

MANITOBA JIM MANN'S Long and Successful Hockey Career

**Story by Mike Fraser, Staff Reporter
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Jim Mann has watched a lot of hockey in his day.

Touring inside the basement of the 77year old's Brandon home; the walls and shelves are covered with memorabilia and awards Mann has achieved throughout his coaching and playing days.

Those achievements are in part why the long time Wheat City resident was inducted into the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame on October 21, 2005. "It was a pleasant but unexpected surprise to receive the honor, who was appreciative of those responsible for his induction including Gladwyn Scott and Frank McKinnon, each of whom played a key role in the nomination process". "I've had a lot of good memories over the years".

Self considered a "late bloomer" during his playing days, Mann began skating at the age of nine. Seeing his share of bumps along the way, Mann soon progressed into a solid defenseman through an amateur playing career that spanned from 1945 – 1964.

Mann who was inducted into the Manitoba Softball Hall of Fame in 2004 as a member of the Brandon Army, Navy and Air Force Senior Fastball Team, captured nine Hockey League and Provincial titles during that span, including a Manitoba Junior A Championship with the Brandon Elks in 1947, a team that advanced to the Western Canadian Final.

Picked up by the Dauphin Kings for interprovincial play in 1951 – 52, Mann and the Kings won the Western Canadian Intermediate AA Championship over a team from Canmore, Alberta. It was the first time a Manitoba team won the Western Canadian Title.

Mann also attended professional training camps, most notably the New York Rangers camp in 1948. He was asked to return the following year but chose not to.

While in the finishing years of his playing days, Mann took up coaching in 1961. He won Provincial Midget Titles and an Intermediate Championship in his first four years behind the bench. He was then asked to coach the Brandon University Bobcats hockey team in 1964 – 65. For Mann, it was the beginning of some of his most memorable coaching years. It was also a busy time, as he juggled his bench boss duties with his full time job at Simplot.

It was Doug Steeves, who was inducted into the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame in November, 2005 who hired Mann at Brandon University.

“In the early days, there were no Scholarships and the young men who came to Brandon University were able to continue their education as well as continue with their hockey careers without any other financial assistance. Brandon University, at this stage, was not blessed with big budgets and these students played for the love of the game, not monetary rewards”, he said. Mann still describes the 1968 -69 season as his most memorable one with the Bobcats. At the time, the Bobcats competed in the South West Hockey League.

“I had set a goal to win the SWHL Championship within 5 years when I started coaching there”, said Mann, who was twice selected as a SWHL All-Star Coach. “It took the full 5 years to accomplish it. It was the first time Brandon University won the League Title after participating in the League for over 20 years”.

In the fall of 1969, the Bobcats joined the Western Canada Inter Collegiate Athletic Association on a full time basis.

Lyle Franklin was a Bobcat that year, as young player willing and determined to learn more from his coach. “Jim knew the game well and I always thought he was a student of the game” said Franklin. “ He constantly told us that Hockey wasn’t a difficult game, there was so much about hockey that just came naturally to those who listened and watched”.

Franklin describes Mann as a “Players Coach”, and someone who could easily pin point the strengths and weaknesses of each of his players.

“Jim was quick to recognize each player. He never let anyone of us forget the concept of “Team” and how each player could contribute to the team’s success no matter what kind of skill set brought you to the rink. He gave kids like me a chance to learn and to grow with people who had more experience than I did”.

In 1971, Mann retired from Brandon University and received a life time membership into the Brandon University Letterman’s Club. The 1969 – 70 Bobcat Team was later inducted into the Brandon University Hockey Hall of Fame.

In 1998, Mann was inducted into the Brandon University Hockey Hall of Fame in the Builders category.

Like many followers and Alumni of the Brandon University Hockey Program, Mann admitted he was disappointed when he heard the Bobcats would no longer compete on the ice after the 2001 – 02 season.

Jim Mann of Brandon, who had a long and illustrious career in hockey, was inducted as a Builder into the Manitoba Hockey Hall of Fame on October 21, 2005.