

NHL greats prevail as Thompson Arena hosts Rockets, Tigers and Golden Jets

By Dan Skeen
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Last night in Thompson Arena a combined team of municipal, provincial and federal police proved they are better with hand-cuffs than hockey sticks as they took on a team of NHL Oldtimers.

The Oldtimers, led by the likes of Guy Lafleur, Norm Ullman, Gilbert Perreault and Wilf Paiement, fought the Law Enforcement Torch Team and won by a total score of 29-11.

The event is part of a massive 64-game tour to benefit the Ontario Special Olympics, and the near-capacity crowd at the arena proved its success. The Oldtimers' coach, Bobby Hull, was as pleased as anyone.

"We've got a great group of guys," the Golden Jet said. "Every rink we've been to has been full, and we're going away with nothing but praise."

Fans like Dave Hubley also enjoyed the event — which at times was more of a show than a game, featuring pie-throwing, water-dumping, penalties for bad shots, a running commentary from 77-year-old referee Red Storey, and linesman Eddy Shack in a 10-

gallon cowboy hat.

"It's enjoyable," Hubley said. "It's nice to see guys you haven't seen in a long time, like Norm Ullman." Hubley said the Hall-of-Famer was "doing all-right" for a 59-year-old.

Ullman agreed. "I'm feeling pretty good. I just take it a year at a time. It's something I've done all my life and I still enjoy it."

Although the Oldtimers seemed to be working the rust off their skates early on, it wasn't long before the fans were treated to a show of skill that played like a highlight reel.

Six-time all-star Guy Lafleur led the way with seven goals and some on-ice freewheeling that resurrected the familiar "Guy, Guy" chant.

"It's a lot of fun, playing with guys I've played against in the NHL," Lafleur said. "Getting in shape is the tough part. I had not practiced until last week, so it's tough to get going."

It's even tougher to get going when the words 'work ethic' were forgotten years ago and the beverage of choice in the smoky post-game dressing rooms is made by Labatt's rather than Gator-ade.

But tournament organizer

Mark Verreault, facing sell-out venues at every turn, isn't pushing anyone. "Things are going good everywhere," he said.

For Verreault, putting together a group of former NHLers, ranging in age from the mid-30s to late 70s, was simple. "I've been around all these guys for 29 years. They're easy to get."

He certainly had no problem signing up London native Dave Hutchison, who welcomed the opportunity to take a break from his local real-estate agency and lace up the old skates.

"It's really nice to get involved," he said. "I'm playing with some of my idols here, Bobby Hull, Guy Lafleur, the Rocket [Maurice Richard was a linesman], and Gilbert Perreault. I'm still a big hockey fan."

Perhaps the biggest fans were the ones willing to dish out the \$15 dollars per seat, but many fans, like Doug Gates, felt it was "for a good cause."

"I haven't seen many NHL games," his father, Matt, added. "I've never seen guys like Tiger [Williams], and [Gilbert] Perreault play."

Evidently, he wasn't the only one.



Rob Moore/Gazette

CLEAR THE TRACK, SHACK. Seventeen-year NHL veteran Eddy Shack arrives in style for last night's Oldtimers charity game at Thompson Arena.