

Portland Buckaroos

By Dan Schaefer

The Portland Buckaroos professional hockey team has had several incarnations. The original club was named the Portland Rosebuds as part of the Pacific Coast Hockey Association, from 1914 to 1918; the Rosebuds were also part of the Western Hockey League in 1925-1926. The team became the Portland Buckaroos in 1933-1941 and was the Portland Eagles in 1944-1951 as part of the Western Hockey League.

Due to the state of disrepair of the Portland Ice Hippodrome in 1951, professional hockey left Portland for nine years, until a bond to build new Portland venues was passed in the mid 1950s. Included were plans for a new zoo and a public arena on the east side of the Willamette River.

The arena, the Veterans Memorial Coliseum, would spark interest in the minor-league Western Hockey League, and a savvy young promoter, Harry Glickman, began talks to bring the ailing New Westminster Royals Canadian team to Portland. Work on the Coliseum was not finished, so the team (the future Portland Buckaroos) loaned its players to the Victoria, British Columbia, Cougars club in 1959 and 1960. Five players, trainer Berlyn Hodges, and coach Hal Laycoe began preparing for the first season in Portland.

After retaining the remainder of the team through trades and free agency, the Portland Buckaroos started the season on the road. A sports writer in Montreal wrote that it was the worst professional team ever fielded in hockey, but the team evened its road trip in points and, by Christmas, was filling every seat at what had become known as the Glass Palace and competing with the best of the other seven WHL teams.

The Bucks' success sent them to the playoffs, where they beat teams from Spokane, Vancouver, and Seattle in the Patrick Cup for the championship. In the fourteen years that the Buckaroos competed in the WHL, they were league leaders eight times, played in the finals six times, and captured the Patrick Cup three times (1960, 1965, 1971).

Between 1960 and 1974, the Portland Buckaroos were the most successful hockey team in professional hockey. Their success was due to several factors. The team owned the players' contracts, maintained continuity in its players and coaches, and had strong fan support.

At the end of the 1973-1974 season, the Western Hockey League folded when both the NHL and the new World Hockey League launched teams in major cities once occupied by the WHL. The Buckaroos continued in the new North West Hockey League from the 1974-1975 season to the 1975-1976 season until that league folded. The team also played both the Russian and American Olympic teams in 1975 and 1976 in non-league scrimmages.

Strong support for hockey and the Buckaroos in Portland encouraged an ownership group led by Brian Shaw to bring the Canadian Junior Hockey team, the Edmonton Oil Kings, to Portland in 1976-1977. They were renamed the Portland Winter Hawks.

Sources

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