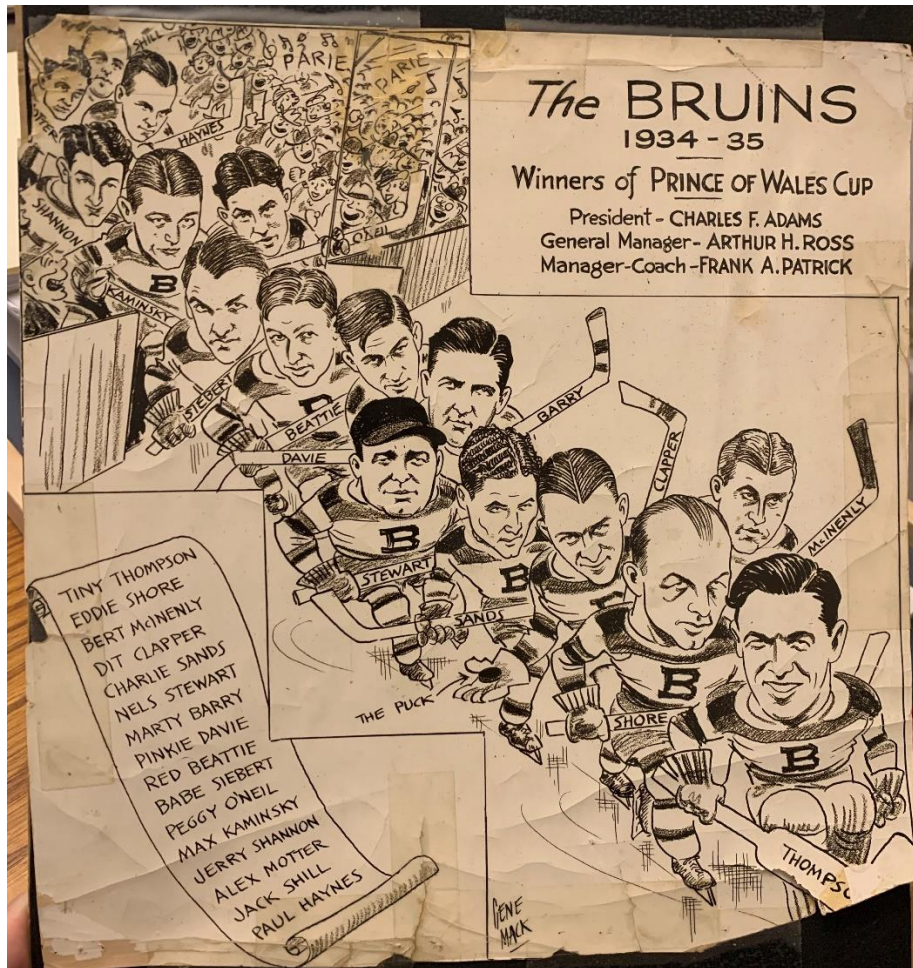


Towards the end of the season, Davie spent some time on the ice playing alongside Eddie Shore as his defence partner. Davie took after Shore and had a reputation for being a rugged, hard-nosed defenceman that could hand out stiff bodychecks.

Eddie Shore also talked Davie into wearing a helmet when they played together. Shore started wearing a helmet for the rest of his career after the infamous Ace Bailey incident of 1933.

Pinkie admired the Bruins star defenceman Eddie Shore a great deal, but he also hated being stuck on the bench behind him. They played the same position, and Shore was typically on the ice for most of the game. In those days, some of the top defencemen would play over 75% of the game.

On February 10th, 1935, Pinkie Davie picked up the lone point of his NHL career. In a 7-5 loss to the New York Americans, Davie assisted on a second-period goal scored by Paul Haynes.



Davie was in the lineup when the Bruins clinched the Prince of Wales Trophy as the NHL's American Division regular season champs for the 1934-35 season. Back in the early days, the NHL had some fascinating playoff formats. The Bruins reward for winning their division was a matchup with the other division winner, the Toronto Maple Leafs, in a best-of-five, semi-final series. A move that was done to ensure at least one division winner was playing in the Stanley Cup finals.

Game 1 at the Boston Garden was a defensive struggle that saw Toronto's George Hainsworth and Boston's Tiny Thompson turn away shot after shot during a game that crept into a second overtime. Dit Clapper scored for the Bruins at 13:26 of double overtime to give the Bruins a 1-0 win.

Unfortunately, it was Toronto's George Hainsworth who stayed hot the rest of the series as he shut out the Bruins in Game 2 and Game 3 by 2-0 and 3-0 score. Game 4 was a back-and-forth affair that went into overtime. Pep Kelly of the Maple Leafs was the hero to give them the 2-1 win and a berth in the Stanley Cup finals.

For Pinkie Davie, that was the closest he would ever get to the Stanley Cup.

During the following 1935-36 season, the Bruins loaned Davie out to the Springfield Indians before officially trading him to them. In Springfield, Davie played under coach George "Buck" Boucher, a Hall of Fame defenceman with the Ottawa Senators and Montreal Maroons. The pair were reunited from their

days of winning a league title previously with the Boston Cubs, and they always had a great player/coach connection.

"There are hockey men in Boston who will tell you that Davie would have been with the Bruins yet if Boucher had also been sent up as his coach. He could get the hockey out of Davie," wrote a Springfield paper.

"You know Davie has been telling me ever since we brought him in that he thrives on work and plenty of it," said George "Buck" Boucher. "For a while, I used Bob only the usual amount of time, but as of late, I have been taking him at his word, and he has been producing some fine hockey for the Indians."

An injury while playing with Springfield forced Davie to come home to Winnipeg to heal. Hall of Fame defenceman Bullet Joe Simpson, who was coaching the Minneapolis Millers in the old American Association (AHA) at the time, was desperate for help approached Davie in Winnipeg about joining his team.

Davie later recalled he could barely walk but went anyway, skated himself back into form, and ended up leading the Millers to the AHA championship in 1936-37. Davie was named an AHA First-Team All-Star that season at right defence.



Pinkie Davie (fifth from right) and the Minneapolis Millers after winning the championship

Davie was recalled by Springfield of the International League and spent some time with them in 1937-38 before being returned to Minneapolis later in the season. He was expected to return to Minneapolis in the fall of 1938 but instead suffered a career-ending injury as a result of a scary sawmill accident on Hecla Island, Manitoba, that August.

Ironically, W.J. Holmes, who took a great interest in Pinkie's career, was going to send him to a job on Black Island, near Hecla Island on Lake Winnipeg, but changed his mind.

"If you go up there, you're liable to get hurt," said Holmes, who may have had a premonition of what was going to happen.

Davie thought that taking the sawmill job was going to be good for his conditioning as he wanted to give it his all the following season in the hopes of making another stab at the NHL. However, on August 2nd, Davie suffered a gruesome career and life-changing injury while working a sawmill machine on Hecla Island.

"What I was told by our mother was that in doing a favour for a local farmer right before his lunch break, while passing a wagon 'spit' through the planer, the machine sputtered and stopped," recalled Pinkie's son Bob Davie. "He kicked a lever, which restarted the machine, but when it did, an exposed worm gear caught hold of the bottom of the (kicking foot) leg of his overalls, pulling his foot, heel first into the gear, crushing and mangling his foot from the arch to above the ankle."

"With great difficulty, he was able to contort himself to move a lever that reversed the gear, which then spit his foot out of the gear. When she got to him soon after the accident, our mother told me his toes were above his knee. People there helped to secure his leg in splints, and he was taken first by fishing boat to Hnausa and then by car to St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg, arriving six hours after the accident at 6 pm. My Mom was with him and told me he never lost consciousness. She said he sipped a 'mickey' of brandy during the trip. It was volunteered by a Hecla resident, who claimed it was the only liquor on the island. On arrival at the hospital, the doctors told him that their only option was amputation. Pinkie, still clear-headed, refused to consent. And so began about a year and a half of surgeries and skin grafts, some of which there was no text for. This recollection is fuzzy but from what I recall is that two brothers that were doctors; I think their name was Stevenson, rebuilt his foot from his own flesh, some of which came from his waist. The grafts had to remain healthy tissue at the removal point while attaching itself to the foot. They were able to save his foot, but with the ankle joint fused, he walked with a slight limp for the rest of his life."



Well! ! Pinkie Davie, former Monarch junior hockey star, keeps tabs on the current sports news from his cot in St. Boniface hospital. Pinkie suffered a severe ankle injury six months ago and has been receiving treatment ever since.

Davie ended up spending over seven months in the hospital, going under the knife five different times in an effort to rebuild his ankle/heel. During that time, he followed the game of hockey closely and read newspaper reports extensively of the professional game, while at the same time sadly realizing that his professional hockey days were now behind him.

In 1940, Davie accepted an offer to coach all levels of hockey in Dauphin, Manitoba (Pee Wee, Midget, Juvenile and Intermediate). Miraculously, Pinkie actually returned to the ice that season as the playing-coach of the intermediate Dauphin Kings. They won the provincial championship, and it was Pinkie who scored the winning goal in the final game.

The Winnipeg Tribune wrote, "Pinkie Davie fired the winning goal at 17:28 in the third period. Davie, who gets around heroically with his unsound leg in a special leather brace, whipped a loose puck into the goal."

Davie spent a year and a half in Dauphin before moving on to Flin Flon in 1941. He started out there by coaching the senior Flin Flon Bombers and eventually became the town's recreation director. He coached the Flin Flon Bombers senior team until the old Saskatchewan Senior League dissolved in 1944. He was also the first coach of the junior Flin Flon Bombers in the SJHL. Davie discontinued coaching when he was appointed manager of the Flin Flon Community Club.

After he left pro hockey, his NHL contacts were mainly with the Detroit Red Wings due to his association with Sid Abel, who had started his Hall of Fame career with the senior Flin Flon Bombers.

Pinkie had close, if geographically distant relationships with Abel, Jimmy Skinner, Jack Adams, and others. He exploited those contacts in the early 1950s to establish a junior hockey franchise in Flin Flon, icing the first Manitoba-based team in the Saskatchewan Junior League in 1950.

"At age 10, I accompanied him to the Detroit Red Wings spring training camp in Winnipeg," recalled Bob Davie. "I had watched the Senior Bombers as a kid growing up, but I was dumbstruck watching Alex Delvecchio. He made you blink and say, 'what just happened there?'"



Pinkie Davie presenting the 1960 Robin Hood Oats Trophy for the Most Valuable Player to Dennis Hyndman

During the 1950s and 1960s, Flin Flon was a hockey factory. Kids grew up on outdoor rinks and played hockey every day all winter. From the levels of Pee Wee, Tom Thumb, Midget, Juvenile and then finally the junior Flin Flon Bombers. Many professional-grade players were developed in town, including the legendary Bobby Clarke, who went on to a Hall of Fame career with the Philadelphia Flyers.

“My father was, to kids and early teenagers, a larger-than-life figure,” said Brett Davie. “Kids in town idolized him. He was completely at home in the rink. He would be in the locker rooms, talking to them, making personal contact, always encouraging. He seemed to have a way with kids. He would never let them get down on themselves because they lost a game or didn’t score a goal.”

As the recreation director for the town, Pinkie had a rule that required all teams to make a complete five-person substitution every three minutes. Under his guidance, Flin Flon’s program was rated second to none across the country. Over the years, it received glowing tributes from outside press media. Many favourable comments were given to the Bantam, Pee Wee and Tom Thumb hockey operation, a direct responsibility of the local manager.

“Every Fall, he would post in the paper the Pee Wee and Tom Thumb team rosters. The rule he had that he is best remembered for is a buzzer would sound every three minutes, and coaches would exchange full lines at the buzzer for the duration of the game. This was not popular with everyone, but you challenged him on it at your peril.”

It wasn’t Davie’s goal that everybody played the same amount. His goal was that everybody played, period.

“Many friends have said to me over the years that if it wasn’t for my Dad asking why they were watching and not out there playing and fixing whatever the problem was, like finding a pair of skates, an old stick, two bucks for fees, that they would not have been able to play. I think there were times when my mother had a tough time balancing the books!

“He was simply a friendly giant, who seemed to be in his element when there were a hundred or so youngsters milling around, all hollering for individual attention at the same time,” said Bruce Keddie, former Mayor of Flin Flon. “Pinkie was the fellow who laced on skates for those too young to lace on their own, wiped away tears, treated a bloody nose, and bandaged a scraped shin. He was always on hand to open the rink and hall and always managed to escape being crushed by the milling crowd of enthusiastic youngsters.”

When Pinkie first came to Flin Flon, there were only six teams in its minor hockey program. In 20 years with Davie at the helm, it had grown to 18 teams with 400 boys ranging in ages 9-14.

After working in Flin Flon for 26 years, Davie moved on to Virden, where he stayed for eight years as the recreation director for the town. He then returned to Dauphin to work in the Parkland region before retiring in 1978. A few years later in 1982, Pinkie and his wife retired to Kelowna, British Columbia.

Pinkie Davie passed away from a heart attack on October 27th, 1990. He was 78 years old.

Pinkie’s five children are very proud of their Dad’s accomplishments in the hockey world.

“We sons and daughters, as well as all the hockey enthusiasts in our extended family, have always been very proud of our dad and his hockey days,” remarked Pinkie’s son Bob Davie. “He was a kind and

humble man that rarely spoke to us about his pro career. If anything, our Mom would give us bits and pieces about his career, but mainly only stuff about how management treated their players poorly back in those days. Times have sure changed.”



1934-35 Boston Bruins (Pinkie is in the back row, second from left)