



Perhaps more than most professional athletes, hockey players are happy to engage their fans with no better illustration than this charming shot of Flames' favourite, Joe Nieuwendyk signing autographs from atop the Calgary's players bench in the Saddledome.

## Joe Nieuwendyk

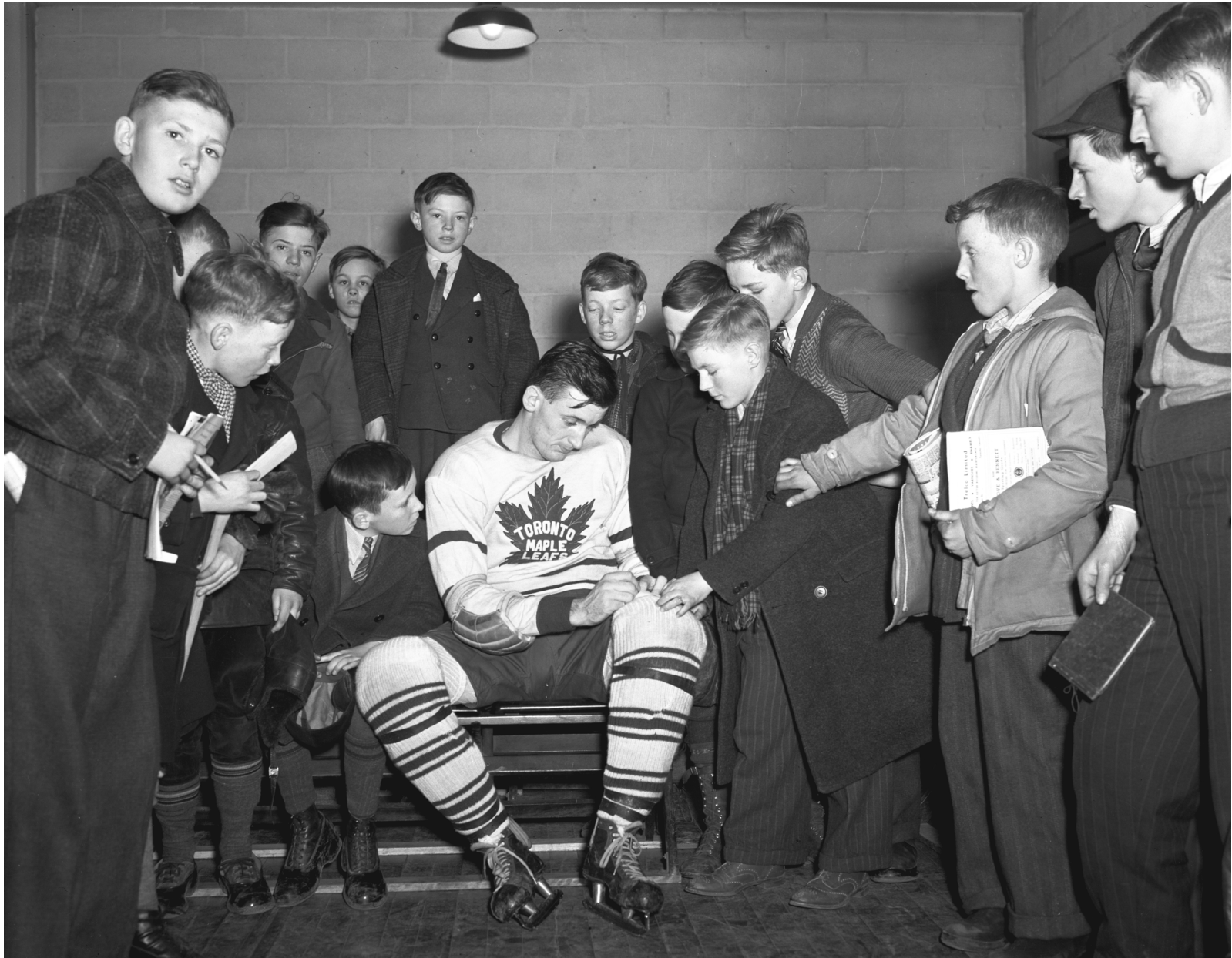
From the equipment its players wear to the rules it is played under, and the expansion of the NHL from four teams in Canada to a 31-team league that reaches into just about every corner of North America, so much about hockey has changed in the past century. The one constant in the past 100 years has been the support the game receives from its fans. Without its supporters, there would be no hockey, at least not NHL hockey, anyway.

Since December 19, 1917, when supporters in Montreal celebrated the NHL's first-ever goal, by Dave Ritchie of the Montreal Wanderers, fans have travelled by foot, car, subway train, trolley and tram and reached into their pockets for money, money that was at times scarce, to buy tickets for the games their heroes played. They have clapped, cheered and stomped their feet, hooted, hollered and booed as they let the game lift them up, or let them down... and sometimes carry them away.

As a number of these photos show, there was a time, before the era of multi-million-dollar contracts, when contact between the fans and the players was not so closely managed, and the line between participant and observer was not so wide. Sometimes, when the glass and wire cages that separated the stands from the ice were not so high, or didn't exist at all, as some of these photos also reveal, the fans even become part of the action.

The famous rinks, like the beloved Montreal Forum, Maple Leaf Gardens, Chicago Stadium and Boston Garden, have changed, too. In fact, just about all of the original "barns" are gone, but not forgotten, by those who watched hockey games inside them. Photos of these buildings, and more importantly, the happy, sad and sometimes, angry fans that filled the seats, are like time capsules from different eras.

Remembering simpler times!



Sid Smith of the Leafs signs autographs for a group of young — and well-dressed fans — at the Maple Leafs Gardens. A fan-favourite in Toronto, Smith would play 12 seasons with the Leafs, including two as captain in 1955-56.

## Sid Smith

Maple Leaf Gardens · Toronto, ON | Early 1950s | Turofsky | B/W · acetate · 4" x 5"



A young Frank Mahovlich of the Toronto Maple Leafs, the evening's First Star, and Andy Hebenton of the New York Rangers, sign autographs for fans as they wait for their names to be called following a late 1950s game at Maple Leaf Gardens. "The Big M" was the NHL's Rookie-of-the-Year in 1958 and went on to score 40-plus goals with three different NHL teams. Mahovlich was named a Canadian Senator in 1998.

## Frank Mahovlich

HHOF 1981



Players safety when it comes to hostile fans on the road wasn't necessarily a big issue back in the days, as illustrated in this photo of visiting Detroit Red Wings on the players bench at the Montreal Forum.

## Detroit Red Wings



Marcel Pronovost (No. 3) of the Detroit Red Wings appears to have words with a fan during a game. Maple Leaf Gardens became the first NHL rink to replace the chicken wire behind the nets and in the corners with plexiglass, but the space above the boards remained open for a number of years, allowing for up-close and personal fan-player interactions. Glass eventually found its way atop the boards in every NHL rink, but it was low enough for fans to be able to reach up and grab players' sticks. Higher glass was installed in the early 1980s.

## Marcel Pronovost

**HHOF 1978**

Montreal Forum · Montreal, QC | January 4, 1958 | Studio Alain Brouillard | B/W · acetate · 4" x 5"



Chicago Stadium · Chicago, IL | April 6, 1961 | Le Studio du Hockey | B/W · negative · 2¼" x 2¼"

Fans line up around the block to enter Chicago Stadium, the raucously loud “Madhouse on Madison” and home of the Chicago Blackhawks from its opening in 1929 until its closing in 1994. Built at a cost of \$9.5 million, the Stadium was the largest indoor arena in the world at the time of its construction, with a capacity of 16,000 for hockey and 17,000 for basketball. The building featured a 3,663-pipe Barton organ with the world’s largest console (six keyboards). It was also the last NHL venue to have an analog game clock (a Bulova, from 1943 to 1975).

## Chicago Stadium





While the hometown Bruins might have considered the Boston Garden small and intimate, you can rest assured visiting teams saw the famous North End arena differently.

## Boston Garden



East Division goaltender, Tony Esposito (the "A" is for Anthony), leaves his net to beat onrushing West Division forward, Bill Goldsworthy, to the puck during the 1970 NHL All-Star Game, while Brad Park (No. 3) comes back to help. The game was the first All-Star Game to be broadcast live on U.S. network television. The East Division won 4-1. Esposito's teammate on the Chicago Blackhawks, Bobby Hull, was MVP.

## Tony Esposito

HHOF 1988

St. Louis Arena · St. Louis, MO | January 20, 1970 | Lewis Portnoy | B/W · negative · 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"



Chicago Blackhawks' star, Bobby Hull, is swarmed by young fans during an autograph session. One of the most popular players in NHL history, Hull is famous for never refusing an autograph request. It's said that his teammates would often shout at him to hurry up, so that the team bus could get on the road. But "The Golden Jet" would keep signing until every single fan was satisfied.

## Bobby Hull

HHOF 1983



New York Islanders' captain, Bryan Trottier, salutes the team's fans in this magical moment during the dying seconds of Game 4 of the Stanley Cup Finals. The Islanders defeated the Oilers by a score of 4-2 to sweep the best-of-seven series and win their fourth consecutive Stanley Cup. Trottier scored the game's first goal.

## Bryan Trottier

HHOF 1997