

ALF PIKE, *'The Embalmer'* HAD SKILLS AND SMARTS

THEY certainly don't make hockey players like Alf Pike any longer and they don't carry nicknames like the New York Rangers forward did during his time as a big league player.

Pike, known as The Embalmer due to his summer job at a Winnipeg funeral home, died on the weekend at the age of 91 of natural causes at his home in Calgary.

A winner of the Memorial Cup as a player and a coach as well as the Stanley Cup in his rookie year with the Rangers, Pike also served in the Second World War with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

"He was a very polite man and very big man. Big boned." Said Pike's nephew and Winnipeg resident, George Pike, " He was very knowledgeable about hockey. Fred Shero (legendary Philadelphia Flyers coach) said my uncle was the man who taught him how to coach hockey."

Pike played junior hockey with the East Kildonan North Stars and Winnipeg Monarchs in the 1930s, winning the Memorial cup with the Monarchs in 1937.

Pike centred the club's top line with wingers Johnny McCreedy and Dick Kowcinak.

Pike joined the New York Rangers organization the next season and spent parts of two seasons with the New York Rovers in the old Eastern Hockey League, winning a championship in 1939.

The 1940 season saw Pike crack the Rangers lineup and score eight goals and seven assists in 47 games. The Rangers won the Stanley cup that season with Pike scoring three goals in the club's 12 game playoff run.

Prior to the season, Pike got into a contract dispute with Rangers GM Lester Patrick. Patrick made an offer but Pike wanted an extra \$500.

Rangers coach Frank Boucher told Pike to take the deal and he would make up the \$500. When Patrick found out about the side deal, he chastised Boucher but gave Pike his money.

"My uncle was a tough guy to play against but a nice man when not in competition," said George Pike. " I had dinner with Gordie Howe a few years ago and he told me a story of his first trip to a Rangers camp before he joined the Red Wings. Gordie said if it wasn't for my uncle he would have starved. Alf made sure he was invited up to the buffet and was able to eat. The veterans weren't easy on the rookies back then. Alf took time to talk to Gordie and I guess he never forgot that."

Pike's NHL career lasted six seasons, all with the Rangers. After that he moved into coaching and won the Memorial Cup with the Guelph Biltmores in 1952. That squad included Andy Bathgate, Harry Howell and Lou Fontinato.

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